

This book is the International version of a college level textbook prepared a few years ago for a Bible college in South India.

It can also be used for Bible study groups in local churches and for individual students of the Bible. It was written it with the South Indian Christian context in mind. But with minor adaptions it should be useful in any cultural context.

The Bible quotations are based on the World English Bible (WEB) translation.

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Table of Contents

For the teacher 3

Understanding the Kingdom of God

Study 1: God the King 5

Study 2: A wrong view of the Kingdom of God 8

Study 3: A correct view of the Kingdom of God 12

Study 4: Jesus the King 16

Answers 1: God the King 19

Answers 2: A wrong view of the Kingdom of God 25

Answers 3: A correct view of the Kingdom of God 29

Answers 4: Jesus the King 34

More about the Kingdom of God

Study 5: The Kingdom arrives 40

Study 6: The Kingdom crosses boundaries 42

Study 7: The Kingdom grows 44

Study 8: Two challenging Kingdom principles 46

Study 9: Waiting for the Kingdom 48

Study 10: The church and the Kingdom 51

Answers 5: The Kingdom arrives 53

Answers 6: The Kingdom crosses boundaries 59

Answers 7: The Kingdom grows 64

Answers 8: Two challenging Kingdom principles 69

Answers 9: Waiting for the Kingdom 74

Answers 10: The church and the Kingdom 79

Living the Kingdom of God

Study 11: The Sermon on the Mount 83

Study 12: Our blessings 90

Study 13: Our influence 95

Study 14: Our moral righteousness 99

Study 15: Our religious righteousness 104

Study 16: Our ambition 107

Study 17: Our relationships 110

Study 18: The choice we must make 113

Answers 11: The Sermon on the Mount 115

Answers 12: Our blessings 119

Answers 13: Our influence 121

Answers 14: Our moral righteousness 125

Answers 15: Our religious righteousness 130

Answers 16: Our ambition 137

Answers 17: Our relationships 142

Answers 18: The choice we must make 146

## For the teacher

Textbook and course

This textbook has been prepared for a one-week course called The Kingdom of God, offered towards the end of the first year of studies at Kannada Satyaveda College in Karnataka, India. But it can also be used during the second or third year of studies.

The book has two main parts that are closely linked, Studies and Answers:

* 1. Studies: Most of the studies contain three parts: an introduction, reference to the Bible passage/passages to be read, and questions. Many of the questions are easy, others more difficult. There are both text questions and application questions. A few studies also include comments.
  2. Answers: Most of the questions from the corresponding study have been provided with some kind of answer. They are my answers. You are, of course, free to modify them, add to them, and challenge/question them. The answers are primarily meant to help you, but they can also be used by the students for reference. Most of the answer sections end with “Reflections”. They are there to summarize, and to challenge – the students as well as the teacher. Each answer section begins with “For the teacher”. There the teacher will find suggestions on how to plan and use that particular study. Sometimes tricky points have been explained more in detail.

Planning

This is how you could use the book for a one-week course:

Monday and Tuesday  
Understanding the Kingdom (studies 1–4)  
Estimated class time required: at least 8

Wednesday  
More about the Kingdom (studies 5–10, give priority to studies 5, 9, and 10). Estimated class time required: 7 or less. So two or three studies may have to be left out, saved for later, or done as homework assignments.

Thursday and Friday  
Living the Kingdom (studies 11–18). Estimated class time required: 8. Remember that there is no Library or homework time on Friday.

How to cover a study in four steps

1. You introduce the study.
2. The students read the Bible text and work through the questions in groups of three or four.
3. Go through their answers in class. Don’t waste time. Skip the simple questions and focus on those that the students have struggled with. Clarify misunderstandings.
4. Encourage the students to complete unfinished work during library time. They should also take time to review each study.

Five student goals

1. The students should further develop their reading and understanding skills.
2. The students should constantly be encouraged to think about what they have read and to draw conclusions from what they have understood.
3. The students should get to understand the Kingdom of God as it is presented in the New Testament.
4. The students should be challenged to apply what they have studied to their own South Indian contemporary situation.
5. The students should be encouraged to use material from this textbook for devotions, Bible studies and sermons.

A few general suggestions

1. Lecture and “teach” as little as possible.
2. Base your teaching on the dynamics of group work. This textbook has been designed to help you do so. The ideal group consists of 3–4 students of mixed ability.
3. Make sure that all the students are active in class. Encourage those who are silent, shy or weak.
4. Never ridicule a student. Always encourage.
5. Encourage questions, and don’t be embarrassed if you cannot answer all of them. No Bible teacher has all the answers.
6. Don’t let students sidetrack you and your class by silly or irrelevant questions. Class time is precious and should not be wasted.

Understanding the Kingdom – studies

### Study 1: God the King

Introduction

This study is based on Psalm 145, a psalm written by David. We will look at some of the reasons that David had to praise God.

David was king of Israel for 40 years, from around 1010 BC to around 970 BC. But there is no way for us to know exactly when during this 40-year period David wrote this beautiful psalm about God and his Kingdom.

In Psalm 145 we find a great earthly king – David – praising an even greater king – king God (v 1), the Creator, the Upholder, and the Ruler of the whole universe. God’s everlasting kingdom is glorious and full of majesty (v 10–13).

David knew what he was writing about. It was based on his own experience. Through this study we can learn from David’s experience. We would be wise if we then applied his experience to our own lives.

Read

Psalm 145

Questions

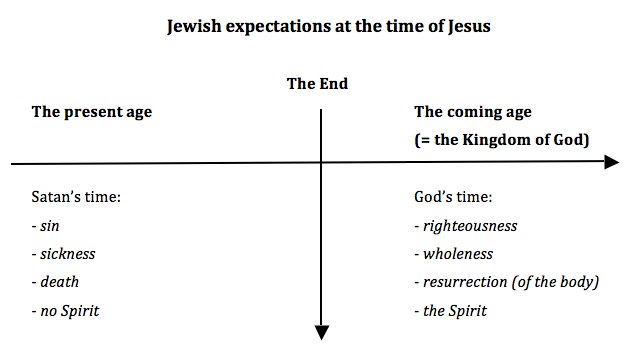
1. There are different ways of structuring this psalm:
   1. One is based on who speaks. How would you do this?
   2. Another is based on the contents. How would you do this?
2. One interesting characteristic of this psalm is that it uses different words (different synonyms) for “to praise”. Go through your Bible and make a list of these synonyms. Why do you think David used so many synonymous expressions?
3. David also used different expressions to describe the long-lasting nature of this praise. What expressions do you find?
4. Look again at verses 1–7:
   1. Make a list of the reasons (or qualities) why God should be praised.
   2. Explain in your own words that they mean.
   3. Give examples of how they can be seen in you own life and circumstances.
5. The praise of earlier generations inspired David to respond to God in three different ways (v 5–7, 21). How?
6. Look again at verses 8–13a:
   1. What do we learn about the character of God the King and his Kingdom?
   2. Give examples of how these character traits are expressed in your own life and circumstances.
7. Look again at verses 13b–20:
   1. Who are the creatures and people mentioned? And how does God act toward them? Make a chart with two columns. The heading of the first column is “Creature/person”. The heading of the second column is “God’s acts toward them”. You may need ten lines.
   2. Then give as many practical examples of this as you can think of.
8. How does David celebrate God’s attributes and actions as he concludes his psalm (v 21)?
9. Summarize in a few sentences how David describes God the King and his Kingdom in this psalm. Use your own words.
10. Share in your groups what you feel is the most important lesson that you have learnt through this study. Explain why this lesson is so important for you.
11. After all of you have shared, spend some time in your groups in prayer for each other.

Additional questions (for library time and homework).

1. Look at your answer to question 5. Describe one or two situations when you have responded to God in similar ways. Note it down in the form of a short testimony.
2. Look at the chart you filled in as you answered question 7. What do you learn about God’s agenda as King. Summarize you conclusions using your own words as much as possible.
3. Imagine what it would look like if India more fully shared God’s agenda. Describe one or two areas in which our country would be different. Note down your observations.
4. What could your church fellowship do to promote the characteristics of God and his Kingdom in your neighborhood. Note down your observations.
5. Describe one specific way in which you could reflect God’s agenda at your college (or workplace) – or in your neighborhood – during the next few months. Be practical! Then find some friends (or colleagues) who are willing to help you implement your decision.

### Study 2: A wrong view of the Kingdom of God

Introduction

The Jews at the time of Jesus were waiting for God to send his Messiah, a king in the family line of David. The Messiah would bring a dramatic end to the present evil age and introduce God’s rule on this earth, the Kingdom of God. This picture illustrates their view:

The horizontal arrow represents the passing of time, from the past (the left hand side) into the future (the right hand side). The vertical arrow represents the arrival of the end (the Old Testament uses expressions such as “the Day of the Lord” and “the Day of God’s Judgment” for this event). At the time of Jesus, the Jews expected the Messiah to enforce this “end to the present age” and introduce “the coming age”, the Kingdom of God.

The Jews understood this present age to be Satan’s time, the period of history when Satan ruled the world. This is an age of sin, sickness, and death. It is also an age when God’s Spirit is not present among his people.

But when the Messiah arrives with the Kingdom of God, then this present age with Satan’s rule comes to an end. The Kingdom that God’s Messiah will rule over is the very opposite of Satan’s kingdom. Instead of sin there will be righteousness. Instead of sickness and trouble there will be wholeness, health, and peace (the Hebrew expression for this state is shalom). Instead of death there will be the resurrection of the body and eternal life. Finally, in this Kingdom of the coming age (the Kingdom of God), God’s Spirit will again be present among his people.

This Jewish understanding of “the end” and of the Kingdom of God contains a lot of truth. But it is not entirely correct. So we call it “the wrong view of the Kingdom of God”. It is wrong because it is not the view that we find in the New Testament. In our next study we will look at how Jesus and the apostles taught about “the end” and the Kingdom of God. Then we will understand the correct view of the Kingdom of God.

You may think that it is not so important for us to understand a view that is wrong. Isn’t it better for us just to focus on the view that is correct? But I don’t think so. Here are my three reasons for that:

* 1. We will have a better understanding of what is correct if we contrast it with what is wrong.
  2. We will have a better understanding of why the Jews were disappointed with Jesus and why they rejected him. Jesus did not live up to their expectations of God’s Messiah. He did not drive away the Roman occupants from the Holy Land and establish God’s kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital city and with himself as its king. He did not bring a complete end to Satan’s rule in this present world – and to sickness and death. So the Jews were disappointed with him and rejected him. They did this because they had a wrong understanding of “the end” and of the Kingdom of God.
  3. This wrong understanding of “the end” and of the Kingdom of God is common among many Christian believers even today. So there is a risk that we will accept this wrong view and think that it is correct. So we need to make sure that we understand the difference between the “Jewish view” and the “Christian view” of the Kingdom of God.

Questions

1. Explain to the others in your group the Jewish expectations at the time of Jesus. Use your own words and do not look at the picture above and do not refer to your notes.
2. Many years ago I was working at a Bible college in a Western country. Some of my students came from churches where their pastor had taught them something like this:

When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day, the present age came to an end and the Kingdom of God came with overwhelming power. So as believers we must understand that Satan’s time is over. He was conquered by Jesus. Now, as Jesus rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit was poured out over God’s people, God’s time has arrived. Consequently, sin has no power over our lives. And disease and sickness are no longer part of the life of a true believer. Instead we as God’s people must claim complete healing in the name of Jesus.

* 1. Have you ever come across this kind of teaching? Share your experiences.
  2. What could be the problems with this kind of teaching? Discuss and summarize your conclusions in a few points.

1. Devaraj is working sincerely as an evangelist in Karnataka. As he meets people in the villages, he often says something like this:

If you accept Jesus as your personal Savior, all your present problems will be over. You will have no more worries. You will be healed from all your sicknesses. Your children will get good results in their annual exams. God will also bless you financially.

* 1. Have you used this kind of arguments as you minister to people who are not yet believers in Jesus? Share your testimonies.
  2. What could be the problems with this kind of arguments? Discuss and summarize your conclusions in a few points.

1. Sita is a young girl who lives in Bangalore. She eagerly desires to go to university. But first she must pass her PUC exams. She is a sincere student, even if she is not very bright. But she studies really hard for her exams. She is also a good believer, who sincerely prays to God for her studies and for her exams. She sits her exams – but fails.

How do you think Sita feels after her failure? What could be her reactions to her failure? How would you – as her close friend – counsel her after her failure?

1. Radhamma is cell-group leader in a Pentecostal church in a city in central Karnataka. She is a faithful member of the church. She is loved and respected by all for her sincere faith and exemplary Christian life. But one day she is diagnosed with breast cancer. She undergoes surgery and chemotherapy at great expense for her family. The believers of her church, and particularly the members of her cell-group, spend many hours in fasting prayer for her recovery. But all medical treatment fails. Radhamma’s cancer spreads throughout her body, and within a year she dies.

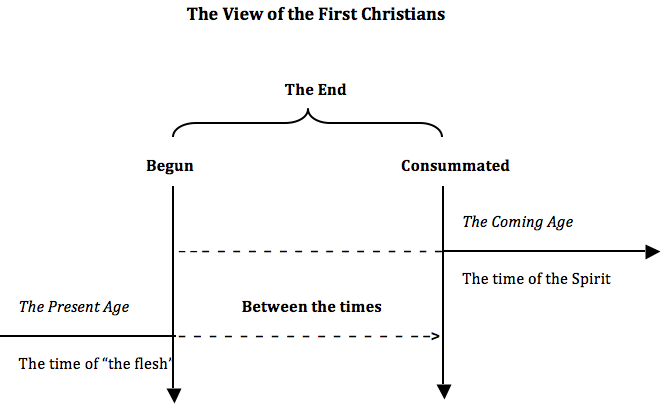
How do you think Radhamma’s cell-group members feel when they hear that Radhamma has succumbed to her cancer? How would you counsel them?

1. Prakash is the pastor of a growing Charismatic church in Bangalore. He is a great preacher, and many new people join his church. The believers love him and his beautiful family. They respect him and trust him. After a few years it is revealed that Prakash has had an ongoing sexual relationship with a woman in the church. When the believers hear this, they are shocked. Most of them leave the church, and the ministry collapses.

What do you think happened to the believers’ faith when they found out what their pastor Prakash had done? How would you counsel them?

### Study 3: A correct view of the Kingdom of God

Introduction

A close reading of the New Testament texts will reveal that the understanding that the Jews had of the Kingdom of God at the time of Jesus was not shared by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament books. So the picture that we looked at in the previous study must be modified, like this:

In the view of the first Christians (but, of course, also of Jesus), “the end” comes in two steps. The “beginning of the end” came with Jesus (his ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “The end of the end” (or the consummation of the end) will come with the return of Jesus, the Day of Judgment, and God’s new heaven and new earth.

The present age (represented by the continuous line on the left side in the picture) is the time of Satan (or the time of “the flesh”, an expression used by Paul to denote “the human nature deprived of the Spirit of God and dominated by sin”). This is – as we saw in the previous study – an age of sin, sickness, and death. It is also an age when God’s Spirit is not present among his people.

With the ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost this present age received a death blow (“the serpent’s head was bruised”, Gen 3:15), but it is not yet completely dead (even if it is weaker and doomed to death). This is represented by the lower dashed line in the picture.

The upper dashed line in the picture represents the truth that even if “the beginning of the end” came with the first coming of Jesus it will not be consummated until his second coming, which will bring “the end of the end”.

“The coming age” (or the time of the Spirit, represented by the continuous line on the right hand side of the picture) which is already present in this world (the upper dashed line) since the time of Jesus, will come in its full power with the return of Jesus, the Day of Judgment, and God’s new heaven and new earth. Then there will be no more sin, no more sickness, and no more death. Then there will be righteousness, shalom, and eternal life. Then God’s dwelling is with people, and God himself will be with them, Rev 21:3).

So how should we understand the Kingdom of God in this New Testament perspective? Three points will help us answer this very important question:

* + The Kingdom of God came in a new and tangible way with Jesus (his ministry, his suffering and death, his resurrection and exaltation) and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.
  + The Kingdom of God is at work in a tangible way ever since those days as the gospel is being preached. People listen to the good news. They are saved from their sins. They are delivered from demonic powers. They are healed from their illnesses. Their lives are molded into the likeness of Christ. And their deeds express the principles of the Kingdom of God.
  + The Kingdom of God will come in full power at the return of Jesus, the Day of God’s Judgment, the day when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Bible scholars speak of the already – not yet perspective of the Kingdom of God. By that they mean that on one hand the Kingdom of God has already come with Jesus. But on the other hand, the Kingdom of God has not yet come in its fullness. That will happen only at the second coming of Jesus.

This means that we live “between the times” (an expression found in the middle of the picture; this period can also be called “the end times” or “the end of the ages”, compare Heb 9:26). This refers to

* + “between the times” of Jesus’ first and second coming,
  + “between the times” of the “beginning of the end” and the “end of the end (or the “consummation of the end”
  + “between the times” of the coming of the Kingdom of God (with Jesus) and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God (with the return of Jesus).

So as believers in this present world we are “boxed in” on four sides (see the picture): behind us we have Jesus’ first coming; in front of us we have Jesus’ second coming; under us we have the powers of this present age (but weakened by Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and limited in time by the Day of God’s Judgment); above us we have the powers of the coming age (even if they have not yet come in full power).

The already – not yet perspective was crucial to the writers of the New Testament books and the early church. They understood their Christian existence as a life “between the times”: The future had already begun, but it had not yet been completely fulfilled. They were living in the time of the end, but the end had not yet been consummated. This eschatological framework determined everything about them: How they lived. How they thought. How they understood their place in the present world. For them this present world was on its way out, it was doomed.

Questions

1. Compare the two pictures (the one in study 2 and the the one in this study). What is the most important difference between them?
2. Explain what happens to the line that represent the present age.
3. What are the two other expressions for “the present age”?
4. Explain what happens to the line that represents the coming age.
5. The vertical line on the left represents “the beginning of the end”. What are the two other expressions that can be used for this?
6. The vertical line on the right represents “the consummation of the end”. What are the two other expressions that can be used for this?
7. Explain the expression “believers are boxed in on four sides”. Use your own words without referring to the picture or the text above.
8. How would you explain the phrase “we live in the end times”?
9. Explain the expression “already – not yet” about the Kingdom of God. Use your own words without referring to the text above.
10. How do we find the “already – not yet” perspective in the way Paul uses the word “justice/righteousness” (Kannada NIBV and JV nIti) in Rom 5:1 and Gal 5:5?
11. How do we find the “already – not yet” perspective in the way Paul uses the word “redemption” (Kannada NIBV vimOchane and Kannada JV biDugaDe/vimOchane) in Eph 1:7 and 4:40?
12. How do we find the “already – not yet” perspective in the way Paul uses the the expressions “spirit of adoption” and “adoption as sons” (Kannada NIBV putrara Atma and putrara padavi and Kannada JV magana bhAva and putrara padavi) in Rom 8:15 and 8:23?
13. Compare in the perspective of “already – not yet” how Jesus uses the expressions “the Kingdom of God” in Matt 12:22–28 with how he uses “the kingdom” in Matt 25:31–34.
14. In Matt 13:24–33 we find three parables about the Kingdom of God (here Matthew uses the synonymous expression “the kingdom of heaven”). Where in the picture (see Introduction above) do these parables fit in? Explain why.
15. Prepare a simple Bible study for your cell-group (or for a group of youngsters) based on this study. One way of doing so would be to start with the Bible verses from questions 9–12 above. Guide the participants to realize the “already – not yet” perspective in Paul’s use of the three concepts “righteousness”, “redemption”, and “sonship”. Then make a simple picture to illustrate the double perspective. The result could be a picture like the one in the Introduction above but with some information about the present age and the coming age taken from the picture in study 2.

### Study 4: Jesus the King

Introduction

The New Testament uses various expressions in connection with “kingdom”, for example:

* + the kingdom of heaven (commonly used in Matthew’s gospel, where the other gospels use “kingdom of God”).
  + the Father’s kingdom (with variations): Matt 13:43; Luk 11:2, Matt 26:29
  + the kingdom of light: Col 1:12
  + the kingdom of our Lord: 2 Tim 4:18; 2 Pet 1:11
  + the kingdom of Christ (with variations): Eph 5:5; 2 Tim 4:1
  + the kingdom of the Son (with variations): Matt 16:28; Col 1:13
  + my (referring to Jesus) kingdom: John 18:36

We also find “the kingdom” without any qualifying word, for example in Matt 4:23; Luk 12:32; Acts 20:25; Rev 1:9.

These variations have led some people to claim that there are different “kingdoms” in the New Testament, and that “the Kingdom of God” must be different from “the kingdom of Christ/the Son”. This view is not convincing. In Rev 11:15 we, for example, find the expression the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ with reference to the Kingdom of God. Both God and the Lamb sit on the throne of the Kingdom of God, which is also the Kingdom of his Son (or of Christ/the Lamb of God): No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him (Rev 22:3).

The big picture that the New Testament paints of the Kingdom of God also makes it clear that there is only one such kingdom. Consequently, all these “kingdom” expressions refer to the same truth and reality. They are synonymous.

The English word “kingdom” almost always means “country, nation”. “The United Kingdom” is a country in Europe, and “Denmark” is a “kingdom” because it is a country ruled by a king. So “kingdom” refers to a geographical area over which a king rules. In Kannada the corresponding word rAjya has the same meaning, but it is even more commonly used about a “province, state” (a part of a country). But the New Testament Greek word basileia primarily refers to “reign, rule” – and not to a country. So the expressions “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Christ” do not refer to any geographical area but to the authority (reign, rule) of God/Christ.

As we saw in the previous study, the New Testament sees the Kingdom of God from two time aspects. The “already” aspect, and the “not yet” aspect. There are also occurrences of this expression that do not emphasize either of these two time aspects. So “the Kingdom of God” is used like this in the New Testament:

* 1. With no time aspect: The Kingdom of God is God’s reign/rule/authority/kingship anywhere and at any time in history.
  2. With the “already” time aspect: The Kingdom of God is the domain into which we can now enter and experience the blessings of his rule/authority/kingship.
  3. With the “not yet” time aspect: The Kingdom of God is a future realm which will come only with the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and into which we then enter and experience the fullness of his reign/rule/authority/kingship.

This study focuses on Jesus as king. We will first look at three passages in John’s gospel where Jesus is called “king”, by the people or by himself. Then we will read Paul’s description of Christ in the first chapter of his letter to the church in Colosse. Finally we will look at some verses from the book of Revelation about Jesus the King.

Read

John 6:14–15; 12:12–16; 18:28–40

Col 1:10–20

Rev 7:17; 17:14; 19:16; 22:1, 3

Questions

1. How are the expressions “the Kingdom of God” and “the Kingdom of Christ” related to each other?
2. Explain why the word “kingdom” is easily misunderstood. What does it usually mean in the New Testament context?
3. What are the three “aspects” of the expression “kingdom of God” as it is used in the New Testament?
4. What do we understand about the people’s understanding of Jesus’ identity in John 6:14–15? How did Jesus react to this?
5. What do you think were the crowd’s expectations of Jesus at the time of his triumphal entry (John 12:12–16)? Explain.
6. What do you think were the disciples’ understanding of Jesus at the time of his triumphal entry (John 12:12–16)? Explain.
7. What do you think were the crowd’s understanding of Jesus when he was tried before Pilate (John 18:38–40)? Explain.
8. What do we find out about Jesus’ kingship from his interrogation before Pilate (John 18:28–37)?
9. Summarize what you have learned about Jesus and his kingship from working with questions 4–8. Use our own words.
10. What do we learn about “the inheritance of the saints” and the Kingdom of God in Col 1:10–14?
11. In Col 1:15–17 Paul writes about the supremacy (or kingship) of Christ in creation. What are his six points?
12. In Col 1:18–20 Paul writes about the supremacy (or kingship) of Christ in redemption. What are his six points?
13. Summarize in your own words Paul’s theology on the supremacy (or kingship) of Jesus Christ as expressed in Col 1:15–18.
14. What do we learn about Jesus from Rev 7:17?
15. What do we learn about Jesus from Rev 17:14?
16. What do we learn about Jesus from Rev 19:16 (compare 1 Tim 6:15)?
17. What do we learn about Jesus from Rev 22:1, 3?
18. So what can we understand about Jesus’ kingship and his kingdom from the verses in the book of Revelation?

Understanding the Kingdom – answers

### Answers 1: God the King

For the teacher

You would probably need two lessons to cover this study.

Psalm 145 is “acrostic”. This means that the first letter of each verse follows the alphabet of the Hebrew language. Tell the students that there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Then ask them three questions:

1. How many verses do we expect to find in this psalm? The answer is, of course, “Twenty-two verses”.
2. Look in your Bibles. How many verses do you find? The answer is, of course, “Twenty-one verses”. Unless a student happens to use pavitra baibal, in which the translators have added one verse after verse 13 (a new verse 14), which brings the total to 22.
3. What could be the solution to this difference? Let the students think and share their thoughts for a minute, before you help them with the answer:

One verse is missing from your Bibles! This verse was lost early, so it was not included in the manuscripts that the Jewish scholars used when they put together the Hebrew Bible. But Bible scholars knew that the verse was missing. First, it is found in some very early translations of the book of Psalms to other languages. It was also found among the Dead Sea scolls in the 1940s. Second, this psalm is evidently acrostic, so we would expect David to use all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and not skip one letter in the middle.

This is the missing verse (called 13b in most translations, 14 in pavitra baibal):

The Lord is faithful in all his words  
and gracious in all his deeds (WEB)

Write a Kannada translation of this verse on the blackboard and let the students copy it into their Bibles. We will call this new verse 13b.

Don’t let the students work through all the 10 questions in one sitting! I suggest the following procedure:

* 1. After the students have “added” verse 13b, let them work through questions 1–3 in their groups. Go through their answers and help those who are confused.
  2. Let the students works though questions 4 and 5 in their groups. Go through their answers.
  3. Follow the same procedure with question 6.
  4. Follow the same procedure with questions 7–9.
  5. Let the student finally do questions 10 and 11.

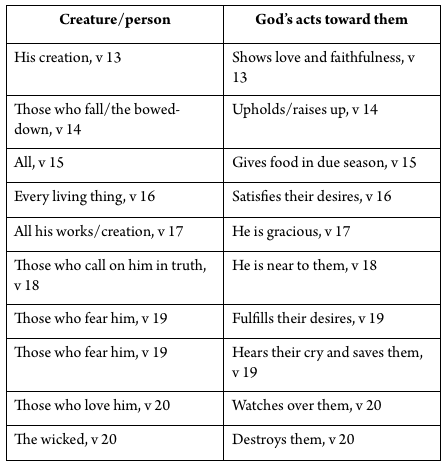
Don’t let the students do the Additional questions during class time. Save these for library time and homework. There is, of course, no need for the students to do all of them. Question 12 is best done individually. Questions 13 and 14 can be done individually or in groups. Questions 15 and 16 are best done in groups.

Answers to the questions

1. There are different ways of structuring this psalm:
   1. One is based on who speaks, like this:
      * David himself “speaks” in v 1–3
      * Generation after generation “speaks” in v 4–7
      * All “speak” in v 8–21 – but David is, of course, the author of the whole psalm, so he is putting his own words into the mouths of “generation after generation” and of “all”. This is how poets often work.
   2. Another is based on the contents, something like this :
      * Introduction, v 1–2
      * Great is the Lord, v 3–7,
      * The Lord is gracious, v 8–13a
      * The Lord is faithful, v 13b–20
      * Conclusion, v 21
2. One interesting characteristic of this psalm is that it uses different words (different synonyms) for “to praise”. I find these synonyms in the English WEB translation:
   * + exhalt (which means “to speak very highly about God”), v 1
     + extol (which means “to praise God enthusiastically”), v 2, 10
     + praise (which means “to glorify God for his greatness”), v 1, 2, 3, 21
     + commend (which means “to speak highly of God”), v 4
     + declare (which means “to announce in a strong way”), v 4, 6
     + meditate (which means “to think deeply about”), v 5
     + speak, v 6, 11, 21
     + utter the memory of, v 7
     + sing aloud, v 7
     + give thanks, v 10

Use your words to explain how all these expressions (the ones you have in your Kannada Bibles!) vary in their shades of meaning.

The reason why David used so many synonymous expressions must have been his desire to employ all his poetic skills to praise God as strongly and beautifully as possible. He felt that God was truly worthy of all this praise.

1. David also used different expressions to describe the long-lasting nature of this praise. I find these expressions in the English WEB translation:
   * + forever and ever, 1, 2, 21
     + generations, v 4, 13
     + everlasting, v 13
2. Look again at verses 1–7:
   1. This is a list of the reasons (or qualities) why God should be praised:
      * Because of his unsearchable greatness (v 3)
      * Because of what he has done: his works, his mighty acts and his awesome acts (v 4, 5, 6)
      * Because of his glorious majesty (v 5)
      * Because of his great goodness (v 7)
      * Because of his righteousness (v 7)
   2. –
   3. –
3. The praise of earlier generations inspired David to respond to God in three different ways (v 5–7, 21):
   1. David responded by meditating on what God had done (v 5).
   2. David responded by declaring what God had done (v 6).
   3. David responded by celebrating (singing about, speaking the praise of) what God had done (v 7, 21).
4. Look again at verses 8–13a:
   1. We learn these things about the character of God the King and his Kingdom:
      * The King is gracious and merciful (v 8, 9).
      * The King is slow to anger and great in steadfast love (v 8).
      * The King is good to all (v 9).
      * The King is powerful (v 11).
      * His kingdom is glorious and full of majesty (v 11, 12).
      * His Kingdom is everlasting (v 13a).
   2. –
5. Look again at verses 13b–20:
   1. Who are the creatures and people mentioned? And how does God act toward them? My chart looks like this:
   2. –
6. As David concludes his psalm (v 21), he celebrates God’s attributes and actions by praising the Lord.
7. –
8. –
9. –

Reflections

In Psalm 145, David describes God and his Kingdom with spiritual eyes, He sees them through eyes of faith – beyond the superficial, and beyond the apparent.

David was a man who had experienced many hardships on his way to the throne of Israel. God had chosen him, and anointed him through Samuel the prophet, while he was still young. Fifteen years later he become king over Judah. And it took seven more years until he was king over all Israel. Many of these years David spent as a refugee to avoid being killed by king Saul. In addition, David’s years on the throne were not easy. His son Amnon was murdered by another son, Absalom, who later rebelled against his father. Again David had to flee for his life. So David was a man well acquainted with war and bloodshed, treachery and deceit, disappointments and death. He had suffered from the hands of enemies and experienced the deprivations of exile. He knew that life could be tough, and that God did not always seem to be in control of events of history – nor of what happened to his people. He realized that his life was lived in a world affected by the consequences of the Fall. He knew that sin, suffering, and death were all parts of human existence.

But in Psalm 145, David sees beyond all this. He sees who God truly is: the Creator, the Sustainer, the Deliverer, the Judge, the King. David’s King is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love, faithful to his covenant with his creation and faithful to his covenant with his people.

We should learn from David. We should – more often than most of us do – lift up our eyes from the problems and difficulties of our everyday lives and see who God truly is. God is our great King and he rules his wonderful Kingdom. When we realize this, our hearts and mouths will be filled with praise. We will also be encouraged to live lives worthy of him and the principles of his Kingdom. As we do so, we can confidently look forward to the day when our King will come to judge and destroy all wickedness and to deliver and save all those who fear him. On that day the King’s Kingdom will be manifest to all. That will be the day of God’s new heaven and new earth.

### Answers 2: A wrong view of the Kingdom of God

For the teacher

You will probably need two class periods to work through this study properly with your students.

This study could turn out to be a challenge to you as a teacher. First, it is the first part of a two-part series. So it can only be fully understood together with the following study. Consequently, you as a teacher have to carefully prepare both studies, study 2 and study 3, before you start working on study 2 with your students.

Second, the “theology” that it contains presents a wrong (or at least a partially wrong) view of the end of the present age and of the Kingdom of God. But you may not have realized that it is wrong.

In any case, there will certainly be at least one or two students in your class who think that this wrong view is the correct view. And most of your remaining students are probably confused and do not have a clear understanding of what is wrong and what is correct. So a third challenge for you is to help your students reach a correct understanding– after they have completed this and the following study. They have to reach it on their own. This means that they will not be helped by you telling them. Instead you must carefully and sensitively help them reach the truth. The first step in reaching this goal is to realize that there are big problems with the “theology” that the wrong view represents. Make sure that your students realize this at the end of this present study.

The six questions have been designed to help your students reach this realization. I suggest the following procedure:

* 1. Let the students work though questions 1 and 2 in their groups. Go through their answers.
  2. Let the students work though question 3 in their groups. Go through their answers.
  3. Let the students work though questions 4 –6 in their groups. Go through their answers.

By working through the questions gradually in this way, the students should reach an understanding of the “theological” and practical difficulties that are the consequences of the Jewish view on “the end” and on the Kingdom of God.

Answers to the questions

1. –
2. There are at least two big problems with this kind of teaching:
   1. It is not verified by our own Christian experience
      * We can see Satan at work in this world. There are wars. There is oppression. There is sin. There is suffering. There is death. There are natural disasters: drought, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis.
      * We still struggle with sin in our own lives. We also find that mature believers, and even successful pastors, struggle with weaknesses and sins.
      * We experience ill health. Even strong believers sometimes suffer from disease.
      * Death seems to be the only certain thing in human life.
   2. It will result in disappointment:
      * Perhaps disappointment with God.
      * Or disappointment with ourselves and our lack of faith.
      * Or disappointment with our pastor and his teaching.
      * Or disappointment with our church and its doctrines.
3. I have come across Devaraj’s kind of arguments quite often. Many years ago I might even have used them myself, but probably in a less direct way. The main problem with them is that they are not true. At least they are not completely true, for example:
   * + I know of lots of good believers who worry a lot. Even I who have been a believer for more than fifty years sometimes worry.
     + I know of lots of very good believers who are unwell.
     + I have also come across believers who have prayed sincerely before their exams and still failed.
     + In my church there are many good believers who are struggling financially. In my town there are also some very rich people, who do not believe in Jesus. They never go to church. Instead they spend their free time drinking and going to parties. So the link between Christian faith and financial success seems to be weak!

The New Testament does not promise us an easy and successful life in this world. Instead we are told to expect problems and difficulties as followers of Jesus. Our adversary the devil walks around like a roaring lion seeking to devour us (1 Pet 5:8). But the New Testament contains many promises of help and encouragement for believers: Jesus promised to be with us in our trials and difficulties. Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us. Paul teaches us that we will never be tested beyond our endurance. Both Jesus and Paul promise us a great future when our lives in this world is over. We have a wonderful inheritance waiting for us in heaven, where there is no unrighteousness, no sin, no disease, no death.

1. Sita would, of course, have been very disappointed to fail in her exams. As her friends, we should not blame her or tell her that she was lacking in her faith. Instead we must comfort and guide her. We must encourage her to try again, to study even more – and to trust God to give her the strength to do so. We must explain to her that Jesus is with us, particularly in times of discouragement and difficulties. We must help her not to blame God – or even herself – for her failure. We must help her see her failure in a bigger perspective.

We all fail at times. We all live in an imperfect world in which we sometimes face trials and disappointments. But God is with us to help us, to give us strength, and to guide us.

1. Radhamma’s cell-group members must have been vey sad and disappointed to hear that she had succumbed to her cancer – in spite of their trust in God and in divine healing through Jesus, and in spite of all their prayers. They need to be counseled in a wise and sensitive way. We must comfort them in their grief. We must help them not to blame themselves for lack of faith. We must also help them not to lose their faith in God and his ability – and willingness – to answer our prayers for divine healing.

We must help them realize that we live in an imperfect world, that suffering and death is part of human life – whether we are believers or not.

1. What pastor Prakash did was absolutely wrong. His sinful life is not something the believers can accept or copy. We may wonder at the success of his ministry. But there is power in the preaching of the gospel about Jesus – even if the preacher is far from perfect.

What happened in Prakash’s church must have made the believers both confused and disappointed. They are in desperate need of wise Christian counseling so that they don’t lose their faith in God, their faith in the church, or their faith in pastors.

We must remind them of what God has done in their lives: how he saved them from their old sinful life, how he gave them peace in their hearts, how he gave them hope for the future and eternal life. We must also remind them of the blessings they received as members of the church, the joy of the worship services, the comfort of the prayer meetings, the support and friendship of other believers, God’s blessings on their family and on their children.

Then we must help them see the consequences of a life away from God and away from other believers. How would their lives be without God – now that they tasted his peace, his goodness, and his guidance? How would their lives be without the fellowship of other believers – now that they have experienced the joy of fellowship and the encouragement of church services and prayer meetings? How would their lives be without good sermons and spiritual food in the form of Bible studies – now that they have come appreciate the treasure house of God’s word?

So we must help them find a new church where they can enjoy the fellowship of other believers, and where they can receive spiritual food on a regular basis.

Finally, we must help them realize that we as Christian believers live in an imperfect world. A world where even pastors experience temptations – be it power, money, or women – and some of them may even fall, just as their own pastor did. But God expects his people to be faithful to him, even in the midst of trials and temptations. What happened in their church was a terrible failure in their pastor’s life – and in the life of that church. But they should not allow Satan to use that failure to defeat them as well. Instead they should allow God to use that failure to strengthen them and to help them grow in their spiritual lives.

Reflections

This may have been a tough study for some of you. At times you may even have been confused. But I sincerely hope that you by now have realized the weaknesses of the Jewish view of “the end” and of the Kingdom of God, a view that many Christian believers today sometimes share. This view contains a lot of truth, but not the whole truth. That is why I call it “wrong”.

So by now you should be eager to proceed to our next study where we will look at the “correct” view of the Kingdom of God, the view that we find in the New Testament texts.

### Answers 3: A correct view of the Kingdom of God

For the teacher

You will probably need at least two periods to work through this study with your students. Don’t rush it, but make sure that all your students end up understanding the crucial points about the “end times” and the Kingdom of God.

The picture is simplified or else it would have become too detailed to be intelligible. My text explains the picture and gradually adds the information that the students need in order to understand the already – not yet perspective of the Kingdom of God. It is important that you spend enough time with the picture and with my explanations so that each student ends up with a correct view of the Kingdom of God. The first nine questions will help you do so.

I suggest that you work with the questions like this:

* 1. Let the students work through questions 1–9 in groups. They are all based on the picture and on the text explaining the picture. Go through their answers. Make sure everybody understands the answers.
  2. Do question 10 together with the students. Make sure everybody under-stands the question and the answer.
  3. Let the students work through questions 11–14 in groups. Go through their answers. Make sure everybody understands the answers. These questions can be used in class or for library time/homework.
  4. Question 15 is supplementary and should only be used for advanced students – and if they have time for it. It can be done individually or in pairs. It is, of course, good if you can find an opportunity for the students to use the result or their work in a real situation.

Answers to the questions

1. The most important difference between the two pictures has to do with “the end”. The Jews at the time of Jesus (the picture in study 2) believed that the end of this present age would come in one step only. But the New Testament teaches us (the picture in this study) that the end comes in two steps.
2. The line that represents the present age changes from a continuous line (illustrating its “normal” stage) to a dashed line (illustrating its “weakened” or “doomed” stage). This change took place at the “beginning of the end”, with Jesus’ ministry, suffering and death, resurrection and exaltation, and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
3. The two other expressions for “the present age” are “Satan’s time” and “the time of the flesh”.
4. The line that represents the coming age begins as a dashed line during the period called “between the times” in the picture. The dashes illustrate that the Kingdom of God (or the coming age) arrived with Jesus, but not in full power. This dashed line changes into a continuous line when the end is consummated (at the second coming of Jesus). That it is shown as continuous illustrates its full power.
5. The vertical line on the left represents “the beginning of the end”. The two other expressions that can be used for this are “the first coming of Jesus” and “the beginning of the Kingdom of God in a tangible way with Jesus”.
6. The vertical line on the right represents “the consummation of the end”. The two other expressions that can be used for this are “the second coming of Jesus” and “the coming of the Kingdom of God in full power”.
7. The expression “believers are boxed in on four sides” can be explained like this: Believers in the present world live their lives in a metaphorical box with four sides. Behind us we have the historical events connected with Jesus’ first coming. In front of us we have the historical events connected with Jesus’ second coming. Beneath us we have the negative spiritual powers of this evil world. Above us we have the positive spiritual powers of the Kingdom of God.

These four sides of the box are connected. The spiritual powers of this evil world (represented by Satan) received a death blow with the historical events connected with Jesus’ first coming, and they will be totally destroyed with the historical events connected with Jesus’ second coming. The spiritual powers of the Kingdom of God entered human existence in a new way with the historical events connected with Jesus’ first coming, and they will enter human existence with full power with the historical events connected with Jesus’ second coming.

1. I would explain the phrase “we live in the end times” like this: The “end times” began with the first coming of Jesus. The “end times” will end with the second coming of Jesus. So we live between the first and the second coming of Jesus – in the end times (or during “the end of the ages”). This is the time of the gospel. This is the time of the church and of church growth. This is the time of evangelization and mission. This is the time of the expansion of the Kingdom of God in this world. This is the time of grace and salvation. This is the time when people can still turn to God and enter the Kingdom of God. This is the time of spiritual growth so that we can attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, Eph 4:13.
2. The expression “already – not yet” about the Kingdom of God can be explained like this: The Kingdom of God has already come with Jesus, but not yet in full power and glory. That will happen at his second coming. So the Kingdom of God is already present with men, but it is not yet consummated.
3. The “already – not yet” perspective in the way Paul uses the word “justice/righteousness” (Kannada NIBV and JV nIti) in Rom 5:1 and Gal 5:5:
   * In Rom 5:1 Paul states that believers have already been justified through faith. So here we find the “already” perspective of our justification and of the Kingdom of God. This happened when we received Jesus as our Savior.
   * In Gal 5:5 Paul states that believers are waiting and hoping for righteousness. So here we find the “not yet” perspective of our righteousness/justification and of the Kingdom of God. This will happen when Jesus comes back in glory.
4. The “already – not yet” perspective in the way Paul uses the word “redemption” (Kannada NIBV vimOchane and Kannada JV biDugaDe/vimOchane) in Eph 1:7 and 4:40:
   * In Eph 1:7 Paul states that believers have already been redeemed. This happened when we received Jesus as our personal Savior. So here we find the “already” perspective of redemption and of the Kingdom of God.
   * In Eph 4:40 Paul states that believers received the seal of the Spirit for the day of redemption. This redemption will take place when Jesus comes back. So here we find the “not yet” perspective of our redemption and of the Kingdom of God.
5. The “already – not yet” perspective in the way Paul uses the the expressions “spirit of adoption” and “adoption as sons” (Kannada NIBV putrara Atma and putrara padavi and Kannada JV magana bhAva and putrara padavi) in Rom 8:15 and 8:23:
   * In Rom 8:15 Paul states that believers have already received the spirit of sonship (or the spirit of adoption). This happened when God became our Father as we accepted his salvation through Jesus. So here we find the “already” perspective of our sonship and of the Kingdom of God.
   * In Rom 8:23 Paul states that believers are eagerly waiting for their adoption as sons. We are waiting for an event that will take place in the future. So here we find the “not yet” perspective of our sonship (or adoption as sons) or of the Kingdom of God.
6. This is how Jesus uses the expressions “the Kingdom of God” in Matt 12:22–28 and “the kingdom” in Matt 25:31–34 in the perspective of “already–not yet”:
   * In Matt 12:28 Jesus challenges the Pharisees and their understanding of his ministry: But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. So Jesus claims that the Kingdom of God has come – because he delivered the demon-possessed man (v 22) and he did so by the Spirit of God. Consequently, Jesus stated that the Kingdom of God had come through his ministry. This is the “already” perspective of the Kingdom of God.
   * In Matt 24–25 Jesus is teaching his disciples about what will happen “at the end of the age” (see Matt 24:3). The passage about the “sheep and the goats” (25:33–46) is about the second coming of Jesus (when the Son of Man comes in his glory, v 31). Then the King will say to the righteous (compare v 37), Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, v 34. This will happen in the future, so we find here the “not yet” perspective of the Kingdom of God.
7. In Matt 13:24–33 we find three parables about the Kingdom of God (here Matthew uses the synonymous expression “the kingdom of heaven”). They all fit into the period called “between the times” in the picture above:
   * The parable of the weeds (v 24–30) is about the wheat and the weeds growing together in the field until the day of harvest. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like this. So this must refer to the period between Jesus’ first and second coming, which is called “between the times” in the picture. After the second coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God will be present in full power. By that time all the “weeds” will have been burned up in God’s judgment.
   * The parable of the mustard seed (v 31–32) is about the small mustard seed growing into a big tree. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like this. So this must refer to the period between Jesus’ first and second coming, which is called “between the times” in the picture. After the second coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God will be present in full power. Then the Kingdom of God will no longer grow and expand.
   * The parable about the yeast (v 33) is about the power of the yeast penetrating the whole dough. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like this. So this must refer to the period between Jesus’ first and second coming, which is called “between the times” in the picture. After the second coming of Jesus, this present world (the “dough” of the parable) will no longer be present for the Kingdom of God to penetrate.

Reflections

The life of a believer in this world (his life “between the times”) can be compared to a person running with a strong tail-wind – and this tail-wind comes from the future.

We who have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior have already received the future into our lives. The Kingdom of God is this future. And it has already come to us in Jesus. But it has not yet come to us in its full power and glory. That will only happen with the second coming of Jesus, the day when God will judge and destroy all evil and all unrighteousness, the day when God will make every-thing new with his new heaven and new earth.

But we have already had a foretaste of this glory and this righteousness and this new life. This foretaste gives us strength to run our race. It will help us keep our eyes focused on Jesus, our Savior and our Lord. This foretaste of the future will also encourage us to run in the right direction – toward the future where our eternal inheritance is waiting for us. This is the believer’s tail-wind.

### Answers 4: Jesus the King

For the teacher

This study probably requires two lessons.

This study consists of two parts:

* + First, a final look at what the New Testament means by “the Kingdom of God”. This is found in the Introduction to the study. The first three questions will reinforce the students’ knowledge bout this.
  + Second, a look at three sets of New Testament passages where Jesus is described as King. Questions 4–18 will help the students understand the nature and extent of his kingship.

It is important for you – and for your students – to realize that much more can be said about the kingship of Jesus and about the Kingdom of God in the New Testament. But as this fourth study and the first part of this textbook is completed, your students should have acquired a sound biblical understanding of the nature of the Kingdom of God.

A few additional perspectives of the Kingdom will be found in the second part of the book, More about the Kingdom. If your time is limited, you can pass over some or all of those studies and jump to the third part of the book, Life in the Kingdom.

I suggest that you make use of the questions like this:

* 1. Let the students work through questions 1–3 in groups (before doing so they must have covered the material in the Introduction to this study). Go through their answers. Make sure that all your students have understood the New Testament meaning of “the Kingdom of God” by now.
  2. Let the students work through questions 4–18 in groups. Go through their answers. These questions can be used either in class or for library time/homework.

Answers to the questions

1. The expressions “the Kingdom of God” and “the Kingdom of Christ” cannot be separated from each other in the New Testament. They both refer to the same truth – the authority and rule of God the Father and God the Son.
2. The word “kingdom” is easily misunderstood, because in our modern languages it is mainly used about countries (for example the United Kingdom, the kingdom of Denmark). But in the New Testament it does not primarily refer to a country – but to authority and rule. So “the kingdom of God” means “wherever God rules, wherever God has authority”.
3. These are the three “aspects” of the expression “kingdom of God” as it is used in the New Testament:
   1. The general aspect: It refers to God’s authority and rules in general, without emphasis on time.
   2. The “already” aspect: It refers to the fact that God’s authority and rule has entered human existence in a new and powerful way with Jesus (his ministry, his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension, his sending of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in him).
   3. The “not yet” aspect: It refers to the fact that God’s authority and rule over human existence is not yet total. That will happen with the return of Jesus, with God’s final Day of Judgment, and with God’s new heaven and new earth.
4. The people’s understanding of Jesus’ identity in John 6:14–15 and Jesus’ reaction to this:

Jesus had performed the miracle (the “sign”) of feeding the five thousand, John 6:5–13. The people then thought that Jesus must be the Prophet, in fulfillment of the prediction of a prophet like Moses (whom God used to feed the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings) in Deut 18:15 and 18: I will raise up for them from among their brothersa prophet like you. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I will command him.

Jesus realized that the people would now force him to become their king. He knew that the Jews were expecting the Messiah to be a king who would establish a Jewish kingdom and rule the people from Jerusalem. But this was not the kind of kingship that he had come to establish. So Jesus went to a mountain to get away from the people and their plans for him.

1. It is clear from their behavior what the crowd expected of Jesus at the time of his triumphal entry (John 12:12–16):
   1. They treated Jesus as a victorious king entering Jerusalem: They waved palm branches, which was a sign of victory over enemies. So the people must have thought that Jesus was now going to bring deliverance from the Romans, the political enemies of the Jews, and become their king.
   2. They quoted a messianic text (Ps 118:25–26) and added Blessed is the King of Israel. So they evidently expected the Messiah to be an Israelite king.
2. The disciples seem to have been confused about the nature of Jesus’ messianic kingship at the time of his triumphal entry (John 12:12–16). They realized that the crowd expected a king in the line – and on the pattern – of king David. They also saw that Jesus’s behavior (He didn’t oppose the rejoicing of the crowds. He even entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy (Zech 9:9). But only after Jesus’ glorification did they realize the true nature of his kingship (v 16).
3. The crowd’s understanding of Jesus when he was tried before Pilate (John 18:38–40) was very different from what it had been when Jesus entered Jerusalem just a few days earlier. Now they no longer believed that he was the Messiah who had come to deliver the Jews from the Romans and establish an Israelite kingdom on the pattern of king David. Before Pilate they denied that he was “the king of the Jews”. They wanted him crucified and Barabbas the rebel released.
4. From Jesus’ interrogation before Pilate (John 18:28–37), we understand that his kingship is different. Jesus claims to be king and to have a kingdom (v 36–37). He was born to be a king. But his kingdom “is not of this world”, it “is from another place”.
5. This is what we have learned about Jesus and his kingship from working with questions 4–8:
   1. The Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and a king in the line of David were really about Jesus.
   2. But the Jews at the time of Jesus (including his own disciples) misunder-stood the nature of this messiahship and this kingship, and the nature of the Kingdom (the Kingdom of God) that Jesus was going to establish.
   3. Jesus really was (and is) King. But he was not (and is not) the kind of earthly king that the Jews were waiting for. He is a different kind of king with a different kind of kingship and a different kind of kingdom. It is a kingdom “not of this world”, but a spiritual kingdom, a divine kingdom. It is “from another place”.
6. We learn these things about “the inheritance of the saints” and the Kingdom of God in Col 1:10–14:
   1. It is God’s work in us that prepares us for our inheritance (that we live lives worthy of our Lord, that we please him in every way, that we bear fruit in every good work, that we grow in the knowledge of God, that we endure, that we give thanks to our heavenly Father), because he has qualified us for our inheritance by rescuing us from the dominion of darkness.
   2. Our inheritance is in the “kingdom of light”. The overall New Testament context shows that this is the same kingdom as “the Kingdom of God” and “the Kingdom of the Son, Jesus Christ”.
   3. We received this inheritance because we were brought from the dominion (or kingdom) of darkness into the kingdom (or dominion) of the Son.
   4. This “bringing” is summarized with the two expressions “redemption” and “the forgiveness of sins”.
7. In Col 1:15–17 Paul writes about the supremacy (or kingship) of Christ in creation. These are his six points:
   1. Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (v 15a). The Greek word for “image” signifies “likeness with the participation in the reality of this likeness”. Compare the image of Caesar on the Roman coin (Matt 22:20): It is not only a picture of Caesar, it also represents Caesar; it stands for Caesar. So Jesus stands for God, he is God. Paul uses the same expression in 2 Cor 4:4.
   2. Christ is “the firstborn of all creation” (v 15b). In the Bible the word “firstborn” has a metaphorical meaning in addition to the literal meaning. The literal meaning: the person who is born first in a family (Jesus was Mary’s firstborn, as he was her first child). The metaphorical meaning of the Greek word that Paul uses here: the privileged one, the exalted one. So Paul states that Christ is Lord (or “king”) over all of God’s creation.
   3. Christ is the creator of all things (v 16a). He is the agent of God’s creation, the Word through whom all things were made (John 1:1–3).
   4. Christ is the goal of all creation (v 16b). Everything was created for him. He is the purpose of creation.
   5. Christ existed before creation (v 17a). He “is before all things”, compare John 1:1–3.
   6. Christ upholds all of creation (v 17b). In “him all things are held together”, compare Heb 1:3.
8. In Col 1:18–20 Paul writes about the supremacy (or kingship) of Christ in redemption. These are his six points:
   1. Christ is “the head of the body, the church” (v 18a). This metaphor signifies Christ’s leadership over (and perhaps also his provisions for) the church.
   2. Christ is “the beginning” (v 18b). This shows that the church is a “new creation”, compare 2 Cor 5:17.
   3. Christ is “the firstborn from among the dead” (v 18c). Jesus was the first to rise from the dead with a resurrection body. In 1 Cor 15:20, Paul calls Jesus “the firstfruits of those who have died” with reference to his resurrection.
   4. Christ is supreme in everything (v 18d). This means that Jesus is first in rank (or “king”) over everything.
   5. Christ is the one in whom the “fullness” of God dwells (19). This signifies that God is in Jesus (compare how God “filled” the temple with his presence, Ezek 44:4.
   6. Christ is the one through whom God has reconciled all things to himself (v 20). This was done through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.
9. This is a summary of Paul’s theology on the supremacy (or kingship) of Jesus Christ as expressed in Col 1:15–18: Jesus is supreme (or King) over everything – God’s creation as well as the church – just as God is supreme (or King) over everything. The Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of God are one and the same.
10. From Rev 7:17 we learn that Jesus, the Lamb, is in the midst of God’s throne and that he is the shepherd of the believers in the Kingdom of God. In Psalm 23, king David describes the Lord God as his shepherd. And in Ezek 34:11–16, God describes himself as the shepherd of his people. Later in the same prophetic oracle, he promises to place over his people one shepherd, his servant David (a prophecy about the Messiah, Jesus of the family line of king David), who will tend them and be their shepherd.
11. From Rev 17:14 and 19:16 we learn that Jesus, the Lamb, is Lord of lords and King of kings. These expressions emphasize the supreme sovereignty of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God. Paul uses the same expressions about “God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords”, 1 Tim 6:15.
12. See the previous answer.
13. From Rev 22:1, 3 we learn that the throne in heaven is described as “the throne of God and of the Lamb”. So both God and Jesus are seated on the heavenly throne.
14. From these verses in the book of Revelation, we understand at least two things about Jesus kingship and his kingdom:
    1. Both God the Father and God the Son are the King of the Kingdom of God.
    2. The Kingdom of God/the Father and the Kingdom of Jesus/Christ/the Lamb refer to the same kingdom, not to two different kingdoms.

More about the Kingdom – studies

### Study 5: The Kingdom arrives

Introduction

In the first chapters of their books, the authors of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) show their readers how Jesus introduced the Kingdom of God through his ministry. Jesus did so through his words (his proclamation and teaching) and his deeds (healing the sick and delivering the demon-possessed).

In this study will look at some of the key texts about the arrival of the Kingdom of God with Jesus. We will also consider the authority of his ministry and people’s response to it.

We will, however, save Jesus’ teaching about “living the Kingdom of God in this world” till the third section of this book, which is about the Sermon on the Mount.

Read

Matt 4:23–25

Mark 1:14–15, 35–39, 44–45

Luke 4:31–41; 5:1–14

Questions

1. What do we learn about the Kingdom of God in Matt 4:23 and Mark 1:14–15?
2. How can we see the authority (compare 4:32) of the Kingdom of God at work in Luke 5:1–11?
3. How do you think the relatives and the employees of the early disciples might have felt about their decision to follow Jesus?
4. What benefits did the people of Capernaum experience as the kingdom arrived with Jesus (Luke 4:31–41)?
5. Describe the power structures in Capernaum that might have been challenged by the arrival of the Kingdom of God in Jesus?
6. What do Jesus’ actions reveal about the priorities and the values of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:35–39)?
7. Lev 13:44–46 helps us understand the pitiable situation of lepers in ancient Israel. Lepers were religiously unclean, physically ill, socially excluded, and emotionally separated from the community. How does Jesus offer full reconciliation to the leper in Luke 5:12–14?
8. In Mark 1:44 we see that Jesus told the leper not to tell anybody about what had happened to him. But the leper was disobedient to Jesus’s authority (Mark 1:45). Who was affected negatively by the leper’s disobedience?
9. Which power structures (see your answer to question 5 above) seems most resistant to the challenges of the Kingdom of God in South India today? Explain.
10. How could God use your church fellowship to challenge this kind of power structures in your own society?
11. Describe a time when prayer and quiet enabled you to re-order your life around Jesus’ Kingdom priorities and values? (compare your answer to question 6 above).
12. What would happen, if we as God’s people in South India today did not follow Jesus’ words as recorded in
    1. The Great Commandment (Matt 22:37–39),
    2. The Great Commission (Matt 28:16–20), and
    3. The Golden Rule (Matt 7:12)

Which groups of people would miss out on God’s blessings?

1. Summarize what you have learnt in this study about the Kingdom of God at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Use your own words and do not consult your notes or the text in this study.

### Study 6: The Kingdom crosses boundaries

Introduction

The Samaritans were of mixed cultural and religious heritage. They lived in the district of Samaria in central Palestine. This was the heartland of the old Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 722–721 BC. At that time many of its inhabitants were deported and replaced by people from other countries.

The Jews who returned to Judah (the heartland of the old Southern Kingdom of Israel) after the Babylonian Exile (538 BC and later) were received with hostility by the people who had remained, including the people of Samaria. They were told by their Jewish leaders not to intermarry, and to keep their Jewish religion undefiled by the influences of the local people. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us how each group attacked the other group’s chief place of worship. The Jews attacked Mount Gerizim and the Samaritans attacked the temple in Jerusalem.

At the time of the New Testament the tensions between Jews and Samaritans had been developing over several centuries. The Jews despised the Samaritans, and the Samaritans despised the Jews. The message of Jesus’ story about the Good Samaritan (Luke chapter 10), and the account of his meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John chapter 4) must be read with this background.

This is also the background to the story in Acts chapter 8 about Philip and his ministry in Samaria. Philip was one of the Seven in the Jerusalem church (see Acts chapter 6), and he was later called Philip the Evangelist. Philip and the Samaritans must have had mutual prejudices, suspicions and fears that originated in the history of their respective peoples – a history of nationalism, ethnicity, religious pride, political tension, and historical violence.

The Jews did not consider the Samaritans to be Gentiles, but neither did they consider them to be Jews.

Read

Acts 8:4–25

Questions

1. What prejudices and fears could Philip have faced as he traveled into Samaria to proclaim the Kingdom of God there?
2. Are there groups of people that raise similar fears in you? Explain how.
3. Philip went into Samaria to proclaim Christ. Has your own commitment to proclaim the gospel forced you to confront prejudice and fear in yourself and in others? Explain how.
4. Describe the content of Philip’s message. Also describe the characteristics of his ministry.
5. How did Philip’s deeds show that his message was true?
6. If your own church fellowship had to face similar prejudice and fear for Jesus’ sake, what specific deeds would best show your gospel message is true?
7. Compare the words and deeds of Simon the Sorcerer before his conversion with Philip’s words and deeds during his stay in Samaria. Also compare the response of the Samaritans to Simon and to Philip.
8. Consider the response of your friends and neighbors to your words and deeds. What could you to so that your words and deeds become more like Philip’s?
9. Why do you think the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria?
10. Does your own experience of the Kingdom of God embrace people who are different from you because of religion, history, or culture? Why – why not?
11. What role does the Holy Spirit play in this story? And what role does the Holy Spirit play in helping all of God’s people experience the good news of the Kingdom of God?
12. What changes would you like to see the Holy Spirit bring into your church fellowship so that people from different backgrounds can come together?
13. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. In the first column, list persons who are different from you (for example race, language, caste/tribe, gender, social and economic status, educational qualifications, and so on). In the second column, one good way in which you could demonstrate – by word or by deed – the message of the Kingdom of God.

### Study 7: The Kingdom grows

Introduction

Chapter 13 in Matthew’s gospel contains seven of Jesus’ parables about the Kingdom of God. Matthew normally uses the expression Kingdom of Heaven, which was less offensive to the Jews. They avoided mentioning God’s holy name so they often replaced it with other words. One such word was “heaven”. In this study we will look at the first four of these parables:

* + - The parable of the sower (v 1–9; 18–23)
    - The parable of the weeds (v 24–30; 36–43)
    - The parable of the mustard seed (v 31–32)
    - The parable of the yeast (v 33)

All four are about the spreading, growing, and expansion of the Kingdom of God during this present “age of the church”.

Read

Matt 13:1–9; 18–43

Questions

1. Explain the relationship between the two expressions “the Kingdom of God” and “the Kingdom of Heaven”.
2. What do the four parables about the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, and the yeast have in common?
3. What can we learn about the Kingdom of God from the parable of the sower? Make a list.
4. Draw a chart based on the parable of the sower. The chart should have three columns and compares the type of soil, the response to the Kingdom of God the soil represents, and an example that you have seen of this kind of response.
5. What are your conclusions for your own ministry from this chart of the parable of the sower?
6. Jews in Jesus’ time expected the Kingdom of God to come all at once and to immediately inaugurate a dramatically different world. How does the parable of the weeds correct this misunderstanding?
7. What can you learn about the Kingdom of God for your own ministry from the parable of the weeds?
8. What do we learn about the Kingdom of God from the parable of the mustard seed?
9. How could this knowledge help us in our own ministry?
10. What do we learn about the Kingdom of God from the parable of the yeast?
11. How could this knowledge help us in our own ministry?

### Study 8: Two challenging Kingdom principles

Introduction

In this study we will look at two fundamental principles (or values) of the Kingdom of God. The principle of grace and the principle of servanthood. The first principle is based on one of Jesus’ parables, the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1–16). The second principle is taught by Jesus in connection with a mother’s request (Matt 20:17–28).

These two principles of grace and servanthood go against the grain of our fallen human nature. This makes them very challenging – perhaps even disturbing – to most of us. We feel that the kind of grace that the landowner of the parable represents is unreasonable. We also feel – even if we don’t admit to this feeling – that servanthood is for Jesus and other “saints” and not for ourselves. Or we will redefine the meaning of “servant”: There are many “servants of God” in India, who show no “servanthood”.

These two principles can be read into Jesus’ words to Pilate, My kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). We can understand the expression “not of this world” in two ways. It can mean that Jesus’ Kingdom is not an earthly but a heavenly kingdom. But it can also mean – and I think that Jesus has that meaning in mind as well – that the principles of Jesus’ Kingdom (the values that his Kingdom stands for) have nothing to do with this fallen world, the world of power-seeking human kings and ruthless human empires. The values of Jesus’ Kingdom are from “another place”, from above, from heaven. His Kingdom has godly values, values found in God the Father (who describes himself like this, The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, abundant in love and faithfulness, Ex 34:6) and in Jesus, the God Incarnate, who came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28).

Read

Matt 20:1–28

Questions

1. How do you feel about the way the landowner of the parable treated his workers? Why do you feel like this?
2. What does the landowner’s character reveal about the values of the Kingdom of God?
3. What are the normal human values that makes most of us so upset over the way the landowner treated his workers?
4. Share an opportunity you have had to show these two Kingdom values (see your answer to the previous question) in your community, workplace, school/college, or church.
5. How would these places change if believers more often acted like the landowner in Jesus’ parable?
6. Do you think that it is possible for our modern society (or our Indian govern-ment) to act more like the landowner? Why – why not?
7. Compare the future Jesus predicts for himself with the future that the mother of Zebedee’s sons would like to see for her sons?
8. Jesus’ description of his death should have changed her understanding of the values of the Kingdom of God. Explain how.
9. Jesus did not discourage his disciples from seeking greatness. But how did he redefine their understanding of greatness?
10. How would a biblical understanding of greatness help a pastor, when he guides his believers to make vocational and economic choices that reflect the values of the Kingdom of God?
11. Describe a person you know who embodies greatness through sacrificial servanthood.
12. Give some examples of everyday choices that a person who wants to follow Jesus’ path to greatness can face.
13. What choices do you face this week as you follow Jesus’ path to greatness?

### Study 9: Waiting for the Kingdom

Introduction

Chapters 24 and 25 in Matthew’s gospel contain a long speech by Jesus. The purpose of this speech was to address the questions the disciples had about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the coming of the Son of Man and the end of the age. This happened on the Mount of Olives (24:1–3) a couple of days before Jesus’ crucifixion.

In addition to other material this speech contains four stories or parables:

* + - The faithful and wise servant (24:45–51)
    - The parable of the ten virgins (25:1–13)
    - The parable of the talents (25:14–30)
    - The sheep and the goats (25:31–46)

The emotional focus of these stories/parables is on anticipation (to be eagerly waiting for something) and faithful obedience. To be wise from a biblical point of view is to have both insight (wisdom) and obedience. Jesus expected his disciples to act on what they knew.

Earlier in his speech Jesus has one interesting piece of information about the gospel and the end: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (24:14).

Jesus’ exhortations to his disciples (and in extension all believers throughout the church age) can be summarized in five points:

* 1. Preach the gospel about the Kingdom of God!
  2. Keep awake and be alert!
  3. Be prepared!
  4. Be faithful!
  5. Be like Jesus!

Read

Matt 24:36–51 and Matt 25:1–46

Questions

1. How does your Kannada translation of the Bible divide this text? And what are the headings? Compare the three major translations satyavEdavu, pavitra grantha and pavitra baibal. (If you use the satyavEdavu translation, note down each para and add your own headings)
2. Why does Jesus bring up “the days of Noah”?
3. Why does Jesus tell his disciples to keep watch?
4. Explain Jesus’ point about the thief at night.
5. What is the main difference between a faithful servant and a wicked servant?
6. Use your own words – and do not look in your Bibles – to summarize what Jesus says in Matt 24:36–51.
7. What did Jesus say that the parable of the ten virgins was about?
8. How did the wise virgins show wisdom?
9. What did the harsh behavior of the bridegroom demonstrate?
10. How does Jesus conclude the parable of the ten virgins?
11. What is the parable of the talents about (compare the first sentence in the three Kannada translations, v 14)?
12. Why didn’t the master give the same amount to all his servants?
13. How did the master praise the first two servants?
14. Why was the master so angry with the third servant?
15. What do the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents tell us about what it will be like when the Kingdom of God comes it its fullness?
16. God has entrusted you with a lot of opportunities, resources, and experiences. Do you feel that your choices in life (about for example education, jobb offers, social life, economic matters, and political outlook) have reflected the characteristics of a good servant? To what extent and how? Why or why not?
17. Explain the difference between the “sheep” kind of people and the “goat” kind of people.
18. What kind of life does Jesus expect from those who finally will inter the Kingdom of God (25:31–46)?
19. Many Bible readers find the passage about the “sheep and the goats” (25:31–46) difficult. What could be the reason for that? How do you understand it?
20. Most people think of waiting as a passive experience. What could you do during the next week to show that you are actively waiting for Jesus’ return?
21. How can we summarize Jesus’ exhortations to believers who are waiting for the consummation of the Kingdom of God?

### Study 10: The church and the Kingdom

Introduction

Many theologians claim that the church and the Kingdom of God are one and the same. That is not correct. But there is a strong link between the Kingdom of God and the church. The church embodies – or expresses – the Kingdom of God in the world during the “church age”, the period between Jesus’ first and second comings.

In this study we will look at some aspects of the relationship between the church and the Kingdom of God.

Read

Matt 28: 8–10, 16–20

Acts 1:4–8

1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:23

Questions

1. What message did Jesus have for the eleven remaining disciples through the women at the grave (Matt 28:8–10)?
2. Jesus’ exhortation to his eleven disciples in Matt 28:18–20 is called The Great Commission. It can be structured into three parts. How? And what is the significance of each part?
3. Jesus told the eleven to “make disciples of all nations”. Which three steps did he say that would involve?
4. To what extent has your own church followed the three steps of the Great Commission? Share in your groups.
5. Why did Jesus tell his disciples to stay in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4–8)?
6. What connection do we find between Jesus, the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit, and the disciples in Acts 1:4–8?
7. Many Bible scholars see the book of Acts as the continuation of Luke’s gospel not only as the second volume of a two-part narrative (see Luke’s introduction to Acts in 1:1), but also theologically. Do you agree with them? Why – why not?
8. What do we learn about the relationship between Jesus and the church through 1 Cor 12:27 and Eph 1:23?
9. What conclusions about the church and the Kingdom of God can we draw from our answer to the previous question?
10. Summarize what you have learnt about the church and the Kingdom of God in this study.

More about the Kingdom – answers

### Answers 5: The Kingdom arrives

For the teacher

This study should not require more than one class period – plus library and homework time. You will also need some follow-up time the next day.

Go through the Introduction and read the Bible passages together in class before you let the students work with the questions.

I suggest that you make use of the questions like this:

* 1. Let the students work through questions 1–8 in groups. Go through their answers.
  2. Let the students work through questions 9–12 in groups. These questions can be used either in class or for library time/homework. Check answers.
  3. Question 13 is best done individually. But check during class time what the students have come up with. This would reinforce learning.

I suggest that you let the students read Reflections individually as homework. Then follow-up in class. Let the students share and discuss.

Answers to questions

1. We learn these things about the Kingdom of God in Matt 4:23–25 and Mark 1:14–15:
   1. Matthew mentions four key words about Jesus’ ministry:
      * He taught, referring to the teaching about the Kingdom of God: its character and how believers should live as citizens of the Kingdom of God. This is what the “Sermon on the Mount” is about.
      * He preached the Kingdom of God. This was the “good news” message about why he had come to this world, and what he would achieve through his death and resurrection.
      * He healed every disease and sickness among the people. Healing was an important sign of the Kingdom of God. It showed that the end of the present evil age had come with Jesus. One of the characteristics of the present age was sickness. On the other hand, the coming age (the Kingdom of God) is characterized by shalom (health, wholeness and peace).
      * He delivered (Matthew uses the word “healed” about this) the demon-possessed. The deliverance of the possessed demonstrated that Satan’s rule was coming to an end.
   2. Matthew also informs his readers that Jesus’ ministry (and as a consequence, the Kingdom of God) is not limited to the Israelites. It also included the Gentiles, in this case the people of Syria and Decapolis, the ten Greek cities east of the Jordan River.
   3. Mark helps us understand four things about the Kingdom of God:
      * It is good news, the “gospel”.
      * It arrived in a new way with Jesus: “The time is fulfilled” or “The time has come”.
      * At the same time it is near: Jesus’ ministry demonstrated the visible extension of the Kingdom of God, God’s reign. But its full power, its consummation, was yet to come.
      * Human beings must respond to the Kingdom of God. Jesus expected his listeners to repent and to believe the good news.
2. We can see the authority of the Kingdom of God at work in Luke 5:1–11:
   1. Simon Peter obeyed Jesus’ command to put out the nets again – just because Jesus told him to do so.
   2. Jesus demonstrated that he has power over nature by the fishermen’s miraculous catch of fish.
   3. Simon Peter realized his own sinfulness in the presence of Jesus’ authority.
   4. The first disciples joined Jesus without delay. They did not hesitate to leave their boats, which were their livelihood.
   5. Jesus had a divine purpose for Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen. From now on they would catch souls for the Kingdom of God.
3. The relatives and the employees of the early disciples might have felt like this about their decision to follow Jesus:
   1. They might have thought the disciples were fools to leave their livelihood and that it would be risky to follow Jesus.
   2. They might have become angry or worried, as their own livelihood was now in jeopardy:
      * Their servants and assistants in the fishing business would perhaps lose their employment.
      * Their parents and children depended on them for their survival. So what would happen to them now?
4. The people of Capernaum experienced these benefits as the kingdom arrived with Jesus (Luke 4:31–41):
   1. They experienced how demon-possessed were delivered. As a consequence, the synagogue services would become more peaceful.
   2. They experienced how sick were healed.
   3. They realized that Jesus’ teaching was different from what there were used to. His message had authority. He had power over the evil spirits.
5. These were some of the power structures in Capernaum that might have been challenged by the arrival of the Kingdom of God in Jesus:
   1. Family loyalties as a consequence of Jesus’ call of the disciples.
   2. Business loyalties and financial priorities as a consequence of the disciples leaving their fishing enterprises.
   3. The teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees must have been challenged by the authority of Jesus’ words.
   4. Jesus demonstrated the inbreaking of Kingdom of God in the surrounding world, challenging Satan and his powers of darkness:
      * the deliverance of the demon-possessed
      * the healing of the sick
6. Jesus’ actions in Mark 1:35–39 reveal these things about the priorities and the values of the Kingdom of God:
   1. Popularity is not important. Jesus could have stayed in Capernaum and enjoyed the popularity of his successful ministry there. But that was not his priority.
   2. Prayer is important. Jesus could have said that ministry is more important than prayer. But he withdrew from his successful ministry to spend time in prayer with his heavenly Father.
   3. The urgency of the preaching of the gospel. Jesus pressed on with his evangelistic ministry after having spent some time with God in prayer. He realized the urgency of the gospel.
   4. The importance that the gospel reaches new places and new groups of people. Jesus could have remained in Capernaum. But he pressed on to new villages to preach the gospel there also. He had come so that all people would hear the good news of the Kingdom of God.
   5. The ability to see the needs of people. Jesus was well aware of the need for healing and deliverance that the people in the other places had.
   6. The need for God’s guidance. We can understand from this passage that Jesus was directed by his heavenly Father in everything that he did.
7. Jesus offered full reconciliation to the leper in Luke 5:12–14 by meeting his total needs:
   1. Jesus met him physically.
   2. Jesus met him emotionally.
   3. Jesus met him spiritually.
   4. Jesus met him socially.

As a result of meeting Jesus, the leper was completely restored to normal life.

1. All the people in other cities who could not hear Jesus proclaim the gospel (because he had to retire to lonely places as a result of his unmanageable popularity) were negatively affected by the leper’s disobedience.
2. Which power structures (see your answer to question 5 above) seems most resistant to the challenges of the Kingdom of God in South India today?

Here are some powerful structures that you may have mentioned, but there are, of course, many others as well:

* + The caste system (perhaps the Christian faith carries the stigma of being “low caste”)
  + Family loyalties, family dependence (difficult for young believers to make independent decisions, pressure to marry a Hindu, pressure to get a certain education or job)
  + Friendship and caste loyalties (losing old friends, losing business partners, problems with participation in social and religious functions)
  + Nationalism (perhaps the Christian faith carries the stigma of being “foreign” and “un-Indian”, even “anti-Indian”)
  + Materialism (the struggle for survival, focus on financial security, desire to amass wealth and property, losing customers, losing job)
  + Religious compromise (the religions are only different ways to God, any god is fine as long as you are a devout worshiper, adding Jesus to our personal pantheon)
  + “The Indian way” (corruption, politics, compromise, manipulation, influence, personal contacts, nepotism, lies and half-truths, misuse of position and authority)

1. –
2. –
3. –
4. –

Reflections

In this study we have looked at Jesus’ ministry and authority as he introduced the Kingdom of God to the people he met in Palestine in those days. Before his suffering and death, he told his disciples: Very truly, I tell you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do. And even greater works than these will he do, because I am going to my Father (John 14:12). When we read the book of Acts, which is about “the acts of the apostles” (with reference to Jesus disciples, Paul, and the believers of the early church), we see that they too preached the gospel with authority. They too healed the sick and delivered the demon-possessed. So their ministry was a continuation of Jesus’ ministry.

The ministry of the church today – not only in South India but all over the world – is also a continuation of Jesus’ ministry. We boldly preach the gospel. We pray for the sick in the Name of Jesus, trusting him for healing. We also pray for the deliverance of the demon-possessed in the Name of Jesus. We do these things not in our own strength and by our own authority, but with faith and confidence in the power and authority of Jesus. It is he who manifests the authority of the Kingdom of God through the ministry that he has called us to.

But sometimes our ministry does not live up to our expectations. Some people harden their hearts to our proclamation of the gospel. Others turn against us and persecute us. Some of those we pray for are not visibly healed. Sometimes demon-possessed are not delivered. Some believers do not live lives that honor God and his Kingdom. When these things happen, we easily get discouraged. We may also blame ourselves for lack of faith.

This is my advice for you who feel like this – and for you who would like to see more of the Kingdom of God manifested through your ministry:

* 1. Remember the “already – not yet” aspect of the Kingdom of God. It is already here through what Jesus has done and with the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. But it has not yet come with full power and authority. That will only happen when Jesus returns in glory.
  2. Pray that the power and authority of the Kingdom of God would become more evident in your life and ministry. Pray that people’s ears would be opened. Pray that people’s hearts would be softened. Pray that more people would experience healing. Pray that more demon-possessed would be delivered. Pray that people’s lives would be transformed to a larger extent.
  3. Seek God’s guidance for your life and ministry. Perhaps you need to spend more time in prayer. Perhaps you need to recommit your life to the Lord. Perhaps you need to re-focus your life. Perhaps you need to humble yourself before God in order for him to use you better for his glory. Perhaps you need to work in a different way. Perhaps you need to work in a difference place.
  4. Trust in Jesus (Rom 10:11; 15:13; 1 Pet 2:6). He is faithful (1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 5:24; 2 Tim 2:13). He keeps his promises (Heb 10:23). He will never let you down or forsake you.
  5. Focus more on Jesus than on yourself. Jesus is the Savior, you cannot save anybody from their sins. Jesus is the Healer, you cannot heal anybody from their sicknesses. Jesus is the Deliverer, you cannot deliver anybody from the powers of Satan. Jesus is the Transformer, you cannot transform anybody’s spiritual life. Remember that Jesus is King of the Kingdom, and that you are just his humble servant.

### Answers 6: The Kingdom crosses boundaries

For the teacher

This study should not require more than one class period – plus library and homework time. You will also need some follow-up time the next day.

Go through the Introduction and read the Bible passage together in class before you let the students work with the questions.

I suggest that you make use of the questions like this:

* 1. Let the students work through questions 1–12 in groups. Go through their answers. Any of these questions can also be used for library time and as homework.
  2. Question 13 is best done individually (or in pairs) for library time or as homework. But spend some time in class the next day to check what the students have come up with.

Students who have ability and time can be asked to do the Assignments (or one of them) as a “project”. But first make sure that there are resources (books or persons) available. Follow-up in class at some later point, if you have the opportunity, but there is no need to do so.

Answers to the questions

1. These could have been some of the prejudices and fears that Philip faced as he traveled into Samaria to proclaim the Kingdom of God there (see also the Introduction to this study):
   1. That the Samaritans would be unfriendly or hostile to Philip: perhaps they would beat him
   2. That the Samaritans would not be willing to listen to the gospel because of Philip’s Jewish background
   3. That the Samaritans would not be able to understand the gospel message because of their religious and cultural background
   4. That the Samaritans would be suspicious of Philip’s motives, thinking that he had come to “convert” them, to make them Jews
   5. That the Samaritans would think that Philip came with political motives, perhaps to spy on them on behalf of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem
   6. That the Samaritans would think that Philip had come with some other “hidden agenda”, perhaps to cheat them into paying him money for his “services” to them
2. –
3. –
4. The content of Philip’s message can be described like this: He proclaimed the Christ (v 5), which meant
   1. the good news of the Kingdom of God (v 12), and
   2. the name of Jesus Christ (v 12)

The characteristics of his ministry (which reminds us of Jesus’ early ministry, see the previous study) can be described like this:

* 1. Philip preached the gospel about Jesus and the Kingdom of God.
  2. Philip healed the sick and delivered the demon-possessed.
  3. The miraculous signs that Philip performed made the people listen to his gospel message.
  4. His ministry brought joy to the people.

1. Philip’s deeds showed that his message was true, like this :

He not only spoke about the power of salvation, of healing and of deliverance in the name of Jesus. His deeds (bringing people into the joy of salvation, seeing sick people healed and demon-possessed people delivered) demonstrated the truth of his message – that the Kingdom of God had arrived with the person of Jesus and that it was expanding to new people (even across religious, cultural, and social boundaries) as Jesus Christ was proclaimed and as people accepted him as their personal Savior.

1. If your own church fellowship had to face similar prejudice and fear for Jesus’ sake, what specific deeds would best show your gospel message is true?

Perhaps you also (in addition to healings, deliverances and other miracles) mentioned things like these:

* 1. That your church has reached people from all kinds of religious, linguistic, caste/tribal, social, and economic backgrounds. And that your church has room for both young and old, both singles and families. This would demonstrate the power of the Kingdom of God to cross all kinds of boundaries.
  2. That all believers are treated with respect, irrespective of their background
  3. That all believers are given equal leadership and ministry opportunities, irrespective of their background
  4. That believers make friends across the social, linguistic, caste/tribal economic, and ethnic divides that we usually find in India
  5. That believers’ lives are changed (they are restored and rehabilitated, they are now honest while they used to be corrupt, they are now generous while they used to be greedy, they are now humble while they used to be proud, they are now spiritual while they used to be worldly, and so on)
  6. That the believers (including the pastor and other leaders) have remained “Indian” (they don’t behave like foreigners, they are still proud of their country, they still identify with the people of their nation, and so on)

1. The words and deeds of Simon the Sorcerer before his conversion compared with Philip’s words and deeds during his stay in Samaria:
   1. Simon practiced sorcery and magic. Philip practiced healing and deliverance.
   2. Simon put himself in the center of his “ministry” (he was boastful, he thought he was somebody great). Philip put Jesus Christ in the center of his ministry.

A comparison of the response of the Samaritans to Simon and to Philip:

* 1. People were impressed by both Simon (initially) and Philip (later).
  2. People followed first Simon, then Philip.
  3. But Philip’s ministry must have been more powerful, more convincing, and more genuine than Simon’s, because the Samaritans left Simon for Philip. Even Simon gave up his old life, was baptized and followed Philip.

1. –
2. I think that there must have been more than one reason why the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria:
   1. They had heard rumors about the revival in Samaria and wanted to get first-hand, eye-witness information about it.
   2. They perhaps doubted that Samaritans had accepted the gospel and turn to Jesus.
   3. They perhaps wanted to make sure that Philip’s ministry was genuine.
   4. They perhaps wanted to make sure that the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit through Philip’s ministry.
3. –
4. The Holy Spirit plays a key role in this story, even if its role is not explicitly mentioned:
   1. The crossing of boundaries is the work of the Holy Spirit (this was one of the miracles of the first Day of Pentecost, when “Jews from every nation under the sky” heard about “the mighty works of God” in their own languages (Acts 2:5–11). So when the gospel crossed the boundary between Jews and Samaritans it was the work of the Holy Spirit”.
   2. The “cutting to the heart” (Acts 2:37) of people so that they listened to the gospel and accepted it is the work of the Holy Spirit, in Samaria just as it was in Jerusalem on the first Day of Pentecost (compare 1 Thess 1:5).
   3. The joy that the people in Samaria experienced as they believed in Jesus and were saved was the work of the Holy Spirit (compare Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22; 1 Thess 1:6).
   4. The “power ministry” that Philip engaged in with the Samaritans was the work of the Holy Spirit (compare Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4).
   5. The laying on of hands of the apostles filled the Samaritans with the Holy Spirit in such a powerful way that Simon the Sorcerer offered money for this “gift” that the apostles manifested. This was also the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit plays a key role in helping all of God’s people experience the good news of the Kingdom of God. The expansion of the Kingdom of God is the work of the Holy Spirit. The crossing of every kind of human and geographical boundary as the Kingdom of God grows and spreads is the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. –
2. –

Reflections

The book of Acts contains many interesting stories about the ministries of Peter and Paul. Several of these stories show how they were guided by the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel to new groups of people and to new geographical areas. The Kingdom of God is repeatedly shown to cross boundaries.

Church history is also full of exciting and challenging stories about the Kingdom of God crossing boundaries. God continues to call and equip individuals and churches to carry the good news about Jesus to “all nations” (Matt 28:19). Jesus told his disciples, And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt 24:14).

Assignments

1. Find (perhaps in your college library) a book (or a chapter in a book) about a missionary (a person who left his/her home and culture to spread the gospel “cross-culturally”, across social and cultural boundaries). Read the book (or the chapter) and try to find an occasion when you can share this story with your friends or classmates.
2. Interview a pastor you know who has been successful in spreading the gospel across social and cultural boundaries. Write a short report and present it to your friends/classmates (or put it up on a notice board).

### Answers 7: The Kingdom grows

For the teacher

One class period should be enough to cover this study.

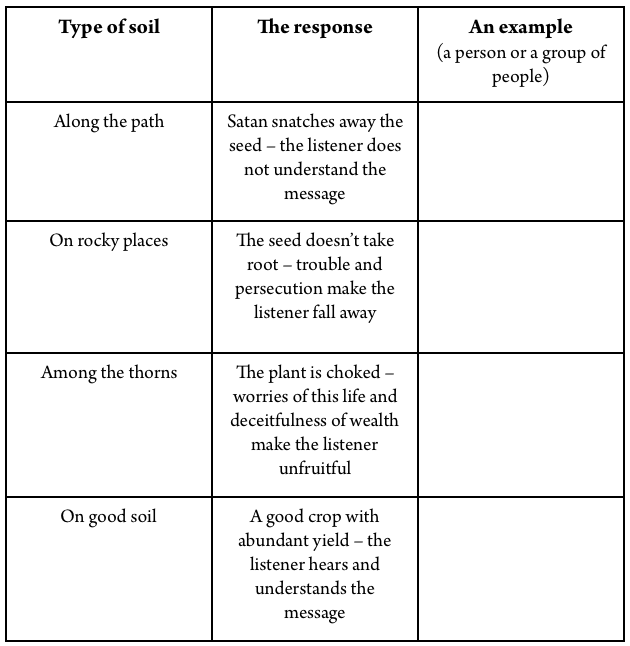
A few comments:

* + - The weeds (v 25 and so on) refer to a kind of weed that while they were still small they were very similar to wheat. And when they grew bigger they intertwined with the wheat in such a way that it was impossible to remove them without destroying the wheat. That could only be done at the time of harvest.
    - The mustard seed (v 31) was the smallest agricultural seed in Palestine. Under favorable conditions it could grow to a tree that was about 3 meters tall.
    - Yeast (v 33) usually stands for something evil or unclean. But in this parable it is used for its unseen power to penetrate and affect the whole dough.

Go through the Introduction and read the Bible passages together in class before you let the students work with the questions.

The first two questions are based on the Introduction. The remaining questions are based on the four parables of this study.

Answers to the questions

1. The relationship between the two expressions “the Kingdom of God” and “the Kingdom of Heaven” is that they are synonymous. This means that they mean the same thing. So there is no difference in meaning between them. The reason why Matthew often used “heaven” instead of “God” was to avoid offending some of the Jews, who thought that God’s name was too holy to be spoken by man.
2. The four parables about the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, and the yeast have in common that they are all about the development of the Kingdom of God during this present age, the “church age”. They show that it is spread, and that it grows and expands.
3. We can learn at least these four things about the Kingdom of God from the parable of the sower:
   1. The message of the Kingdom of God is spread among people.
   2. The people who hear the message about the Kingdom of God are of all kinds. And people receive the message in different ways.
   3. In many people’s lives the message of the Kingdom of God does not bear fruit. There are various reasons for this.
   4. But the person who accepts the message of the Kingdom of God and understands it will be very fruitful.
4. Your chart based on the parable of the sower can look something like this – but fill in examples from your own church experience in the third column.
5. From this chart of the parable of the sower I draw these conclusions for my own ministry:
   1. The gospel must be sown everywhere, but I cannot expect good success from everybody that hears the gospel, nor from everybody that initially receives the gospel message.
   2. There is a struggle between good and evil during the period of the church (the period between Jesus introducing the Kingdom of God during his earthly ministry and Jesus coming back in glory to consummate the Kingdom of God).
   3. Satan is constantly trying to obstruct the spreading and the rooting of the gospel message in various ways: by making people not understand (or making them misinterpret) the message of salvation; by troubling and persecuting weak believers so that they fall away from the faith; by sidetracking people with worldly matters so that they do not commit themselves to a fruitful life in the Kingdom of God.
   4. Consequently, I must do whatever I can to help people understand and accept the gospel message. I must tirelessly proclaim and explain. I must also help believers to get rooted in their faith, help them grow strong, help them understand that we have an enemy, the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8). So I must tirelessly keep on teaching and exhorting believers so that they mature and become more like Jesus (Eph 4:13).
   5. But I must not get too discouraged when some of my efforts fail. My conscience should be clear after I have done my duty. Then it is up to the people I have worked with to say “yes” or “no” to God’s word, God’s salvation, and to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
6. Jews in Jesus’ time expected the Kingdom of God to come all at once and to immediately introduce a dramatically different world without Satan’s demolishing presence. The parable of the weeds corrects this misunderstanding by showing us that good wheat and bad weeds grow together at this stage of the Kingdom of God. This is the period of the church (the period of the gospel, of the mission of teh church), which started with Jesus’ earthly ministry. Since then the Kingdom of God has been present among people – but not in its full power. But when this present evil age has reached its final end, the Kingdom of God will arrive in full glory. Then all evil (the “weeds” of the parable) will be destroyed, and we who believe in Jesus (the “wheat” of the parable) will be saved. We will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of God.
7. We can learn at least these things about the Kingdom of God for our own ministry from the parable of the weeds:
   1. We have to realize that God allows both good and evil to grow together in this world. And that will continue until the Day of God’s Judgment.
   2. Jesus is the sower of the good seed of the Kingdom of God. Those who believe in him are the good seed. Satan is the sower of the poisonous weeds. Those who follow him and do not accept Jesus are these weeds.
   3. Sometimes Satan’s poisonous weeds look so similar to the good wheat of the Kingdom of God that it is impossible for us to see the difference. This we must remember when we are tempted to destroy what looks like evil. But it is not for us to judge and destroy evil in this way. That is up to the Son of Man.
   4. There will come a Day of Judgment when the differences between the children of the Kingdom of God (the “wheat”) and the children of the evil one (the “weeds”) will become obvious. On that day all evil will be destroyed, and we who belong to Jesus will receive our inheritance, God’s Kingdom of light (Col 1:12). We can confidently look forward to that day as we faithfully work for the expansion of the Kingdom of God during this present church age.
8. From the parable of the mustard seed we learn that the Kingdom of God grows from a small and insignificant beginning to something great. This has, of course, already happened in the early church, and it has continued to happen throughout the history of the church. But in addition, we should expect the Kingdom of God to grow through our own ministry. We should expect many people to turn to God. We should expect our ministry to spread to new places and to new people groups – perhaps even to new countries. We should expect our church to grow, not only in numbers, but also in spiritual maturity.
9. This knowledge can help us to work faithfully and to expect progress and growth in our own ministry.
10. From the parable of the yeast we learn that the Kingdom of God has the ability and power to spread and penetrate in ways which we don’t always see or understand.
11. This knowledge can help us in different ways in our own ministry:
    1. It can encourage us to be faithful so that we carry on working for the Kingdom of God – even when we don’t see any results. God will honor our sincere work by using it to further the Kingdom of God, whether see see it or not.
    2. It can challenge us to trust God even more. He is in control, and he knows what is true expansion in the Kingdom of God.
    3. It can help us not to become despondent when our ministry does not bear the fruit that we would like to see.
    4. It will help not to judge other gospel workers, whose ministry has no visible success. We have no idea about the true spiritual results. So who are we to judge them and to take pride in our own “successful” ministry?

### Answers 8: Two challenging Kingdom principles

For the teacher

One class period should be enough to cover this study. If you want the students to do all the questions, you will in addition need library/homework time.

There are, of course, a lot of challenging principles in the Kingdom of God. This study just touches on two of them, unreasonable grace/generosity and sacrificial servanthood.

Go through the Introduction and read the Bible passage together in class before you let the students work with the questions.

For the use of the expression “the kingdom of heaven” in the parable of the workers in the vineyard see study 7.

I suggest that you make use of the questions like this:

* 1. Let the students work through questions 1–4 and 7–9 in groups during class. Go through their answers.
  2. Questions 5, 6 (see the next point), 10–12 can be used for library time and as homework. But you must spend some class time the next day to discuss what the students have come up with.
  3. Questions 5 and 6 are complex and far-reaching. You may not have time to do them properly. It is better to skip them than to do them carelessly. My comments just provide some perspectives – and do not contain any answers!
  4. Make question 13 optional. It is personal and should only be done individually as homework.

Answers to the questions

1. My gut feeling is that there is something wrong about way the landowner of the parable treated his workers. He calls himself “generous” (v 15). But I think a generous person should have given more to the workers who had worked more hours.
2. The landowner’s character reveals that the values of the Kingdom of God are different from many of our normal human values. This parable illustrates the unreasonable generosity of the Kingdom of God, the unlimited and incredible grace of the Kingdom of God. This grace is the same to all who accept it. At the end of the day, all believers will receive the same full and wonderfully generous inheritance – eternal life in the glorious Kingdom of God.
3. The normal human values that makes most of us so upset over the way the landowner treated his workers are “equality” and “fairness”. We feel that the landowner was unfair to his workers when he paid them the same wage. We feel that he should have treated them more equally and paid less to those who hadn’t worked a full day. But the landowner was not unfair; he paid them all that he had promised – a full wage. On the other hand, the landowner was unreasonably generous. Unreasonable generosity and limitless grace are key values of the Kingdom of God.
4. –
5. How would those places (our community, workplace, school/college, or church) change if believers more often acted like the landowner in Jesus’ parable?

One comment: This is a very challenging question, because we (as most believers) are so molded by the values of the world around us that we have a hard time accepting how the landowner treated his workers. So it becomes a struggle for us to show unreasonable generosity and it is practically impossible for us to practice unlimited grace (even within the church context).

1. Do you think that it is possible for our modern society (or our Indian government) to act more like the landowner? Why – why not?

Some comments: This is a very difficult question to answer, because so much in our modern societies is based on values and traditions that do not reflect the values of the Kingdom of God. We can never expect any government in this world to fully reflect Kingdom values. But the parable of the leaven (see study 7) shows that Jesus expected that the Kingdom of God would influence society, and that this influence must come through the work and the lives of believers (see more about this in study 12). So perhaps we as individuals and churches need to involve more in the world around us (schools and colleges, organizations and societies, public life and politics, the legal profession and businesses, social and medical services, and so on) so that the Kingdom values we stand for could increasingly permeate our Indian society. That would result in the society becoming more generous and gracious.

1. The future Jesus predicts for himself compared with the future that the mother of Zebedee’s sons would like to see for her sons:
   1. Jesus’ future (v 18–19): total rejection, humiliation, insufferable pain, ugly and brutal death.
   2. The mother’s expected future for her sons (v 21): prominent positions for her sons in Jesus’ coming glorious kingdom
2. Jesus’ description of his death should have changed her understanding of the values of the Kingdom of God:

She came with her request for her sons just after Jesus had told his disciples once again that he was on his way to Jerusalem to die. So she should have understood that Jesus’ way to his Kingdom and to his greatness must be the way of the cross. A way which included sorrow, agony, self-sacrifice, suffering, sin-bearing and death.

In the light of the whole situation, the mother’s request becomes selfish, narrow-minded, even silly.

1. Jesus did not discourage his disciples from seeking greatness. But he redefined their understanding of greatness (v 24–28):

The disciples took their standards of greatness from the Gentile rulers of this world. They exercised power over their subjects. They were also extremely wealthy and lived lives of extraordinary luxury. And they had hoards of servants to lord over.

But Jesus showed them that he, the Son of Man, should be their standard of greatness. In the Kingdom of God true greatness can only be built on sacrificial servanthood.

1. A biblical understanding of greatness will help a pastor, when he guides his believers to make vocational and economic choices that reflect the values of the Kingdom of God. Here are some examples:
   1. Higher studies: In India “qualification”, referring to level of completed education and to degrees, is very important. But in the Kingdom of God education has no value in itself. Of course, higher education as such is not wrong. But it can be a terrible waste of time and money if it doesn’t equip a person to become more useful in the Kingdom of God. A pastor should help young believers to consider educational options keeping Kingdom values in mind.
   2. Vocation: There is a lot of prestige in certain types of professions, for example medical doctor. A pastor should help young believers not to be so influenced by worldly prestige in their vocational choices. “Prestige” is not a Kingdom value.
   3. Jobs: A job in big cities is often much better paid than a similar job in a small town or a village. A pastor should help believers to consider other aspects than salary when they decide where to work. In the Kingdom of God it is more important to help the poor and needy than earning much money.
   4. Investment: Many well-to-do believers have a worldly mindset with regard to investing money. They see how worldly people use their money and copy their way of doing things. A pastor should help his wealthy believers look at financial investment from a more spiritual perspective. Our lives now should be full of investments that bear fruit in eternity.
   5. Everyday spending: Greed, self-satisfaction, pride, and showing off are factors that often decide how believers spend their money. A pastor should teach his church that these things do not belong to the Kingdom of God. A pastor should also help his believers to evaluate their everyday spending habits in the light of Kingdom values such as generosity, concern for the poor and needy, humility, and trust in God’s faithful provision.
2. –
3. Here are a few examples of everyday choices a person who wants to follow Jesus’ path to greatness face can make:
   1. Spending your time: Take time with people who are sad or lonely, or who need your advice or help.
   2. Spending your money: Don’t waste money on unnecessary things. Be aware of the financial needs of others who are less fortunate than you. Be generous to them.
   3. Using your resources: Allow those who are deprived to use the things and resources that God has given you: Let them borrow your cycle (or two-wheeler, or car). Let them watch important cricket matches on television together with you in your house. Let them borrow utensils, chairs or equipment for a family function. Invite them to join you on a trip.
   4. Treat people correctly: Don’t look down on (or brush off) an uneducated person (or a villager, or a low-caste person, or a poorly dressed person). And don’t admire another person for his nice clothes (or his big house, or his four-wheeler, or his high qualifications, or his high position in society).
4. –

Reflections

There are, of course, many other important values of the Kingdom of God. The greatest of them all is perhaps “sacrificial love” as exemplified by our good shepherd Jesus himself, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

Jesus told his disciples to remain in his love, “Even as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have spoken these things to you so that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be made full. This is my commandment that you love one another even as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:9–13). Love is the fundamental “commandment” of the New Testament. Jesus told his disciples, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35), and “I command these things to you, that you may love one another” (John 15:17).

Love comes first in Paul’s list of the signs of a true believer, he calls them “the fruit of the Spirit”: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). This is a great list of important values of the Kingdom of God.

### Answers 9: Waiting for the Kingdom

For the teacher

This study may require two class periods, especially if you want the students to do all the questions. You may in addition need some library/homework time.

Comment on the parable of the talents: A talent was a very large amount of money, the equivalent of a whole lifetime of wages for a common laborer.

Comments on the simile of the sheep and the goats:

1. Many Bible readers misunderstand this passage. Some of them interpret it as “salvation through social work”. They say that the reason for the separation of people, some to eternal punishment and others to eternal life (25:46), is based on whether they have shown compassion for the poor and needy. The overall theology of the New Testament forbids such an interpretation. Salvation is only through faith in Jesus, not through works. The blessing on the “sheep” and their inheritance is not reward for their good works. They are blessed because they have accepted what the Father did through the sacrificial death of the Son. So now they can “take their inheritance” (eternal life in the Kingdom of God whose fulness they will enter at the second coming of Jesus). This simile is about the kind of life that Jesus expected from his disciples, while they waited for the coming of the Son of Man in his glory. He expected their lives to be lived in service to the poor and needy. He expected them to be loving and merciful. Why? Because that would show that they truly belonged to him and the Kingdom of God. Jesus expects believers to be like him. Jesus makes the same point in the Sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me that day, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and in your name do many mighty works? ’Then I will tell them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity!’” (Matt 7:21–23). Our lives – profession from our mouths is not enough! – show that we have accepted Jesus as our Savior and that we belong to the Kingdom of God.
2. “All the nations will be gathered before him”: Before the Kingdom of God is consummated the gospel will have reached people (both Jews and Gentiles) of all nations, compare Matt 24:14 (“This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come”) and Rev 7:9 (After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no man could count, out of every nation and of all tribes, peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were dressed in white robes with palm branches in their hands).

Go through the Introduction and read the Bible passages together in class before you let the students work with the questions.

I suggest that you make use of the questions like this:

* 1. Let the students work through questions 1–15 and 17–18 in groups during class. Go through their answers. Alternatively you can do this passage by passage and use the questions in four rounds, like this: 1–6, 7–10, 11–15, 17–19.
  2. Don’t let the students spend too much time with question 19. Let them just be challenged by it. Then you help them answer it using my comment above.
  3. Questions 16, 20 and 21 are suitable for library time and as homework. But you must spend some class time the next day to discuss what the students have come up with.

Answers to the questions

1. The Kannada translations of the Bible divide this text like this:
   1. satyavEdavu (It has one heading for the whole passage with new paras as follows):

24:36–41

24:42–51

25:1–13

25:14–30

25:31–46

* 1. pavitra grantha (Same divisions and similar headings as in the English NIV and ESV translations, but ESV has “The final judgment” for last passage):

24:36–51 “The day and hour is unknown”

25:1–13 “The parable of the ten virgins”

25:14–30 “The parable of the talents”

25:31–46 “The parable of the sheep and the goats”

* 1. pavitra baibal:

24:36–44 “Always be prepared”

24:45–51 “The praiseworthy supervisor”

25:1–13 “The parable of the ten virgins”

25:14–30 “Don’t hide what God has given”

25:31–46 “To serve God is the best thing”

1. Jesus brings up “the days of Noah” as a comparison with the days preceding the coming of the Son of Man. Human life will go on as usual (just as it did before flood) until the day Jesus comes back.
2. Jesus tells his disciples to keep watch, because the day when he comes back is unknown.
3. Jesus’ point about the thief at night: Just as a thief breaks into a house at a time of night when nobody is expecting him, so Jesus will come back at a time when he is not expected. So the disciples must keep watch and always be ready.
4. The main difference between a faithful servant and a wicked servant: A faithful and wise servant will keep on doing his job during his master’s absence. But a wicked servant will neglect his duties during his master’s long absence.
5. This is a brief summary of what Jesus says in Matt 24:36–51:
   * Life will go on as usual on the day that the Son of Man returns.
   * Everybody will not be taken into the Kingdom of God on that day. Some will be left outside.
   * Jesus will come back when he is not expected, so believers must always be watchful and ready.
   * Believers must be faithful, even if Jesus is gone a long time. When he comes back, he expects us to be carrying on with our job.
6. Jesus said that the parable of the ten virgins was about “the Kingdom of Heaven” (this is Matthew’s expression for the Kingdom of God) at the time of his second coming.
7. The bridesmaids played an important role at weddings in those days. The wise virgins showed their wisdom by understanding their role at the wedding and by being prepared to meet the bridegroom in spite of his late arrival. So they came with oil in their lamps. They knew that there wouldn’t be time for them to run away and buy oil when the bridegroom arrived. He could come at any time, and he wouldn’t wait for them to finish any unfinished business.
8. The harsh behavior of the bridegroom demonstrated:
   1. The importance of the wedding
   2. The importance of the bridesmaids responsibilities at the wedding
9. Jesus concludes the parable of the ten virgins by exhorting his disciples to keep watch, because they didn’t know the time of his second coming.
10. The parable of the talents is also about the Kingdom of God, even of this is not openly stated in the Greek text. The Kannada pavitra grantha translation has added “Kingdom of God” in verse 14 to make this clear.
11. The master gave different amounts to his servants, because their abilities were different (25:15).
12. The master praised the first two servants by telling them that they had done well with the money entrusted to them. So they had been good and faithful servants.
13. The master was angry with the third servant, because he had been unfaithful (wicked and lazy.) He had failed in two ways:
    1. He had failed to understand his master’s character.
    2. He had failed to undertake his responsibilities faithfully.
14. The parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents tell us two truths about what it will be like when the Kingdom of God comes in its fullness:
    1. When Jesus returns, his people will rejoice and his enemies will mourn.
    2. When Jesus announced his Kingdom during his earthly ministry, he offered forgiveness. But when he consummates his Kingdom on the day of his second coming, he will execute judgement.
15. –
16. Jesus uses a simile in this passage. This means that he compares people with sheep and goats. The difference between the “sheep” kind of people and the “goat” kind of people is what they have done during their lives. The “sheep” have fed the hungry, given water to the thirsty, invited strangers to their homes, provided clothes for the needy, taken care of the sick, and visited the prisoners. But the “goats” have not done these things.
17. Jesus expects love, compassion and mercy from those who finally will inter the Kingdom of God (25:31–46). The believers are people who feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite strangers to their homes, provide clothes for the needy, take care of the sick, and visit the prisoners.
18. Many Bible readers find the passage about the “sheep and the goats” (25:31–46) difficult. The reason is that it seems to contradict the gospel. I have given my understanding of it in comment number 1 in For the teacher above.
19. –
20. Jesus’ exhortations to believers who are waiting for the consummation of the Kingdom of God can be summarized like this:
    1. Preach the gospel about the Kingdom of God!
    2. Keep awake and be alert!
    3. Be prepared!
    4. Be faithful!
    5. Be like Jesus!

Reflections

Jesus told his disciples to be wise while they waited for his return and for the end of the age. He wanted them to be like the faithful and wise servant and like the wise virgins. From a biblical point of view, it is not enough for a wise person to know something or to have insight in a matter. Wisdom must include obedience. You must act on what you know in order to be wise. So what did Jesus want his disciples to do while they were waiting for his return? He wanted them to preach the gospel everywhere. He wanted them to carry on their ministries of love faithfully: to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to invite the strangers home, to clothe the needy, and to visit the sick and the prisoners. He also wanted his disciples to be awake, alert and expectant.

The emotional focus of the four stories/parables that we have examined in this study can be described as “anticipation and faithful obedience”. To “anticipate” means to eagerly wait for something to happen. Do we eagerly look forward to the return of Jesus and the consummation of the Kingdom of God? Are we ready and prepared for that day? It will be a day of judgment – and of fear – for those who are not ready to face the Son of Man. But for us who have accepted him as our Lord and Savior it will be a glorious and happy day. A day to anticipate.

### Answers 10: The church and the Kingdom

For the teacher

This study should require less that one class period. It can also be used for library time or homework. But make sure that you set aside some class time the next day to clarify any questions that the students may have.

Answers to the questions

1. Jesus told the women at the empty grave, which was situated just outside of Jerusalem, to tell the eleven remaining disciples (he called them his “brothers”) to go to Galilee to meet him there.
2. Jesus’ exhortation to his eleven disciples in Matt 28:18–20 is called The Great Commission. It can be structured into three parts:
   1. A statement of Jesus’ authority. Jesus said that God had given him all authority in heaven and on earth. So Jesus had the authority to issue this commission to his disciples. It was the authority of their risen Lord, who is also the King of the Kingdom of God.
   2. The commission itself. They were told to go and make disciples of all nations.
   3. A promise of Jesus’ presence. So the disciples knew that they did not have to carry out the commission on their own. Jesus would be with them through his Holy Spirit. We who are Jesus’ disciples today can continue to fulfill this Great Commission, fully confident of Jesus’ presence with us as well. He will be with his church until the end of the age, until he comes back to consummate his Kingdom.
3. Jesus told the eleven to “make disciples of all nations”. He said it would involve these three steps:
   1. To go: Jesus’ followers were told to go to every nation of this world and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God.
   2. To baptize: Jesus’ followers were told to baptize those who accepted the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Those who have been baptized constitute the church.
   3. To teach: Jesus’ followers were to teach those who had come to faith (the believers, those who had been baptized, the church) to obey everything that Jesus had told his first disciples. This teaching we find in the four New Testament gospels. Jesus’ teaching is also explained and put to practice in the New Testament letters written by the apostles of the church.
4. –
5. Jesus told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Father’s promise, the gift of the Holy Spirit. He called it baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–8).
6. The close connections between Jesus, the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit, and the disciples in Acts 1:4–8 can be explained like this:
   1. The disciples asked Jesus (their Lord) if the time had come for him to restore the Kingdom to Israel. So Jesus is the Lord (or King) of the Kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus had introduced with his earthly ministry.
   2. Jesus’ answer implied that the time for that event (referring to the consummation of the Kingdom of God) had not yet come. First the disciples had to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. This happened on the first Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2). Only then would they be able to witness about Jesus (and spread the good news of his Kingdom) to the ends of the earth.
   3. So we can conclude that the Kingdom of God will be consummated only after it has been proclaimed to all nations. This proclamation will be done through Jesus’ disciples (his followers, the church) by the power of the Holy Spirit.
7. Many Bible scholars see the book of Acts as the continuation of Luke’s gospel not only as the second volume of a two-part narrative (see Luke’s introduction to Acts in 1:1), but also theologically. I agree with them. In Luke’s gospel we read about how Jesus through his earthly ministry (his teachings, his miracles, his suffering, death and resurrection) introduced the Kingdom of God in a new way. In the book of Acts, Luke describes how the Kingdom of God spread all over the ancient world. This could happen, because Jesus was present with the early church through the Holy Spirit. So there is a strong theological connection between Luke’s gospel and the book of Acts.
8. Through 1 Cor 12:27 and Eph 1:23 we learn that the apostle Paul sees the church as a body in which Jesus Christ is present. He even says that the local church (exemplified by the church in the city of Corinth) is the body of Christ, and that each individual member of the local church can be seen as a part of the body of Christ. Paul even goes one step further in Eph 1:23 by claiming that the church embodies the fullness of Christ.
9. We can draw these conclusions about the church and the Kingdom of God from our answer to the previous question:
   1. The church represents, even embodies, Jesus Christ and his Kingdom on earth during this period of history, until Jesus returns.
   2. But not only the church collectively, but also each individual church member (each believer, each follower of Christ, each disciple) represents Jesus Christ and his Kingdom here on earth during this period of history, until Jesus returns.
   3. So how do we, collectively as well as individually, represent Jesus and his Kingdom? Here are a few suggestions:
      * We must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, continuing what Jesus began through his earthly ministry.
      * We must allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, healing the sick and delivering the demon-possessed, thereby continuing what Jesus began through his earthly ministry.
      * We must express God’s love and compassion through our lives and our ministries, thereby continuing what Jesus began through his earthly ministry.
      * We must live lives worthy of the Kingdom of God, sanctified lives that are pleasing to God, lives that express the values and principles of the Kingdom of God.
      * We must expect growth and expansion
10. –

Reflections

The Kingdom of God is growing and expanding. What began with only eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee has grown and spread. Today hundreds of millions of people among hundreds of nations confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But this process of growth and expansion must continue until the end of the age.

This is the work of the universal church, the body of Christ. But Jesus our Lord and King wants each individual member of the church to contribute to the work of the church: to spread the Kingdom of God, to preach the Kingdom of God, to embody the principles of the Kingdom of God. And to do all this with the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This work of the church must continue until the period of the church comes to an end. Only when Jesus Christ returns in glory will this work – and this growth and expansion – be over. That day will bring the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

Living the Kingdom – studies

### Study 11: The Sermon on the Mount

Note

For this unit I am much indebted to John Stott’s book The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (in the Bible Speaks Today series). It is an excellent book, highly recommended for those who want to go deeper into Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

The sermon

The Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the most well-known part of Jesus’ teaching. Even Mahatma Gandhi claimed that his life and actions were guided by it. It is found in Matthew chapters 5–7 and has received its name from Matthew’s introduction to it: Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he opened his mouth and taught them, saying … (5:1).

We find a similar sermon by Jesus in Luke’s gospel (6:20–49), even if Jesus’ words are not exactly the same and even if the occasion seems to be different. Here Jesus speaks to a great crowd of disciples on a level place after he had come down from a mountain with the Twelve (6:12, 17).

So the question is: Do Matthew and Luke record the same event and the same sermon or do we have two different sermons? It is quite possible we only have one – in spite of the differences. All speeches in the New Testament are summaries of much longer speeches. So if Matthew and Luke summarized the same sermon by Jesus, we would expect the result to be slightly different – particularly when we remember that Jesus spoke in Aramaic while Matthew and Luke wrote in Greek. There is also no real contradiction between Matthew’s “he went up onto the mountain” and Luke’s “he went down and stood on a level place”. Jesus and the Twelve could have come down from the higher parts of the mountain to a level place – and still be on the mountain. Then Jesus went up a little bit on the mountainside so that the large crowd could see and hear him well.

But, of course, it doesn’t really matter if the gospel writers recorded one or two sermons about Kingdom of God life by Jesus. In this book, we will use Jesus’ words as they were recorded by Matthew in chapters 5 to 7 of his gospel. This is the text that has been given the name “The Sermon on the Mount”.

Jesus delivered this sermon at the beginning of his ministry and he addressed a larger group of his disciples, people who followed him and believed in him.

What is this sermon?

In his book The Message of the Sermon on the Mount John Stott, the famous English author and Bible teacher, calls the Sermon on the Mount a “manifesto” that sums “Christian counter-culture”. Jesus teaches his disciples what it really means to follow Jesus in this world. He describes what human life and human fellowship looks like from the perspective of the principles of the Kingdom of God.

The followers of Jesus have entered the Kingdom of God so their lives must be different from both the Jews (particularly the scribes, who were the teachers of theology in those days, and the Pharisees, who were pious laymen from all sections of the community) and the Gentiles. And in every paragraph of his sermon he points out this difference.

The Old Testament background

Throughout the Bible we find the theme of “the people of God”. From the stories about Abraham (and perhaps even earlier) we come across God’s plan and purpose to call out from the nations a people set apart to belong to him and to obey him. They were to be a “holy” (or “separated”) nation, different from the surrounding nations.

God made this plan of his clear to Israelites who had been delivered from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses: The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: ‘I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. You shall not follow their practices. You shall obey my ordinances and keep my decrees. I am the Lord your God (Lev 18:1–4).

But the Israelites did not live up to God’s expectations. Instead they adopted the lifestyle and the religious practices of the nations around them, and copied their way of thinking. But God kept sending prophets to remind the Israelites of who they really were. The prophets pleaded with them to follow God’s ways. But the Israelites did not listen. So God’s judgment fell, first on Israel (the northern Israelite kingdom), then on Judah (the southern Israelite kingdom).

With Jesus, God introduced the Kingdom of God in a new way. The time had come for God to make a New Covenant with his people, one that demonstrated life in accordance with the principles of the Kingdom of God. So the Sermon on the Mount can be understood in the light of the Old Covenant that God had made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, when he gave them his law. The Old Testament law regulated the life of the people of God under the Old Covenant. The Sermon on the Mount describes the life of the people of God under the New Covenant.

The New Testament context

The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew’s gospel towards the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Jesus had just begun to announce the good news about the Kingdom of God. God’s promises during the Old Testament times were now beginning to be fulfilled. With Jesus the new age had dawned. With Jesus God’s rule had entered human existence in a new way:

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt 4:17).

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom (Matt 4:23)

This is the New Testament context of the Sermon on the Mount. It shows Jesus’ followers what kind of repentance and what kind of righteousness the Kingdom of God requires of its citizens. It describes what human life and human fellowship looks like under God’s rule. And that can be summarized in one word – different. Life in the Kingdom of God is very different from life in this world, a fallen world, a world controlled by the worldly desires (“the flesh”) inspired by Satan.

Does the Sermon on the Mount concern us today?

The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete description anywhere in the New Testament of the life of the Kingdom of God in this world. This is what John Stott calls “the Christian counter-culture”, a culture that contrasts and opposes “normal” life in this world.

In the Sermon on the Mount we find the kind of value-system, ethical standards, religious devotion, attitude to money, life ambition, life-style, and relationships that are truly Christian. They are all totally different from those of the non-Christian world. Why? Because they reflect the principles of the Kingdom of God and not the principles of this present age.

So the Sermon on the Mount shows us the behavior that Jesus expected of his disciples of those days. They were the citizens of the Kingdom of God – a Kingdom that had come with the first coming of Jesus, a Kingdom that would be consummated with the second coming of Jesus.

Believers today live in the same period of God’s salvation history. We still live “between the times” of Jesus’ first and second coming. We still live at a time in history when the present form of this world is passing away (1 Cor 7:31) and when the Kingdom of God is increasing like the growth of the mustard seed (Luk 13:19). So the message of the Sermon on the Mount concerns believers today just as much as it concerned Jesus’ first disciples. It is just as relevant for citizens of the Kingdom of God today as it was to those who were present when Jesus taught these truths among the hills of Galilee.

Is it possible for us to live up to the standards of the Sermon on the Mount?

To be convinced of the fact that the Sermon on the Mount concerns believers today is fine. But then comes the question: Is it practically possible to live up to the standards of this message? Theory is one thing – practice is something quite different. Are the standards of the Sermon on the Mount attainable? Or are they just goals that can never be reached?

People have answered these questions very differently:

* + Most readers and commentators claim that these standards are unattainable. They are impossible to reach in practical Christian life.
  + Some see them as exceptional demands for an exceptional situation: a “special law” to be used only for the end of history. So Jesus did not intend these standards for everyday Christian life.
  + Many preachers and teachers have tried to adapt the Sermon of the Mount and lower its standards to fit everyday human life. They interpret it in such a way that Jesus did not make any absolute demands on Christians.
  + Others claim that the Sermon on the Mount expresses ethical standards that are basic. They are common to all religions and they are easy to follow. They simply say, “I live by the Sermon on the Mount, no problems!”
  + Personally I agree with John Stott, who writes that the “standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable by every man, nor totally unattainable by any man. To put them beyond anybody’s reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ’s sermon; to put them within everybody’s [reach] is to ignore the reality of man’s sin. They are attainable all right, but only by those who have experienced the new birth”, those who have entered the Kingdom of God. It has to do with the righteousness of the heart, so new birth is essential.

Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount to those who were already his disciples and thereby also citizens of the Kingdom of God and the children of God’s family.

When we reach (or at least get close to) Jesus’ standards, then our lives show that we belong to him. Our daily lives then reveal what we already are by God’s grace – citizens of the Kingdom of God.

The theology of the Sermon on the Mount

Some Bible scholars claim that the Sermon on the Mount teaches a doctrine of salvation by human merit and goods works and that it is a Christian version of the Old Testament law presented by Jesus, the lawgiver of the New Covenant. The consequence of this claim would be that the theology of the Sermon on the Mount is in conflict with the gospel, which proclaims salvation by grace only – and not by works.

This view is, of course, wrong. That can be seen already in the beginning of the Sermon. In the very first blessing, Jesus proclaims salvation by grace, not by works: He promises the kingdom of God to “the poor in spirit”, referring to people who are so spiritually poverty-stricken that they have nothing in the way of merit to offer. Theirs is the Kingdom of God – not because of their works, but because of God’s grace.

How, then, can we explain the emphasis on righteousness that we find throughout the Sermon on the Mount? The answer to this question is that it is a kind of “new law”, which – like the old law – has two divine purposes. First, it shows that the non-Christian cannot please God by himself (because he cannot obey the law) and so the law leads him to Christ to be justified. Secondly, it shows the believer who has come to Christ for justification how to live a life that pleases God. Classical theology based on Paul’s letters, summarized the work of the law in the life of believers like this: The law first sends us to Christ to be justified, and then Christ sends us back to the law to be sanctified (the law shows us what a sanctified life looks like).

Jesus’ authority

The Jesus who preached the Sermon on the Mount is the same Jesus who healed the sick, delivered the demon-possessed, and calmed the storm. It is the same divine power and authority at work in his teachings as in his supernatural miracles.

Those who first heard the Sermon on the Mount preached (the crowd of disciples) were struck by the preacher’s extraordinary authority:

Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them with authority, and not as their scribes (Matt 7:28–29)

What was this “authority” based on? What was Jesus understanding of himself, which led him to speak in this way? The Sermon on the Mount itself gives us clues of how Jesus understood his identity and his mission:

1. Jesus had authority as a teacher: The crowd of disciples were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them with authority, and not like their own scribes. The Jewish scribes claimed no authority of their own. Their only authority lay in the authorities that they were constantly quoting. So they only spoke by authority. Jesus on the other hand, spoke with authority, although he was not a scribe by education. He replaced their interpretations with his own correct and authoritative interpretations of God’s law..
2. Jesus had authority as the Christ (the Messiah): In 5:17 Jesus says, “Don’t think that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets; I didn’t come to destroy but to fulfill”. So Jesus claimed that all foreshadowing and the predictions of both the law and the prophets were fulfilled in him. He understood himself as the fulfillment of all prophecy. Jesus knew that he was the Christ, God’s promised Messiah of the Old Testament.
3. Jesus had authority as the Lord: Jesus saw himself as the people’s master, issuing commandments, expecting their obedience, and warning them that their eternal welfare was at stake: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (7:21) So Jesus was their teacher and their Lord.
4. Jesus had authority as the Savior: It is clear in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus knew the way of salvation and taught it. But he not only taught salvation, he also granted it (even if did not openly say so): In the blessings he distributes blessedness and gives the kingdom. So he is the Savior.
5. Jesus had authority as the judge: “Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many works?’ Then I will tell them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers!’” (7:22–23). But Jesus will also be the point of reference of the judgment. The destiny of human beings will not depend on their knowledge and use of Jesus’ name. No, it will depend on their knowledge of him personally.
6. Jesus had authority as the Son of God: Only once in the Sermon on the Mount does Jesus call God his Father (7:21). But Jesus was deeply aware of the fact that God was his Father in a totally different sense. His Sonship is not like ours, it is unique. This fact is, however, not openly stated in the Sermon.
7. Jesus had authority as God: This can be seen in the way Jesus used divine rights and privileges about himself in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus saw himself as being equal with God, even one with God:
   * The Lord: For Jesus obeying him as Lord and doing their Father’s will were equivalents. So he put himself on a level with God (7:21).
   * The judge: Everybody knew that God was the judge. When Jesus claimed that he is the judge (7:22–23) he implied that he is God.

Questions

The answers to these questions can easily be found in the text above. But you will learn much more, if you try to answer the questions without looking at the text. So use your own words as much as possible.

1. Why is this sermon called the “Sermon on the Mount”?
2. Do you think that Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” and Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain” are two records of the same sermon by Jesus? Why – why not?
3. To whom did Jesus address the Sermon on the Mount?
4. What kind of “manifesto” is the Sermon on the Mount?
5. What contrast does Jesus make throughout the Sermon on the Mount?
6. What is the Old Testament background to the Sermon on the Mount?
7. What is the connection between the law that God gave the Israelites at Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount?
8. What is the New Testament context of the Sermon on the Mount?
9. Why is Kingdom of God life different from life in this world?
10. Why does the Sermon on the Mount concern Christian believers today?
11. Is it practically possible to live up to the standards of this message? Bible readers have given different answers to that question. What is your own answer?
12. Why is it wrong to say that the Sermon on the Mount contradicts the gospel, because it teaches “salvation by works” and not “salvation by grace”?
13. Why is “righteousness” such an important topic in the Sermon on the Mount?
14. The crowds were amazed at Jesus’ teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. So what authority did Jesus actually have?

### Study 12: Our blessings

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount begins with eight blessings. In English they are called the “blessings”. There are four general points about the blessings that we need to understand:

* 1. The people that Jesus describes: Who are they?
  2. The qualities Jesus praises: What are they?
  3. The blessings that Jesus promises: What are they?
  4. The time perspective of blessings: Present or future?

Read

Matt 5:1–12

Introductory comments

The people who are “blessed” are the believers in general. Jesus is not referring to eight different kinds of people among his followers. Jesus is not claiming that some of his disciples are poor in spirit and that other disciples are meek or merciful. We can make a comparison with Paul’s teaching about “the fruit of the Spirit”: all nine “fruits” should characterize all sanctified believers (which is different from the “gifts of the Spirit” who are given to different members of the church body). In addition, Jesus is not saying that believers sometimes will feel poor in spirit, while they at other times will hunger and thirst for righteousness. Or that they sometimes are peacemakers, while at other times they are persecuted. No, all the eight qualities that Jesus mentions should characterize all his followers all the time.

The qualities that Jesus praises are all spiritual qualities. The blessings must be understood from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, not from a worldly or materialistic perspective. Some Bible scholars have claimed that Luke’s version of Matthew’s first and fourth blessing (“Blessed are you who are poor”, and “Blessed are you who are hungry now”, Luke 6:20–21) shows that Jesus was referring to physical poverty and hunger – and that Matthew when he wrote his gospel “spiritualized” Jesus’ words. But these scholars cannot be right. Jesus always rejected the idea of establishing a material kingdom: He refused to turn stones into bread. When he had fed the five thousand and the people wanted to make him king, he just walked away from them. And standing before the Roman governor Pilate, Jesus stated that his kingdom (and his kingship) was not of this world. So with the blessings Jesus is referring to the spiritual qualities of his followers.

How should we understand the “blessings” that Jesus promised his followers? Matthew’s Greek word for “blessed” means “blessed, fortunate, happy”. So many Bible commentators have interpreted the blessings as Jesus’ prescription for human happiness: “If you are like this, or if you do like this, then you will be happy”. This understanding cannot be correct. “Happiness” describes a personal feeling. But in the blessings Jesus is not describing how a believer feels – no, he is making an objective statement about who his followers are. He is not telling them what they must do to feel like that (“happy”). No, he is telling them how God sees them – and what they truly are: They are “blessed”.

So if this blessing is not “happiness”, what is it? The second half of each blessing helps us understand that Jesus painted a picture of his true disciples, his true followers: They possess (or have inherited) the kingdom of God. They are comforted. They will inherit the earth. Their hunger for righteousness is satisfied. They are shown mercy. They see God. They are called sons of God. This is Jesus’ description of a true believer.

So all these blessings belong together. Just as the eight qualities describe every believer, so the eight blessings belong to (or are given to) every believer. Together the qualities describe the duties of a citizen if the Kingdom of God, and together the eight blessings describe the benefits of being a citizen of the Kingdom of God. So the blessings describe what it means to live under God’s rule.

Are these blessings present (benefits that a believer gets now) or future (benefits that a believer will get when his life in this present world is over)? The answer to this question is “both”. This is clear from the rest of Jesus’ teaching. A believer will experience the reality of the kingdom of God as soon as he “receives”, “inherits” or “enters into” it by accepting Jesus as his personal Savior. We can receive mercy and comfort now. We can become God’s children now. We can have our hunger satisfied and our thirst quenched already in this life. We can see God in the person of Christ (John 14:9) – but also with our spiritual eyes (1 John 3:6; 3 John 11) – while we still live in this present world. We even begin to “inherit the earth” in this present life (compare 1 Cor 3:21–23). At the same time the blessings are “eschatological”, which means that they will be fulfilled in the future. We enjoy the firstfruits now, but the main harvest is still to come.

Comments on words and expressions

the poor in spirit (v 3): In the Old Testament “poverty” often meant “humble dependency on God”. In Ps 34:6, David (who was a wealthy and powerful king) calls himself “this poor man”, whom the Lord heard and saved “out of all his troubles”. So to be “poor in spirit” means that you acknowledge that you are spiritually nothing before God. Only then can the Kingdom of God be given to you.

those who mourn (v 4): It seems as if the second blessing claims that “the unhappy are happy”. This doesn’t make sense. So what kind of “mourning” or “sorrow” does Jesus refer to? It is “spiritual sorrow”, which can be of two kinds: The weeping over the sins of others, but more importantly. the weeping over our own sins. Such mourners – those who weep over their own sins – will be truly comforted by Jesus the “consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25), Jesus the Savior of the world (John 4:42) who told the sinful woman, “Your sins are forgiven, go in peace” (Luke 7:48, 50).

the meek (v 5): This Greek word means “gentle, humble, considerate, courteous” and denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of oneself. It is comparatively easy for us to be honest with ourselves before God: I can call myself “a miserable sinner” when I pray to God. But it is much more difficult to let other people say negative things about us: I will get really upset when a fellow-believer comes to me after the service and says, “You are really a miserable sinner!”. Jesus’ statement that the “meek” “will inherit the earth”is surprising. Our experience tells us that meek and humble people don’t get anywhere in a world ruled by the proud and mighty. But the spiritually meek (even if they are now looked down upon by the mighty in this world) will one day inherit “ new heavens and the new earth” and reign with Christ, because they have already had the experience of living with and reigning with Christ in this world.

they will receive mercy (7): In the parable of the unmerciful servant Jesus taught that showing mercy and receiving mercy are intimately connected (Matt 18:21–35). We cannot claim that we have repented of our own sins if we are unmerciful toward the sins of others. Also, when we show mercy to others, we demonstrate our own repentance, our own need for God’s mercy. God will show us mercy. So when we show mercy, we will be shown mercy. This is not because we can merit mercy by mercy, but because we cannot receive the mercy of God unless we repent.

the pure in heart (v 8): This expression probably means “utterly sincere”. Those who are pure in heart are utterly sincere. They have no hypocrisy or deceit. Their thoughts and motives are pure. Now the pure in heart see God with the eyes of faith. In the future they will see him in his glory.

the peacemakers (v 9): According to this blessing, every believer is meant to be a peacemaker, both in the wider community and in the church. God is the source of peace and reconciliation. So peacemaking is divine work. Jesus says here that peacemakers “will be called childrenof God”. Peacemakers do what their Father has already done.

Questions

1. Who are the people that Jesus describes in the blessings?
2. What must we remember about the qualities that Jesus praises in the blessings?
3. What did Jesus refer to when he used the word “blessed”?
4. What is the time perspective of the blessings?
5. Why do you think that Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount with the blessings?
6. Why does the Kingdom of God belong to “the poor in spirit”?
7. In what way will those who mourn be comforted?
8. Explain the words that the Kannada translators have used in verse 5 (sAtvika, shAnta and vinayashIla) . Do you feel that they convey the same meaning as the Greek “meek” (explained in the comments above). Why – why not?
9. Why will the meek inherit the earth?
10. Do you “hunger and thirst for righteousness”? Explain how.
11. Why are the merciful blessed?
12. In what way is the last blessing (the one about persecution) different from the previous ones?
13. Why do you think that God’s people, who in the previous blessings are described as “meek, merciful, and pure in heart” and who hunger and thirst for righteousness, are persecuted?
14. How did Jesus expect his followers to react under persecution? And how do you think that Jesus does not want a believer to react?
15. What are the most important things that you have learnt from this study? Make a short list.
16. Mirror yourself in the blessings. Are you “poor in spirit”? Do you “mourn” the sin of this world, other people’s sin as well as your own? Are you “meek”? Do you “hunger and thirst for righteousness”? Are you “merciful”? Are you “pure in heart”? Are you a “peacemaker”? Are you persecuted for Jesus’ sake? Identify one or two areas where you need the help of the Holy Spirit to become a better citizen of the Kingdom of God. And bring these areas before the Lord in prayer.

### Study 13: Our influence

Introduction

In the previous study we looked at the blessings, a description of the character of the believers. In this study we will examine two metaphors (salt and light) that Jesus uses to describe the influence of believers in this world.

But there is a paradox in this relationship between the believers’ character as described in the blessings and the believers’ influence in this world as illustrated by the sal and light metaphors. How is it possible for Jesus say that people who are persecuted and poor and meek and mourning and merciful and purehearted peacemakers have any kind of influence at all in this hard and tough world? Is Jesus joking? No, Jesus is very serious when he teaches his followers that they already are influencing – and that they must continue to influence – the world they live in.

Read

Matt 5:13–16

Introductory comments

Here Jesus uses two everyday domestic metaphors to define the nature of Christian influence in this world: salt and light. There must be a basic truth behind Jesus’ use of these metaphors. That truth is the fundamental difference between the Kingdom of God (and its citizens) and the present evil world (and its citizens), like this:

“the earth” – but you “the salt”

“the world” – but you “the light”

The church and the world are two distinct communities. It is true that they are related to each other, but they are related through their distinctness, through their difference. Jesus calls his followers to be different.

The “salt” metaphor must be understood by how salt was used in the household in those days. So how was salt used in New Testament times? There are two possible answers:

* + Most of us would probably think of salt giving taste to food. Without salt food is tasteless. This was also the case in Jesus’ days.
  + But throughout history, salt has also been used as a preservative. It prevents decay. That was also the case in ancient Palestine. In many countries even today salted fish and meat can be kept for months without refrigeration. In India we also have pickles (salted condiments) that can keep for a very long time. The pickled vegetables (or fish/prawns/meat) don’t decay because the salt preserves them.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus undoubtedly had the second alternative in mind, because that interpretation makes more sense in the wider context of the metaphor, compare the two options:

* + Is the present evil world tasteless to God so that he wants believers to make it more palatable? That thought does not make much sense.
  + Or is the present evil world decaying more and more, and only something from outside (namely God’s own people) can hinder that process of decay? That thought makes more sense in the wider context of Jesus’ teaching.

The structure is the same in both metaphors. They both have two parts:

* 1. First a statement (an affirmation): You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.
  2. Then a condition on which the statement/affirmation depends: The salt must retain its saltness. The light must be allowed to shine.

The conclusions are that salt is good for nothing if its saltness is lost, and that light is good for nothing if it is concealed.

In his grace, God has provided for various regulatory influences in this world, for example government institutions (the state with its administration and laws, and the judiciary to enforce these laws) and social institutions (the home with marriage and family life). These “secular” institutions undoubtedly have positive influences on people’s lives.

But in addition to these important institutions of human society, God wants his own redeemed, renewed and righteous people to be the most powerful of all positive influences within sinful society. God wants his church, the believers, to be the salt of this earth. But the effectiveness of salt is conditional in Jesus’ metaphor: It must retain its saltness.

Similarly, Jesus tells his listeners not to hide their light, but let their light shine before others so that people can see their good works and glorify their Father who is in heaven.

The salt and light metaphors in this passage have three lessons for us believers in South India today about our Christian responsibilities in the world. They are:

* 1. There is a basic difference between believers and non-believers.
  2. This basic difference has consequences for ur. It gives us a responsibility that we must accept.
  3. This responsibility is double: It is a “salt responsibility”, and it is a “light responsibility”.

Comments on words and expressions

if the salt loses its saltiness (v 13): “Salt” in Palestine was a mixture of salt and sand. Sometimes the salt component was washed away, and only the sand component (which still looked like “salt” and was called “salt”) remained. It had “lost its saltness” and was useless – even as manure.

Questions

1. What do the “salt” and “light” metaphors tell us about the world?
2. Why do our Kannada translations (nissAra, sappE) of what can happen to the salt make it impossible for us to get the point that Jesus was making by his “salt” metaphor?
3. How would you apply the information about salt in Palestine (see the comment above) to Christian believers (compare Jesus’ words in Mark 9:50 “Have salt in yourselves”)?
4. What would happen if believers became just like non-believers, contaminated by all the impurities of the world?
5. How do you understand Jesus’ purpose of Christian believers being “the light of the world”?
6. Why will people glorify God when they see deeds of Christian compassion?
7. If the salt of believers can lose its saltness, so the light in believers can become darkness (Matt 6:23). Give some examples of when this happens.
8. How can you as an individual become “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” in better ways than you already are?
9. How can your church (or your Bible college) become “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” in better ways than it already is?

### Study 14: Our moral righteousness

Introduction

In the remaining part of Matthew chapter 5, Jesus teaches his disciples about believers’ righteousness. Unless believers have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Jewish scribes and the Pharisees, they cannot enter the Kingdom of God. So what is Jesus saying here? Does he mean that believers must follow the commandments and prohibitions of the Old Testament even closer than the Jewish leaders did? Does he mean that we can enter the Kingdom of God by our good works, by keeping all the Old Testament rules and regulations? In this study we will address questions like these.

Read

Matt 5:17–48

Introductory comments

This passage can be structured like this:

* 1. Christ, the believer and the law (v 17–20)
     1. Christ and the law (v 17–18)
     2. The believer and the law (v 19–20)
  2. Six examples of Christian moral righteousness (v 21–48)
     1. Avoiding anger (v 21–26)
     2. Avoiding lust (v 27–30)
     3. Faithfulness in marriage (v 31–32)
     4. Honesty in speech (v 33–37)
     5. Passive non-retaliation (v 38–42)
     6. Active love (v 43–48)

From the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, people had been amazed by his authority. So it was natural that many people were wondering how his authority related to the authority of the law of Moses. The Jewish scribes were teachers of the law and submitted to the law of Moses. They devoted themselves to interpreting the Law, but they had no authority of their own. Jesus was different. He spoke with his own authority. He used a formula which no ancient prophet or modern scribe had ever used: “Truly I say to you!” So he was speaking in his own name, not just quoting earlier authorities.

Jesus came not to abolish the Old Testament, but to fulfill it. What did he mean by that? This important issue will be addressed as we answer the first question and go through the first part of Reflections in the answer section to this study.

After having stated the nature of the righteousness of believers, Jesus presented six parallel paragraphs to illustrate the three statements he had just put forward in verses 17–20: 1. The moral law will not pass away until it has been fulfilled. 2. Jesus came to fulfill the moral law. 3. Jesus’ followers must obey the moral law more completely than the scribes and Pharisees had done.

Each paragraph contains a contrast introduced by the same formula (with small variations): “You have heard that it was said to the people of ancient times ... But I tell you” (v 21–22). Our Bibles have headings like these for the six paragraphs: Murder/Anger, Adultery/Lust, Divorce, Oaths, Retaliation, Love for enemies.

We cannot grasp Jesus’ teaching through these six examples unless we first understand what he was contrasting. With whom was Jesus contrasting himself?

Many Bible scholars claim that Jesus was contrasting himself with Moses; that he inaugurated a new moral righteousness over and against Moses. They claim that Jesus contradicted and rejected the old, like this: “You know what the Old Testa-ment taught ... But I teach you”.

But these Bible scholars are wrong. What Jesus contradicted was not the law itself, but distortions of the law that the scribes and the Pharisees were guilty of. Jesus rather confirmed the law (see v 17–18) against the scribes and the Pharisees. He maintained the authority of the law and gave its true interpretation.

The scribes and the Pharisees had done two things with the Old Testament law:

* 1. They had added to the demands of the law so that the demands became easier to live up to.
  2. They had added to the permissions of the law to make the permissions more more generous.

What Jesus did was to reject both these tendencies. Jesus insisted that God’s commandments must be accepted without imposing any man-made modifications. In the same way, the allowances that God had made must be accepted and not be increased through human additions.

Comments on words and expressions

the law and the prophets (v 17): This referred to the Old Testaments scriptures as a whole. It was also common to use the shorter expression “the law” (as in v 18).

therefore (v 19): The English NIV translation has omitted the word, but it is found in the three Kannada translations.

it was said (v 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43): Jesus normally used the expression “it is written” when he quoted the Old Testament. So “it was said” refers to the “tradition of the elders”, not to the Old Testament. But in two cases (v 27 and 38) Jesus actually quotes the Old Testament law, but then he goes on to deal with the incorrect interpretations that the Jewish scribes had made of these commands.

don’t swear … neither by heaven … nor by the earth … nor by Jerusalem … by your head (v 34–36): The Pharisees tried to restrict and bypass the Old Testament commandments about taking oaths. So they made use of various formulas like these.

that it was said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (v 38): Here Jesus actually quotes Exodus 21:24. The context of this ordinance was to limit the compensation to an exact equivalent and no more. It was a way to restrict tribal revenge which could go on for generations and threatened to wipe out whole families. But by the time of Jesus, the literal retaliation for damage (except in the case of murder) had been replaced by the payment of fines or “damages”. So the scribes and Pharisees had evidently extended this principle of just retribution from the law courts (where it belonged) to the area of personal relationship (where it did not belong). They used it to justify personal revenge, although the law explicitly prohibited this (Lev 19:18). So Jesus opposes this incorrect use, But I tell you… (v 39).

“You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (v 43): This “command” shows that the Pharisees had made two changes to God’s word: First, they had omitted “as yourself” (Lev 19:18), which states the level of love. By doing so they limited the extent of their love towards their neighbors. Second, they had added “and hate your enemy”. This command cannot be found in the Old Testament. By adding it, the Jewish leaders purposely ignored other commands about foreigners living among them (When an foreigner lives with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The foreigner living with you must be be to you as the native-born among you. You must love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God, Lev 19:33–34).

Questions

1. What two expressions did Jesus use to explain his relationship with the Old Testament scriptures? How would you understand them?
2. What did Jesus say about the permanence of the law (referring to the Old Testament and its teachings)?
3. Verse 19 starts with “therefore”. Explain how this word connects the law with the Kingdom of God.
4. In verse 20 Jesus went even further, when he said that entry into the kingdom of God requires a righteousness (a keeping of the law) which exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. But how could that be possible? How could anybody keep the law better than the scribes and the Pharisees? How can Christian righteousness exceed pharisaic righteousness?
5. What do you think Jesus meant by saying that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless our righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees? Doesn’t Jesus here teach a doctrine of a salvation by good works? So how do you think that we should understand Jesus statement, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven”?
6. Explain the formula “You have heard that it was said to the people of ancient times … But I say to you” that we find repeatedly in this passage.
7. The sixth commandment says, You shall not murder (Ex 20:13). In what way was Jesus’ application of the sixth commandment much wider than that of the scribes and the Pharisees?
8. Explain how Jesus interpreted the seventh commandment “You shall not commit adultery”.
9. How do you interpret Jesus’ words, “If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away. For it is better for you to lose one part of your members than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (v 29)?
10. How do you summarize Jesus’ teaching about oaths (v 34–37)?
11. Jesus did not contradict the principle of retribution (“Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth”), because it is a true and just principle. So what point did Jesus actually make?
12. How did Jesus illustrate what he meant by “don’t resist a person who is evil”?
13. The Pharisees taught the people to hate their enemy (v 43). But what did Jesus expect his followers to do?
14. What has challenged you most in this lesson? Why? Share in your groups.

### Study 15: Our religious righteousness

Introduction

Jesus continues his teaching on righteousness in the first half of Matt chapter 6. But he changes his emphasis from a believer’s moral righteousness to his religious righteousness. This is righteousness in practice. So in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches two dimensions of righteousness: moral righteousness and religious righteousness. Note that Matthew uses the same Greek word in 5:6 (with reference to moral righteousness) and in 6:1 (with reference to religious righteousness), even if most translations use different words (or expressions).

Jesus brings up three areas of religious righteousness, which can be found in most religions:

* 1. Almsgiving (6:1–4)
  2. Praying (6:5–15)
  3. Fasting (6:16–18)

As he does so, Jesus contrasts true believers with two categories of people that they should not be like: the Pharisees and the pagans. So Jesus’ followers must not be like the Pharisees, who are hypocritical (v 5). Neither must they be like the pagans, whose religion is mechanical and formal (v 7–8).

Read

Matt 6:1–18

Questions

1. How would you correct a believer who says that things like patience and honesty are more important for a believer to observe than things like prayer and attending church services?
2. What must have been Jesus’ basic attitude to his disciples giving alms, praying, and fasting (v 2, 5, 16)?
3. There seems to be a contradiction between what Jesus said in 5:16 (let your light shine before men) and what he said in 6:1 (Be careful that you don’t practice your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them). Your comment?
4. What was wrong with the almsgiving of the Pharisees?
5. What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase “don’t let your left hand know what your right hand does” (v 3)?
6. What could Jesus have meant by the phrase “your Father will reward you” (v 4)? Can it really mean that Jesus promised that God will give us our money back (hopefully with interest)?
7. Evaluate our own “good deeds” (“acts of righteousness”) in the light of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps you are willing to share some of your conclusions with the others in your group.
8. What did Jesus say was wrong with the prayers of the Pharisees (v 5)?
9. What do you think Jesus referred to by the phrase that the Pharisees had “received their reward” (v 5)?
10. What kind of prayer did Jesus refer to in verse 6 (note his use of pronoun)?
11. What did Jesus say was wrong with the prayer of the pagans (v 7)
12. What does Jesus teach us about prayer in verses 5–6 and 8?
13. Evaluate your own prayer in the light of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps you are willing to share some of your conclusions with the others in your group.
14. What can we understand about God from the first phrase in the Lord’s Prayer?
15. What can we understand about the priorities of our prayer life from the Lord’s Prayer?
16. The first three petitions in the Lord’s Prayer express our concern for God’s glory. Explain how.
17. When we pray “Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven so on earth”, we are actually praying with two perspectives. Explain how?
18. How do you understand our prayer for “bread”?
19. How do you understand the conditional way in which Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father for forgiveness (“Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors”, v ?
20. The last two petitions are best understood as the negative and positive aspects of only one petition. Explain how. And how would you formulate this petition?
21. Reflect on the Lord’s Prayer in the light of your answers to questions 14–20. Do this together in your group.
22. What did Jesus say was wrong with the fasting of the Pharisees (v 16)?
23. What do you think Jesus meant by saying that his disciples should “put oil on their heads and wash their faces” when they fasted?
24. What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase “your Father will reward you” in the context of the disciples fasting?
25. In many churches in foreign countries nowadays, “fasting” is not limited to abstaining from food. Believers “fast” by abstaining from anything that hinders them from fulfilling the real purposes of biblical fasting (see my answer to the previous question).

Is that kind of “fasting” something that you could try also in your own Indian church context? Why – why not? Give some examples of kinds of “fasting” that could be tried.

### Study 16: Our ambition

Introduction

In society, but also in the church, dividing lines are often drawn between religious matters (for example tithing, praying, fasting) and secular matters (for example money, property and possessions, food, drink and clothing, employment, goals and ambitions in life). But God is concerned with both these areas of human life, the religious sphere (“spiritual matters”) as well as the secular sphere (“wordly matters”).

In addition, God is concerned with the private side of our Christian lives (our thoughts and feelings, our “inside”) as well as the public side of our Christian lives (our behavior and actions, our “outside”).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus challenges all these spheres of believers’ lives. Again and again he tells his disciples (those who followed him at that time and us who follow him today) to be different. We must be different from non-believers. But we must also be different from the dominant and ungodly culture of the society that we live in. We must not be hypocrites like those who call themselves “spiritual and religious” (represented by the Pharisees of Jesus’ days, 5:20; 6:1–18). And we must not be “worldly and materialistic” like most people around us (represented by the pagans in the Sermon on the Mount, 6:19–34).

In the second half of Matt chapter 6, Jesus deals with these aspects of our lives. He does so by placing alternatives before us:

* 1. Two treasures: on earth and in heaven (v 19–21): Where is our treasure?
  2. Two bodily conditions: light and darkness (v 22–23): What is the condition of our vision?
  3. Two masters: God and mammon (v 24): Who is our master?
  4. Two concerns: our bodies and God’s kingdom (v 25–34): What is our main concern?

In this study Jesus helps us choose well, to make the right choices. He show us the foolishness of the wrong choice and the wisdom of the right choice. He contrasts the false and the true. He invites us to compare good and bad. And he invites us to make the right choice.

Read

Matt 6:19–34

Questions

1. What did Jesus actually forbid in 6:19–21?
2. What do you think Jesus referred to by the expression “treasures in heaven”?
3. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of Jesus’ teaching in 6:19–21. Perhaps you are willing to share some of your conclusions with the others in your group.
4. How do you understand the metaphor “the eye is the light of the body” (v 22)?
5. How would you explain the point that Jesus made in 6:22–23?
6. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of Jesus’ teaching in 6:22–23. Perhaps you are willing to share some of your conclusions with the others in your group.
7. Jesus then explained that behind the two earlier choices (the choice between two treasures, where we lay them up, and two visions, where we fix our eyes) lies the still more basic choice between two masters: Whom are we serving (6:24)? So what choice of masters does a believer face?
8. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of Jesus’ teaching in 6:24. Perhaps you are willing to share some of your conclusions with the others in your group.
9. How does the next passage (6:25–34) start (the first word or words)? What is the significance of that?
10. “Ambition” can be defined as what we “seek” in life. It concerns our goals in life and our motives for pursuing these goals. Jesus told his disciples that there was something that they had to “seek first”. So what two alternatives does Jesus put before us in 6:25–34?
11. What is the clash between “worry” and a believer’s “faith” (v 30)?
12. What is the clash between “worry” and “common sense” (v 34)?
13. For Jesus the expressions “seek” (v 33, synonymous with “run after” or “strive for” in v 32) and “worry” (v 31) refer to the same thing. What conclusion can we draw from this?
14. Compare your answer to the previous question with the Lord’s Prayer (v 9–13). You conclusion?
15. How can we be obedient to Jesus’ exhortation to “seek God’s kingdom”?
16. Do you think that Jesus had two things in mind (“kingdom” and “righteousness”) when he said, “But seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness” (v 33)? If so, what could he have had in mind?
17. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of Jesus’ teaching in 6:25–34. Perhaps you are willing to share some of your conclusions with the others in your group.

### Study 17: Our relationships

Introduction

It is not easy to see how the passages in chapter 7 of Matthew relate to each other. But we can find one common theme – relationships.

This theme makes good sense in the context of the whole Sermon on the Mount. After describing a believer’s character, influence, righteousness, religion and ambition, Jesus finally concentrates on a believer’s relationships. Every believer who wants to live out the values of the Kingdom of God does that in relationship with others. Christian life is not just individualistic. It is also lived in community with others.

So in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus brings up seven relationships:

* 1. To our fellow believer (v 1–5)
  2. To “dogs” and “pigs” (v 6)
  3. To our Father who is in heaven (v 7–11)
  4. To people in general (v 12)
  5. To those who join us through the narrow gate (v 13–14)
  6. To false prophets (v 15–20)
  7. To Jesus our Lord (v 21–27)

We will look at the first six relationships in this study. The seventh we will save for our concluding study.

In 7:13–14, Jesus comes to a point in his Sermon where he – even more strongly than before – emphasizes the necessity of choice. Believers must make the right choice between

* + - the two kinds of moral righteousness,
    - the two kind of spiritual righteousness,
    - the two treasures,
    - the two masters, and
    - the two ambitions.

Will the church choose the kingdom of Satan (as expressed in the dominant culture of this world), or will the church choose the Kingdom of God (as described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount)?

Read

Matt 7:1–20

Questions

1. Glance through Matthew chapter 7 and try to identify these seven relationships.
2. Which three points did Jesus make in Matt 7:1–5?
3. How do you understand Jesus’ expression “don’t judge” in v 1?
4. Explain the metaphors that Jesus used in Matt 7:3–4. And what was his point?
5. What is Jesus’ evaluation of a believer who wants to deal with the minor weaknesses of his fellow-believer, but fails to see his own more serious faults?
6. What does Jesus tell us to do in Matt 7:5?
7. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of Jesus’ teaching in this passage.
8. Dogs and pigs were unclean animals according to the Jews. They would never feed dogs with leftover food from the temple sacrifices. And of course, nobody would throw their pearls to pigs. In verse 6, Jesus was clearly using the three words “dogs, pigs and pearls” metaphorically. So what did he refer to by these three metaphors?
9. Matt 7:7–8 is very often quoted by Christian believers. But what difficulties have you faced with them in your personal prayer life. Share in your groups.
10. What does Matt 7: 10–11 tell us about God and our prayer life?
11. Rephrase in your own words Jesus’ teaching in Matt 7:7–11 on Christian believers’ relationship to our heavenly Father.
12. Verse 12 contains The Golden Rule. This rule should guide our attitude and behavior toward all men, believers as well as non-believers. Learn the Golden Rule by heart, and quote it to the others in your group.
13. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of the Golden Rule. Share in your groups.
14. What picture does Jesus paint before our eyes in 7:13–14?
15. Picture your own church fellowship (you and your fellow believers) walking along the narrow way. What are the necessary consequences of that walk in your South Indian cultural and religious context? Are there any changes you perhaps should consider? Discuss and share in your groups.
16. Explain the metaphors that Jesus used in 7:15.
17. How would you apply these metaphors to false teachers (and false prophets) in the church?
18. Explain the metaphor that Jesus used in 7:16–19.
19. How would you apply this metaphor to false teachers (and false prophets) in the church?

### Study 18: The choice we must make

Introduction

With this study we have reached the end of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. At this point Jesus does not need to add any more instructions. Instead the time has come for him to make sure that his listeners (his disciples and followers) respond to what he has taught them. He wants them to commit themselves to a lifestyle that reflects the values of the Kingdom of God in this present world.

Jesus does this by bringing his listeners face to face with himself. He places before them the life-and-death choice between obeying him and disobeying him. And he calls us unconditionally to commit our minds, our wills and our lives to him and his teaching. This kind of commitment is our seventh relationship, our relationship with our Lord and Savior himself.

Jesus brings his followers to this commitment by showing us two unacceptable alternatives:

* + - The alternative of claiming that Jesus is our Lord with only our words, is no good (7:21–23).
    - The alternative of having only an intellectual knowledge of Jesus and his way of life is just as bad (7:24–27).

Instead a follower of Jesus must pay attention to his teaching – and obey it! He builds his life on it.

Read

Matt 7:21–29

Questions

1. Rephrase Matt 7:21–23 using your own words, and explain why the persons Jesus mention won’t enter the Kingdom of God.
2. Describe in your own words the type of person in your own church to whom Jesus – on the Day of Judgment – will plainly tell, “Away from me, I never knew you!”
3. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of Matt 7:21–23. Share in your groups.
4. Rephrase Matt 7:24–27 using your own words.
5. Describe in your own words the type of person in your own church who is like the foolish man who built his house on sand.
6. Evaluate yourself and your own life in the light of these verses. Share in your groups.

Living the Kingdom – answers

### Answers 11: The Sermon on the Mount

For the teacher

This study should require less than one class period. It can be used like this:

1. Let the students go through the text of the study on their own as homework without doing any questions.
2. Then let them work through the questions in groups during class time the following day. There is no need for you to check any answers, as all the answers are found in the text. You could just make sure that the students have understood my two points below (about Jesus’ authority and about the “target group” of his sermon).

The topic of the last section of the study about Jesus’ authority belongs to “Doctrines”. But it is important that your students realize that Jesus made it very clear to his first followers (both those who listened to him preach this sermon and Matthew’s first readers) that he really had the authority to speak to them like this. His authority went far beyond the authority of the Jewish teachers. It was divine.

Make sure that the students have understood that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus addressed his disciples, his followers, people who already believed in him. The Sermon on the Mount must not be understood as messages for people in general. It is a description of how Jesus expected his followers – those who had already entered into the Kingdom of God – to understand their identity in this world, their role in this world, and their attitude to life in this world – as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Consequently, the material in the following studies should not be used to present the gospel to non-believers. Instead it can be used with people who have already accepted the gospel. It is suitable for believers, for members in our churches. It will help them understand their Christian identity and the expectations that Jesus has on us who already belong to the Kingdom of God and who are looking forward to its consummation with the second coming of Jesus.

The questions do not go beyond my text in the study, so they should be quick and easy for the students to answer.

Answers to the questions

1. It is called the “Sermon on the Mount”, because Matthew says that Jesus went up on a mountainside before he spoke.
2. Do you think that Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” and Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain” are two records of the same sermon by Jesus?
   1. If your answer is “yes”, these could be your points:
      * They contain more or less the same content matter.
      * They both take place at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.
      * The differences between them can easily be explained:
        + What we find in the two gospels are summaries of a much longer sermon.
        + Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but Luke and Matthew wrote in Greek.
        + “The plain” in Luke could be a plain on Matthew’s “mountain”.
   2. If your answer is “no”, these could be your points:
      * There are many differences between the texts.
      * The place in Matthew is “mountainside”, but in Luke it is on a “plain”.
      * It is possible that Jesus delivered more than one sermon on more or less the same topic. So why not go for two sermons?
3. Jesus addressed the Sermon on the Mount to disciples, people who believed in him and who followed him.
4. The Sermon on the Mount is a “manifesto” about how followers of Christ are expected to live in the present world.
5. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus contrasts the Christian way of life with the teachings and lifestyle of the Jewish religious leaders, but also with the religious life of the Gentiles.
6. One important Old Testament background to the Sermon on the Mount is God’s “holy” people. The Israelites were set apart as God’s “holy” people at Mount Sinai under the leadership of Moses. The Sermon on the Mount shows what it means to be God’s “holy” people from the New Testament perspective of the Kingdom of God.
7. There is a connection between the law that God gave the Israelites at Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount:
   * The Old Testament law (at Sinai) told God’s people God’s expectations on them.
   * The Sermon on the Mount shows God’s people God’s expectations on them from the New Testament perspective of the Kingdom of God.
8. The New Testament context of the Sermon on the Mount is the ministry of Jesus. Through his powerful ministry he proclaimed that the Kingdom of God had arrived with him. Through the Sermon on the Mount he taught how those who accepted the Kingdom of God should live their lives.
9. Kingdom of God life is different from life in this world, because this world is under the curse of the Fall and is influenced by Satan. In contrast, Kingdom of God life reflects the future of the new heaven and earth when Satan has been destroyed.
10. The Sermon on the Mount concerns Christian believers today, because it demonstrates how human life should be lived between Jesus’ first and second comings in the light of the Kingdom of God. So Christian believers today live between these two comings – just as Jesus’ disciples did. So what Jesus told them concerns us as well.
11. –
12. It is wrong to say that the Sermon on the Mount contradicts the gospel, because it teaches “salvation by works” and not “salvation by grace”:

A closer study of the Sermon on the Mount shows this. Even the very first statement that Jesus makes in his Sermon (the first blessing) teaches salvation by grace and not by works.

1. It is true that “righteousness” is a very important topic in the Sermon on the Mount. But Jesus does not teach that our righteousness merits our salvation, that we are saved by our own righteous way of life. It is rather the other way around: A person who has been saved and justified by God’s grace will live a life characterized by righteousness. So righteous living is God’s expectation on a believer who has been save by his grace.
2. The crowds were amazed at Jesus’ teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. Jesus’ authority was different from that of the Jewish teachers in seven areas:
   1. Jesus has divine authority. They didn’t.
   2. Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ). They were not.
   3. Jesus is the Lord. They were not.
   4. Jesus is the Savior. They were not.
   5. Jesus is the judge. They were not.
   6. Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense. They were not.
   7. Jesus is God. They were not.

### Answers 12: Our blessings

For the teacher

It should be possible for you to cover this study during one class period – if you let the students do the two personal questions 15 and 16 for homework. The remaining questions should help the student get at least the main points of Jesus’ message to his listeners through the blessings.

If there is time, questions 15 and 16 can instead be used for a “mini retreat”, where leader begins by summarizing the main points of the Introduction.

Answers to the questions

1. The people that Jesus describes in the blessings are his followers, those who believe in him.
2. We must remember that the qualities that Jesus praises in the blessings are spiritual. They must be understood from the perspective of the Kingdom of God – not from human and worldly perspective.
3. When Jesus used the word “blessed” he referred to the “blessedness” of the citizens of the Kingdom of God. It is a statement about what it means to be a believer. It is not a description of how a believer will feel when he has reached a certain condition or fulfilled a certain obligation.
4. The time perspective of the blessings is the “already – not yet” perspective. The promises of the blessings are already a present reality because Jesus came and introduced the Kingdom of God. But the fulfillment of the blessings belong to the future when Jesus comes back and the Kingdom of God is consummated.
5. I think Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount with the blessings, because he wanted those who listened to his sermon (the crowd of disciples) to be aware of their ”blessedness” (of their identity) as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Only with that realization would they be able to understand the rest of his teaching.
6. The Kingdom of God belongs to the “poor in spirit”. These are the people who humble themselves before God and acknowledge that they are nothing in themselves. They are totally dependent on God’s grace. From the gospels we understand that the Kingdom of God is given to the poor and not to the rich. It is given to the weak and not to the mighty. It is given to the little children and not to the powerful soldiers or the politcal leaders of nation. It is given to the tax-collectors and prostitutes and not to the Pharisees (who considered themselves to be “rich in spirit”).
7. When Jesus said that those who mourn will be comforted he was referring to “spiritual mourning”, the mourning over sin in this world, particularly your own sin. Citizens of the Kingdom of God have gone to Jesus, the consolation of Israel and the Savior of the world, with their “spiritual mourning” and received the forgiveness of sin. So they have been truly comforted.
8. –
9. The meek will inherit the earth, because they have humbled themselves before God and accepted his salvation through Jesus Christ. The earth belongs to Christ their Savior now. When the Kingdom of God is consummated at the time of Christ’s return, there will be “a new heaven and a new earth”. The new earth will be the inheritance of the meek, the citizens of the Kingdom of God.
10. –
11. The merciful are blessed because they have repented from their sins and experienced God’s mercy. So now they will show mercy to others. That they show mercy to others reveals that they have experienced God’s mercy in their own lives and that they are blessed citizens of the Kingdom of God.
12. The last blessing (the one about persecution) is different from the previous ones, because it is a “double blessing”. First Jesus make a general promise to “those who are persecuted”. Then he makes his promise more personal by using the pronoun “you”.
13. I think that God’s people will always be persecuted one way or another as long as we live in the present world. Persecution can be understood as the clash between two irreconcilable value systems, the value system of the Kingdom of God and the value system of the present world order. The unrighteous people of this fallen world are offended by the longing (the “hunger and thirst”) for righteousness of God’s people. They have rejected the Christ that we want to follow, so they despise his followers (the “meek, merciful, and pure in heart”).
14. Jesus expected his followers to “rejoice and be glad” under persecution.

I think that Jesus does not want a believer to react like an unbeliever – who often complains, or feels sorry for himself, or pretends that he enjoys it – in times of suffering and opposition.

1. –
2. –

### Answers 13: Our influence

For the teacher

This study probably requires less than one class period, if you let the students do the two personal questions 8 and 9 for homework. But spend some class time the following day to go through what they have come up with.

Answers to the questions

1. The “salt” and “light” metaphors tell us that something is wrong with this present world:
   * The world is in a process of decay, so “salt” is needed to stop this decay.
   * The world is a dark place so “light” is needed to illuminate it.
2. Our Kannada translations (nissAra, sappE), but also many English translations (“lose its taste”), of what can happen to the salt make it impossible for us to get the point that Jesus was making by his “salt” metaphor. The original meaning of the Greek word is “to become foolish”, referring to the salt becoming useless or powerless. The context shows that Jesus meant just that (salt losing its healthy and preserving effect on food). But many translators have interpreted “becoming foolish” as “becoming tasteless”. This translation is possible, but the result is that Jesus’ point is lost.
3. I would apply the information in the comment about salt in Palestine to Christian believers (compare Jesus’ words in Mark 9:50 “Have salt in your-selves”) like this: For effectiveness the believer must retain his Christlikeness, just as salt must retain its saltness. We can understand Christian saltiness
   * As the Christian character depicted in the blessings
   * As committed Christian discipleship exemplified in both deed (compare Luke 14:33–34: “So therefore, none of you can be my disciple who doesn’t renounce all that he has. Salt is good, but if salt loses its power, how shall its saltness be restored?”) and word (compare Col 4:6: Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone).
4. If believers became just like non-believers, contaminated by allt the impurities of the world, they would lose their influence on society. Their influence depends on being distinct from – not identical with – the surrounding society.
5. I understand Jesus’ purpose of Christian believers being “the light of the world” like this:
   1. The light of believers is their “good works”. This seems to be an expression for everything believers do or say as followers of Christ. The purpose of their good works is for people to glorify God.
   2. The Old Testament prophecy about Jesus being “a light to the nations” (Is 42:6; 49:9) is not only fulfilled through him, but also through believers who bear witness to him.
   3. We need to realize that “good works” is not limited to believing, confessing and teaching the truth about Jesus. “Works” primarily refers to practical deeds of Christian compassion.
6. People will glorify God when they see deeds of Christian compassion, because these deeds embody the good news of God’s love. Without them the gospel that we proclaim with words loses its credibility. And when that happens, God loses his honor.
7. If salt can lose its saltness, so the light in us believers can become darkness (Matt 6:23). Here are some examples of when this happens:
   * + When we conceal the truth about Jesus
     + When we conceal the truth about who we are in Christ
     + When we are ashamed of confessing Jesus’ name
     + When we pretend to be others than we are
     + When we fail to proclaim the gospel
     + When our lives don’t bear the fruit of Christian acts of compassion
     + When our character cannot be described in the words of the blessings
8. –
9. –

Reflections

Jesus’ salt and light metaphors teach us that believers are different, and throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls his followers to be different.

The sad story of much of church history has been the constant tendency for the church to conform to the prevailing culture – instead of developing a Christian counter-culture.

So Jesus’ challenge to us believers in South India today is to more and more become what we already are in him:

* + We are the salt of the earth in South India. Jesus expects us to retain our saltness and thereby more and more influence Indian society and stop the ongoing decay and the spreading of social and cultural corruption.
  + We are the light of the world in South India. Jesus expects us to let our light shine more and more. We must not conceal our light – not by sin, not by compromise, not by laziness, not by fear.

How can we have this “double influence” – arresting the decay of the secular community and bringing light into the darkness of the secular community – on India and the Indian society?

Here are three examples of what we should do to be “salt” in the Indian society:

* 1. We should be more courageous and more outspoken in condemning evil.
  2. We should take our stand boldly for what is true, good and decent – in our neighborhood, in our schools and colleges, in our professions and businesses, and in the wider sphere of national life, including the mass media.
  3. We should see that God’s institutions for the good of society (such as the state and the family) are not only preserved but are also operated with justice: legislation, law enforcement, freedom and dignity of the individual, civil rights for minorities, abolition of language and caste discrimination and so on.

Here are two examples of what we should do to be “light” in the Indian society:

* 1. We should spread the gospel.
  2. We should live our lives in a way that is worthy of the gospel.

But we should never put our two callings to be salt (our Christian social responsibilities) and light (our evangelistic responsibilities) against each other. We don’t have to choose between them. Our Christian calling is to be both.

The blessings (which describe our Christian character) and the salt and light metaphors (which illustrate our Christian influence) are linked together. Our influence in this world depends on our character. The more Christlike we become, the stronger our influence in this world will be. But the blessings set a very high standard, so high that they may discourage us. So Jesus gives his followers three incentives:

* 1. This is how we ourselves will be blessed.
  2. This is how the world will be served.
  3. This is how God will be glorified

### Answers 14: Our moral righteousness

For the teacher

This is a challenging study, and you may feel that your students need lots of time to digest it, time that you don’t have. I suggest that you follow this model:

* 1. Go through the first three sections of this study together with your students in class. Don’t get caught up with details or with theological issues. It is enough that the students see the structure of the text and get a general feeling of the contents.
  2. Use Comments on words and expressions with the relevant questions only. This will help the students not to feel overloaded with information. As a result they will be less confused.
  3. Let the students work in groups with questions 1–6. Go through their answers in class together.
  4. The remaining questions the students can do for library time and as homework. But go through their answers in class the next day.
  5. The Reflections below reinforce (with a few additions) three of the key lessons of this study. They can be omitted if you run out of time.

By following this procedure, this study could be covered during one class period (plus library/homework and follow-up the next day).

Answers to the questions

1. Jesus used these two expressions to explain his relationship with the Old Testament scriptures (v 17):
   1. He came not to abolish: This means that Jesus did not cancel or replace the Old Testament law.
   2. He came to fulfill: This means that Jesus did not just accept or confirm the Old Testament law. The word “fulfill” is actually the same as “fill up”.

The Old Testament contains various kinds of teaching. Their relation to Jesus Christ differs, but the word “fulfillment” covers them all. See Reflections below for more on this topic.

1. The permanence of the law: Jesus said that the law (referring to the Old Testament and its teachings) will not be changed or pass away (v 18). It is as enduring as the universe.
2. Verse 19 starts with “therefore”. This word connects the law with the Kingdom of God like this:

The “therefore” shows that greatness in the kingdom of God will be measured by the extent to which a believer keeps the law. A believer’s greatness will be assessed by a righteousness which is in accordance with the law. But personal obedience to the law is not enough. A believer must also teach other believers about the permanently binding nature of the commandments of the law.

1. This is how we should understand Jesus statement in verse 20, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven”:

Jesus was not speaking about a degree of righteousness, but about the kind of righteousness. Christian righteousness far surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees, not in degree – but in kind. Jesus did not say that believers must keep all the 248 commandments and the 365 prohibitions of the Old Testament, while the Pharisees were only able to keep perhaps 85 % of them.

No Christian righteousness is greater because it is different. It is righteousness of the heart. The Pharisees were satisfied with an external and formal obedience. Jesus taught his followers that the righteousness that pleases God is an inward righteousness, the righteousness of mind and motive.

1. Jesus said that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless our righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees (v 20). Jesus said so, because Christian righteousness, righteousness of the heart shows that we have been born again and become citizens of the Kingdom of God. Nobody can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3:3, 5).
2. In this passage we find that Jesus repeatedly used the formula “You have heard that it was said to the people of ancient times … But I say to you”. This does not mean that Jesus spoke against (or modified) the Old Testament law. We can be certain about this, because Jesus began his teaching by saying that he had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (v 17). He also said that not even the smallest letter or stroke would pass away from the law, until all was accomplished (v 18). In addition, Jesus normally used the expression “it is written” when he referred to the Old Testament writings. So what he opposed was not the Old Testament, but something else. It was the “traditions of the elders”. These were oral additions and modifications to the law (later written down and called the “Mishnah”), which the Jewish scribes had introduced over the years. The purpose of these additions (and inaccurate interpretations of the law) was to make it easier for the Jews to live up to the demands of the law.
3. Jesus’ application of the sixth commandment (You shall not murder, Ex 20:13) was much wider than that of the scribes and the Pharisees: Jesus maintained that the true application of the commandment included words (anger and insults) as well as deeds (murder).

In addition. Jesus extended the nature of the penalty. “Judgment” in verse 21 refers to judgment by the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin. So the Jewish court decided if a case was “murder”. But “judgment” in verse 22 refers to God’s judgment. So God will judge you, even when you call a person “fool”.

1. Jesus interpreted the seventh commandment (“You shall not commit adultery”) to include not only the act of adultery but also the thought of adultery (the lustful look). God sees the heart! Jeremiah described the Lord Almighty as the one who judges righteously and tests the heart and mind (Jer 11:20).
2. I understand Jesus’ words, “If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away. For it is better for you to lose one part of your members than for your whole body to be cast into hell” you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (v 29) as a figure of speech called hyperbole. This means “purposeful exaggeration”. Jesus’ point was to emphasize the seriousness of committing sin. It is better to be maimed than to keep your whole body intact and end up in hell.
3. I would summarize Jesus’ teaching about oaths (v 34–37) like this: Believers must always speak the truth. So when we say “yes”, people know that it is a “yes”. And when we say “no”, people know that it is a “no”. Compare James: Above all, my brothers, don’t swear – neither by heaven nor by the earth nor by anything else. Let your “yes” be yes, and your “no” be no, so that you don’t fall under condemnation (James 5:12).

Some Christian groups claim that the Bible forbids taking oaths in legal courts. This is not correct. Jesus himself didn’t refuse to answer when the high priest put him on oath (Matt 26:63–64).

1. Jesus did not contradict the principle of retribution (“An eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth”), because it is a true and just principle. This was actually Jesus’ point:

This principle belongs to the court of law and is not applicable to our personal relationships. Our relationships must be based on love, not justice. Our duty to individuals who wrong us is not to retaliate but to accept of injustice without revenge or compensation: Don’t resist a person who is evil (v 39).

1. Jesus used four mini-illustrations, four situations, to show what he meant by “don’t resist a person who is evil”. They demonstrate the extent of Christian non-retaliation. Each illustration introduces a person who in some sense is “evil”:
   1. A person who strikes you
   2. A person who sues you
   3. A person who forces you to do something for him
   4. A person who begs from you
2. The Pharisees taught the people to hate their enemy (v 43). But Jesus expected his followers to love their enemies, to bless and pray for them, and to do good to them.
3. –

Reflections

Jesus and the “fulfillment” of the Old Testament

The Old Testament contains various kinds of teaching. The way they relate to Jesus Christ differs, but the word “fulfillment” covers all of them.

1. The Old Testament contains teaching of doctrine. All the great biblical doctrines can be found there. But in the Old Testament they were only partially revealed. Jesus “fulfilled” the Old Testament teaching of doctrine by bringing it to completion in his person, in his teaching, and in his work.
2. The Old Testament contains predictive prophecy (prophecy about the future). Much of it points forward to the Messiah. It describes him in words. Or it foreshadows him. But these things were anticipation. Jesus “fulfilled” it all. What was predicted happened with him: “All this happened to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet” (Matt 1:22). The climax was his death on the cross in which the whole ceremonial system of the OT (the priesthood and the sacrifices) was perfectly fulfilled. They were only a “shadow” of the things to come. The “body” (reality) belongs to Christ (Col 2:17).
3. The Old Testament contains ethical principles (God’s moral law). Jesus fulfilled them by obeying them, for he was “born under the law” (Gal 4:4), and he was determined to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15). But Jesus also explained what obedience involves for his followers. He rejected the superficial interpretation of the law taught by the scribes and the Pharisees. Instead he himself gave the true interpretation of the law. His purpose was not to change the law, or to cancel it. His purpose was to reveal the full extent of the law. When Paul wrote, “For Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4), he did not mean that believers are now free to disobey the law (The opposite is actually the case, “that the jusy requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us”, Rom 8:4). Paul meant that God now accepts us not through our obedience to the law but through our faith in Christ.

Christian righteousness

Christian righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the Pharisees because it is different. Christian righteousness is the righteousness of the heart, but the Pharisees were satisfied with an external and formal obedience. Jesus taught his followers that the righteousness that pleases God is an inner righteousness. For the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7; cf Luke 16:15). It was a new righteousness of teh heart, which the prophets foretold would be one of the blessings of the Messianic age: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it in their hearts”. God promised through Jeremiah (Jer 31:33). How would he achieve this? By his Spirit, as God told Ezekiel: “And I will put my Spirit within you and make you walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezek 36:27).

What the Spirit does in our hearts is to write God’s law there. So “Spirit”, “law”, “righteousness” and “heart” all belong together.

Christian love

Jesus fineshes this part of the Sermon on the Mount with two examples of true Christian moral righteousness that probably challenge us more than anything else in his Sermon. Jesus expects us to show love toward an evil person (v 39) and toward our enemies (v 44). Jesus teaches us to do three things for our enemies:

* 1. We should love them.
  2. We should pray for them.
  3. We should do good for them.

John Stott concludes that nowhere is the distinctiveness of Christian counter-culture more obvious. And nowhere is our need of the power of the Holy Spirit (whose fruit is love) more necessary.

### Answers 15: Our religious righteousness

For the teacher

This study may require more than one class period, even if you let the students do some of the questions during library time and for homework.

If at all possible you should cover the material like this:

During class time with your supervision:

* 1. The Introduction and the reading of the whole passage (with questions 1–3)
  2. The Lord’s Prayer (with questions 14–20)

For library time and homework (but this can also be done in class if there is time):

* 1. Alms-giving and other “good deeds”(with questions 4–6)
  2. Prayer in general (with questions 8–12)
  3. Fasting (with questions 22–24)
  4. The remaining questions 7, 13, 21, 25

Answers to the questions

1. I would correct a believer who says that things like patience and honesty are more important for a believer to observe than things like prayer and attending church services like this:

This is not true. Jesus did not teach that inner moral qualities are more important for a believer than religious observance. Both are important for a believer. He called both “righteousness”, and he expected his followers to pursue both.

1. Jesus took it for granted that his disciples would give alms, pray, and fast. He did not say “If you fast...”, but “When you fast...”, and so on (v 2, 5, 16).
2. There seems to be a contradiction between what Jesus said in 5:16 (let your light shine before men) and what he said in 6:1 (Be careful that you don’t practice your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them).

This is my comment: The contradiction is only superficial, because Jesus addressed two different sins in these verses. In 5:16 he addressed human cowardice. In 6:1 he addressed human vanity. Jesus wants our good works to be public so that our light shines (then God will get the glory). But our religious devotions must be secret so that we don’t boast about religious acts (or else we will take away the glory from God).

1. The almsgiving of the Pharisees was wrong, because it was hypocritical. They made a big show out of it. They put themselves in the center and not God, nor the people in need. They did not honor God.
2. I think Jesus meant something like this by the phrase “don’t let your left hand know what your right hand does” (v 3):

We should not even “tell ourselves” about the good deeds we have done. We should keep them a “secret” to ourselves. This means that we should not be proud in our hearts about it.

1. What could Jesus have meant by the phrase “your Father will reward you” (v 4)?

I don’t think this can be understood as a promise from Jesus that God will give us our money back (hopefully with interest). I also don’t think it means that God will form a high opinion about us and think that we are great role models for other believers. Finally, I don’t believe that God will reveal our good deeds and make people around us think that we are fantastic believers.

Instead I think (with John Stott) that Jesus implied that our reward consists of the positive consequences of that we have done: The hungry have been fed. The naked have been clothed. The sick have been healed. So our reward is that our Christian love, which prompted us to give to the poor and needy, has been rewarded.

1. –
2. The prayers of the Pharisees (v 5): The Pharisees were not wrong in their love for prayer. Nor were they wrong in standing up to pray, or praying in synagogues and street corners. What was wrong was their hypocrisy, their motive for prayer. They wanted to be seen, praised and honored for their prayer life.
3. The Pharisees had “received their reward” (v 5), because as hypocrites they got what they asked for when they showed off their prayer life. They were noticed, praised and honored. That was their reward.
4. In verse 6, Jesus referred to private prayer, not to prayer in church services or in prayer meetings. That is why he used the singular “you” (Kannada nInu), not the plural (Kannada nIvu).
5. This was what was wrong with the prayer of the pagans (v 7): They thought that they could convince their gods, and manipulate their gods through their many words.
6. Jesus teaches us these things about prayer in verses 5–6 and 8:
   * Our personal prayer life must focus on God, not on people or things around us. That is why it is good to go into a closed room and pray.
   * Our prayer must never be a show of our religiosity. We must not be proud of our great prayer life. Prayer is to be in God’s presence.
   * God hears our prayer, not because of how we express our prayers, but because he knows the sincerity of our hearts.
   * Our prayer must be thoughtful, not mechanical.
7. –
8. We can understand three things about God from the first phrase in the Lord’s Prayer:
   1. God is personal.
   2. God is loving (like a good Father)
   3. God is great (he is “in heaven” – this expression is not about location, but about power)
9. From the Lord’s Prayer we can understand that God’s concerns must be given first priority in our prayer life. Our own needs come second. (Compare the Ten Commandments: the first ones concern God, then come the concerns of our neighbor.)
10. The first three petitions in the Lord’s Prayer express our concern for God’s glory, like this
    1. May your name be kept holy: Our concern for his name (which stands for God himself, who he is and what he has done): We pray that his name would be treated as holy. We desire that honor would be given to it (in our lives, in the church, and in the world).
    2. Let your kingdom come: Our concern for his rule: God is already King, reigning in absolute sovereignty. But we pray that more people would submit to his rule by accepting his lordship and his salvation through Jesus. We also pray that the Kingdom of God would soon be consummated. We pray that Jesus would soon return in glory.
    3. Let your will be done, as in heaven so on earth: Our concern for his will: God’s will is already being done in heaven (his name is already holy and he is already King). But we pray that life on earth would become more like life in heaven. That more of God’s holiness and sovereignty would become visible here on earth.
11. When we pray “Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven so on earth”, we are actually praying with two perspectives:
    1. We are praying that God’s rule and authority would increase on this earth. This is the “already” perspective of the Kingdom of God.
    2. We are praying that God would overthrow this present world system and establish his Kingdom on earth: a new heaven and a new earth. That Jesus would come back soon. This is the “not yet” perspective of the Kingdom of God.
12. Give us today our daily bread: This is not a prayer for ”spiritual bread” or for “the communion bead” (the Lord’s supper) as some Bible scholars have claimed. It is a prayer for our everyday human needs: food and drink, clothes and shelter, good health and a beautiful family, job opportunities, a peaceful life, and so on.
13. Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors: John Stott understands (and I agree with him) the conditional way in which Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father for forgiveness like this:

Jesus’ point is not that we can “earn” God’s forgiveness by forgiving those who have sinned against us. His point is that God forgives only the penitent. And one of the chief evidences of true penitence is a forgiving spirit. Our willingness to forgive our neighbor shows that we understand our own need for forgiveness – so that we can open our hearts and receive God’s forgiveness of our sins. Our debt to God is so much bigger than our neighbor’s debt to us (compare the parable of the unmerciful servant, Matt 18:23–35).

1. Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one: The last two petitions are best understood as the negative and positive aspects of only one petition. John Stott explains the problem with them and offers a good solution to the problem like this:
   1. There are two problematic questions with this petition:
      * How can God lead us into temptation when he has promised never to tempt us with evil (Let no man say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”. For God can’t be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one, James 1:13)?
      * Why should we ask God to deliver us from trial and temptation when the Bible says that they are good for us (Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials [or temptations] of any kind, James 1:2)?
   2. But these questions can be solved if we understand “evil” as “the evil one” (as in Matt 13:19), and if we understand the first half of the petition in the light of the second half. The whole petition can be paraphrased like this: “Don’t allow us so to be led into any temptation that will overpower and defeat us, but rescue us from the evil one (Satan)”. If we call on our heavenly Father, he will deliver us from the power of the devil, whom we cannot handle on our own.
2. –
3. The Pharisees fasted twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. And it is clear from verse 16 that Jesus expected his disciples to fast. But the Pharisees were hypocrites who drew attention to themselves through their fasting. So Jesus said that they had already received their reward – the admiration of others.
4. By saying that his disciples should “put oil on their heads and wash their faces” when they fasted (v 17) Jesus meant that they should behave as usual, so that nobody would suspect that they were fasting. They should not make a show of their fasting.
5. I think Jesus must have meant something like this by the phrase “your Father will reward you” in the context of the disciples fasting:

Their “reward” could not be that God would honor their efforts and sacrifices by fulfilling their selfish desires. Fasting cannot be understood as a method to “put pressure on God”. No, Jesus must have referred to a “reward” that was connected with the purpose of fasting:

* + Fasting is a way to discipline one’s body – not to advertise our “spirituality”.
  + Fasting is an expression of one’s humility before God – not to gain reputation for oneself.
  + Fasting is a way to show one’s concern for others in need – to abstain for the benefit of others.

If these purposes are fulfilled, it will be reward enough.

1. In many churches in foreign countries nowadays, “fasting” is not limited to abstaining from food. Believers may also “fast” by abstaining from anything that hinders them from fulfilling the real purposes of biblical fasting (see the bullet points in previous answer), for example by not watching TV, or by not listening to music, or by not reading newspapers, magazines or books, or by not taking part in sport activities, or by not drinking tea or coffee, or by not eating sweets. The money they save by not taking part in these activities, they may give to the church to help the poor and needy.

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Reflections

This study has brought up several issues that can challenge us and question our lifestyle priorities.

What about giving to the poor and needy? Jesus teaches us to give. But we should have no ulterior motives for our giving. We should not be proud of it, or receive honor for it. God who knows what we have done will reward us by making us joyful givers, and allowing our love to our neighbor to be expressed in this way, blessing our gifts and blessing others through our gifts.

What about our prayer life? In praying, the Pharisees were hypocritical and the pagans were mechanical. But the praying of believers must be real – sincere as opposed to hypocritical, thoughtful as opposed to mechanical. Prayer is true communication with our heavenly Father, not a meaningless repetition of words, or a means for our own glorification.

What about our priorities? Jesus teaches us that our top priority should not be our own name, our own kingdom, our own will – but God’s. Afterwards (as Jesus teaches us in the second half of the Lord’s Prayer), we can turn from God’s matters to our own concerns. We can now express our dependence on God’s grace for our daily lives. So Jesus does not expect us to forget our own needs. But to put them in the correct priority order – God’s concerns first, then our concerns. God is our Father in heaven, who is deeply concerned about the total welfare of his children. He wants us to bring our needs before him, to trust him, to depend on him.

The last three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are beautiful as they cover, in principle, all our human needs:

* 1. Our material need (daily bread)
  2. Our spiritual need (forgiveness of sins)
  3. Our moral need (deliverance from evil)

When we pray this prayer we express our dependence on God in every area of our human lives.

What about fasting? Do we use fasting as a way to show off our spirituality, like the sister who sent SMS messages to all her friends requesting prayer support as she had embarked on “a forty days’ fasting”? Do we use fasting as a way to put pressure on God, expecting him to reward us, to grant us our will (instead of his)?

### Answers 16: Our ambition

For the teacher

This study may require more than one class period, even if you let the students do some of the questions during library time and for homework.

These are the more difficult questions: 5, 12, 13–14, and 16.

These are the questions most suitable for library time and for homework: 3, 6, 8, and 17.

Answers to the questions

1. What did Jesus actually forbid in 6:19–21? These are my conclusions:

Jesus did not forbid these things:

* + Possessions in themselves: There is no ban on having private possessions in the Bible.
  + Saving for the future day or taking an insurance policy: The Bible tells us to provide for our families (1 Tim 5:8).
  + Enjoying the good things which our Creator has given us in abundance to enjoy

But Jesus spoke against these things:

* + The selfish amassing of goods (“for yourselves”)
  + Extravagant and luxurious living
  + The coldhearted unconcern for people in need
  + The foolish dream that a person’s life consists in the abundance of his possessions
  + The materialism which ties our hearts and minds to this earth
  + Covetousness (desire to have what other people have)

1. By the expression “treasures in heaven” Jesus must have referred to things that we can do here on earth that will have effects in eternity, in heaven. John Stott suggests things like:
   * The development of a Christlike character (because all we can take with us to heaven is ourselves)
   * The increase of faith, hope and love (Paul said that these three would remain, 1 Cor 13:13)
   * The growth of the knowledge of Christ whom one day we shall see face to face
   * Actively work (prayer and witness) for the spreading of the gospel, so that more people will inherit eternal life
   * The use of our money for good Christian causes: These are the only investments whose dividends are everlasting.
2. –
3. This is how I understand the metaphor “the eye is the light of the body” (v 22):

Jesus contrasted a blind person with a sighted person – and the difference between the light and the darkness in which these two persons live. A body needs sight to be able to function properly. A sighted person walks in the light, a blind person is in darkness. In the Bible “the eye” is often used as a metaphor for “the heart”, see for example Ps 119:10 (heart), 19 (eyes). Compare that Jesus in this very context used both heart (v 21) and eye (v 22): Our heart must be right, and our eye must be undamaged.

1. The point that Jesus made in 6:22–23 can be explained like this (with John Stott):

Just as our eye affects the whole body, so our ambition (where we fix our eyes and heart) affects our whole life:

* + An unselfish ambition to serve God and man gives meaning to our lives and gives significance to everything we do.
  + A selfish ambition (for example laying up treasures for ourselves on earth) throws us into moral darkness. It makes us intolerant, inhuman, ruthless, and removes any real significance from our lives.

So it is a question of vision:

* + If we have spiritual vision, if our spiritual perspective is correctly adjusted, then our lives are filled with purpose and direction.
  + But if our vision becomes clouded by the false gods of materialism and we lose our sense of values, then our lives are in darkness and we cannot see where we are going.

1. –
2. Jesus then explained that behind the two earlier choices (the choice between two treasures, where we lay them up, and two visions, where we fix our eyes) lies the still more basic choice between two masters: Whom are we serving (6:24)? We cannot serve both!

The choice is between God (the living Creator himself) and mammon (any object of our own creation, here represented by “wealth, money”). Jesus used “mammon” which is an Aramaic word for “wealth”).

1. –
2. The next passage (6:25–34) starts with “Therefore”. This shows that Jesus’ teaching in this passage is based on what he has said earlier. We now come to the conclusion of what Jesus has taught earlier: What do we truly seek? What ambitions for our lives do we really have?
3. These are the two alternatives that Jesus puts before us in 6:25–34:
   * Our own security (worry about food, drink and clothing). This is the obsession of “the Gentiles”, those who don’t know God.
   * God’s rule and God’s righteousness and the expansion of God’s Kingdom in the world
4. The clash between “worry” and a believer’s “faith” (v 30): We find that Jesus calls those who worry, “you of little faith”.
5. The clash between “worry” and “common sense” (v 34): We worry about tomorrow; but this worry is experienced today. Our fears about tomorrow, which we feel so intensely today, may not be fulfilled. The popular advice “Don’t worry, it may never happen” is perfectly true. So worry is a waste of our time, of our thought, of our mental energy.
6. For Jesus the expressions “seek” (v 33, or “run after” or “strive for” in v 32) and “worry” (v 31) refer to the same thing. From this we can draw the conclusion that Jesus was not referring so much to “anxiety” as to “ambition”. Pagan ambition focuses on material needs. But this ambition cannot be right for believers partly because our heavenly Father already knows that we need these things, but mostly because these things are not a proper or worthy object for a believer’s goal in life, which is God’s kingdom and his righteousness.
7. When we compare our answer to the previous question with the Lord’s Prayer (v 9–13), we may come to this conclusion:

What we find in the last part of chapter 6 is a variation of the Lord’s Prayer. Believers must, of course, recognize the needs of the body (“give us today our daily bread”), but our priority must be with God’s name, his kingdom and his will. Jesus tells us to first seek God’s kingdom and righteousness. In the Lord’s Prayer we transform this top ambition of our lives into prayer.

1. I think we can be obedient to Jesus’ exhortation “seek God’s kingdom” in these ways:
   1. By submitting to Jesus every area and ambition of our personal lives
   2. By spreading the gospel
   3. By praying and waiting for Jesus’ return, the day when God’s kingdom will be consummated
2. It is hard to know if Jesus had two things in mind (“kingdom” and “righteous-ness”) when he said, “But seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness” (v 33) or if he just had one thing in mind (“But seek first God’s righteous kingdom”).

But if we make a distinction between “God’s kingdom” and “God’s righteousness” it could be something like this (according to John Stott):

“God’s righteousness” is the “spilling over” of God’s kingdom into the non-Christian world, so that some degree of God’s righteousness (which only can be truly experienced by those who belong to God’s family) becomes visible in human society and affairs, for example:

* + More justice instead of more injustice
  + More freedom instead of more oppression
  + More love than hate
  + More peace than war

So in order to seek first God’s kingdom we must evangelize, since the kingdom only spreads as the gospel of Christ is preached, heard, believed and obeyed.

And in order to first seek God’s righteousness we must not only evangelize, but also engage in social action and try to spread those higher standards of righteousness which are pleasing to God.

What do you think about this distinction? Do you agree with John Stott? Or do you disagree with him? Give your reasons!

1. –

Reflections

Jesus helps us choose well, to help us make the right life choice. He shows us the foolishness of the wrong way and the wisdom of the right way. He contrasts the false and the true in order to help us choose and decide.

Jesus took for granted that all human beings are “seekers”, that we all want something, that we all have ambition, that we all strive form something in our lives. We all need something to live for, something that gives meaning to our existence, something on which to set our “hearts” and our “minds”. This that we seek can be called our “ambition”. And the ambition of God’s people must be to “seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness”.

What about your life ambition? Do you first seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness?

### Answers 17: Our relationships

For the teacher

You should be able to cover this study in one class period.

Some of the questions are more suitable for library time and for homework: 7, 13, and 15.

Answers to the questions

1. –
2. Jesus made these three points in Matt 7:1–5:
   1. Not to judge one’s fellow-believer, v 1–2
   2. Not to be a hypocrite, v 3–4
   3. To help one’s fellow-believer, v 5
3. This is how I understand Jesus’ expression “do not judge” (v 1):
   1. He could not have meant that it is wrong to have a court system, where there are judges. Why? Because the context is not about courts but about the responsibilities of individuals to one another.
   2. He also could not have meant that it is wrong for believers to evaluate and criticize. Why? Because the context of the passage speaks against such an interpretation: Jesus tells us to identify “dogs” and” pigs” (v 6). Jesus also tells us identify false prophets and look out for their “fruit” (v 15–16)), which inevitably means that we have to evaluate and “judge” them.
   3. So this must be what Jesus meant: A believer must not take the place of God the Judge. We should not “play God” by unnecessarily criticizing and condemning our fellow-believers. Why? Because we must realize that we too stand under God’s judgment.
4. The metaphors that Jesus used in verses 3–4: A “speck” is something small, so it stands for minor faults in a believer’s life. But a “beam” is something big, so it stands for bigger faults (or even sins) in a believer’s life. Jesus’ point is about perspective. A believer must evaluate both himself and his fellow-believer in the correct perspective. This means that a believer must not try to fix the minor weakness that he finds with his fellow believers, while he fails to deal with his own more serious faults.
5. Jesus uses the word “hypocrisy” about the behavior of a believer who wants to deal with the minor weaknesses of his fellow-believer, but fails to see his own more serious faults. Hypocrisy means to claim to be better (or to have higher standards) than we actually have. A hypocrite is false, two-faced, and dishonest. Hypocrites are not genuine or sincere.
6. Jesus tells us to do two things in verse 5:
   1. First we must deal with our own situation, so that we can see things clearly.
   2. Only then will we be able to deal with problems within the church. Only then can we be true brothers to our fellow-brothers and help them with their problems.
7. –
8. In verse 6, Jesus clearly used the three words dogs, pigs and pearls metaphorically. This is how I understand what he referred to by these three metaphors:

“Dogs” and “pigs” must refer to some kind of people and “pearls” to something we as Christian believers should not give to them, the gospel message.

The “dogs” and the “pigs” are people with such an “animal” kind of nature that we are told not to share God’s word with them. Compare Jesus’ instruction to his disciples in Matt 10:14 (“Whoever does not receive you or hear your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town”), and Paul in Antioch in Pisidia (“It was necessary for us to speak the word of God to you first. Since indeed you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles”, Acts 13:46) and in Corinth (But when the Jews opposed Paul and reviled him, he shook the dust from his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles”, Acts 18:5–6).

It would, of course, be wrong to understand verse 6 as a prohibition byJesus for us to preach the gospel to unbelievers. But we should not waste our time preaching to people who are unwilling to listen to us.

1. –
2. From Matt 7: 10–11 we learn that Jesus wants us to come to our heavenly Father in prayer, confident that he will give us nothing but “good gifts”.
3. My personal rephrasing of Jesus’ teaching in Matt 7:7–11 on Christian believers’ relationship to our heavenly Father can be found in Reflections below.
4. –
5. –
6. This is the picture that Jesus paints before our eyes in 7:13–14:
   1. There are only two ways (there is no middle way): one easy way and one hard way.
   2. These ways are entered by two gates (there is no other gate): one broad gate and one narrow gate.
   3. These ways are traveled by two crowds (there is no neutral crowd, no onlookers): one large crowd and one small crowd.
   4. And these ways end in two destinations (there is no third destination): it si a matter of destruction or life.
7. –
8. The metaphors that Jesus used in 7:15:

“Sheep” are considered peaceful animals. “Wolves” are considered dangerous and ferocious animals. “Clothing” refers to appearance. So what seems to be friendly sheep are in reality dangerous wolves.

1. These metaphors in 7:15 can be applied to false prophets in the church like this: These false prophets (which includes false teachers) appear in the church “in disguise”. People don’t understand who they really are. They appear to be good and friendly. But the truth is that they are dangerous and ferocious. They will destroy the church, if they are allowed to continue their work.
2. The metaphor that Jesus used in 7:16–19:

“Fruit” is what develops from a tree or a bush. The kind of fruit that a tree produces depends on what kind of tree it is. So Jesus referred to the result of a person’s words and actions. This result will reveal the true nature of the person.

1. The metaphor in 7:16–19 can be applied to false teachers (and false prophets) in the church like this:

When a teacher (or a prophet) ministers in a church, we must carefully observe the results of his ministry. If, for example, the result is that believers are confused, become proud, start fighting, adopt beliefs and practices that are clearly against the Bible and the values of the Kingdom of God. Then we know that that teacher (or prophet) is false. He is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing”.

Reflections

Our responsibility to our fellow-believer is to help him, not to judge him. Only God can judge a person. We all come under his judgment. But as he is gracious, we should be gracious. When we discover a weakness or a sin in our brothers and sisters, we have the Christian responsibility to help them. But this help must be offered with love and in the spirit of Christ. And we must never forget ourselves – our own weaknesses and sins. Let us deal with ourselves first. Then God may lead us into dealing with others.

Many of us have personal experiences of frustration and disappointment with reference to Jesus’ words in Matt 7:7–11. We have asked God, but not received what we asked for. We have sought without attaining the feeling of having found what we were looking for. We have knocked at God’s door without seeing it opened.

But in this passage Jesus affirms that God is a good God. He is a better Father to us than even the best earthly father. So all God’s gifts to us are good gifts. He knows our needs and he wants the very best for us. This means that we can confidently approach him in prayer, he who is our Father in heaven. Whatever we ask him for, he will hear, and he will answer our prayer in the manner and with the timing that is best for us and for the Kingdom of God. Whenever we seek his guidance, he will surely guide us in his ways. Whenever we knock at the door to his divine presence, he will let us in. He will have fellowship with us through the Holy Spirit. He will call us his children and his friends.

As children of our heavenly Father we should adopt the prayer attitude of God’s own Son, when in the garden of Gethsemane he experienced one of the darkest moments of his earthly ministry. Jesus fell down with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup passs from me. Yet, not what I want, but what you want.” (Matt 26:39). Jesus was truly committed to his heavenly Father.

### Answers 18: The choice we must make

For the teacher

You should be able to cover this study in one class period. If time allows, the students can spend more time with (perhaps as homework) with questions 3 and 6.

Answers to the questions

1. Matt 7:21–23 can be rephrased like this:

The Day of Judgment will reveal who are genuine and who are false. On that day some believers will not be allowed to enter the eternal Kingdom of God to receive the inheritance that our Father in heaven has prepared for his people. The crucial test will be our true relationship with Jesus, the Savior of the world. Those of us who genuinely know him and who truly profess him as our Lord – and this can be seen by our obedience to him and his will and his plan for our lives – will receive our inheritance. Lip-service to Jesus will not be enough. To just say, “Lord, Lord” with our mouths (and have a heart that is unrepentant and disobedient) will not be enough. To claim that we have prophesied, healed the sick, cast out demons, and performed other miracles in Jesus’ name will not be enough – not unless we have a personal relationship with him, not unless he knows us.

1. –
2. –
3. Matt 7:24–27 can be rephrased like this: Jesus used two persons to illustrate the kind of response to his teaching that he expects from his followers. One person is wise, so he built his house on the rock. That house survived all kinds of terrible weather. The other person is foolish, so he built his house on the sand. That house collapsed, when the rains and the winds came. The wise response to Jesus is not only to listen to his teaching, but also to follow it in practice. The foolish response to Jesus is to listen to his teaching, and then do nothing about it in practical life.
4. –
5. –

Reflection

What about you? Are you a wise or a foolish believer? Are you foolish like the man who built his house on sand? Have you listened to and perhaps even enjoyed Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount – but then forgotten, or ignored, its challenges for your everyday life?

Or are you wise like the man who built his house on the rock? Have you not only listened to Jesus’ teaching, but also put his words into practice? Have you made the right choices that Jesus expects of us believers? What about your moral righteousness? Is it superficial and legalistic like the righteousness of the Pharisees? Or is your righteousness an outflow of your transformed heart? What about your religious life? Is it hypocritical (like the Pharisees), and mechanical (like the pagans)? Or is it sincere and genuine? Where is your treasure? Is it here on earth? Or is it in heaven? Jesus said that where our treasure is, there our heart will also be. Which master do you serve? Do you serve wealth and possessions? Or do you serve God? How would you describe your ambition in life? Is it food, clothes and shelter? Or is it the Kingdom of God and his righteousness? Does God come first in your life? Or are you the center of your life?

Spend some time in prayer with these questions. Recommit your life to Jesus. Ask him to help you to grow into a wise and mature disciple. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into a godly life already in this present evil world, a life that truly reflects the values and the principles of the Kingdom of God.