

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

SERIES INTRODUCTION

In the month of April, we will study a series of passages that will help us examine the spiritual disciplines that Christians practice during the Lenten period as we meditate and reflect on what Jesus has done for us on the cross. After Easter, we will begin a new series of studies on Psalms which will help us to focus on the theme of worship and explore its various aspects and the roles they play. The aspects of worship that we will explore include: silent meditation, praise, music, prayers, acts of blessings, and evangelism.

2 Apr

**How Is "Giving Up" A Part Of
Lenten Disciplines?**

Matthew 5:3,6

9 Apr

**What Have Ashes Got To Do With
Repentance?**

Daniel 9:1-9

16 Apr

Why Is There Joy At Easter?

Acts 2:14-41

23 Apr

A Day Of Reflection

Psalms 92

30 Apr

The King Reigns

Psalms 93

How Is "Giving Up" A Part Of Lenten Disciplines?

MATTHEW 5:3, 6

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

This meditation is part of the Beatitudes. Here, Jesus gives instructions concerning the nature of life in the Kingdom of God and follows up with two piercing metaphors on salt and light to illustrate the impact that the disciples should have on the world around them. We will look at two of the nine "Blessed" states which have to do with poverty and hunger (and thirsting) and examine the need to take on those states to find true happiness.

For Study and Discussion

- 1) A blessed person. Blessed is translated from the Greek word μακάριοι or makarioi - literally: made long/extended - i.e. God extends His benefits (to this person).
 - a) Who would we consider to be a blessed person? Who would Singapore society consider to be blessed? Give examples and explain why that person is blessed.

 - b) In Matthew 5:3-10 & Luke 6:20-23, Jesus gives a list of the types of people who are blessed in God's eyes. How similar or different are these people from the type of person that is considered blessed in your answer to 1a)?

In today's study, we will look in detail at two of the beatitudes (blessings) recorded in Matthew. As we study them, let us consider what these sayings teach us about why and how we should observe the spiritual discipline of fasting during Lent.

- 2) "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (5:3)
 - a) What does it mean to be poor in spirit? (Luke 18:9-14; Psalm 34:18, 51:15-17; 2Chronicles 7:14, etc.)

 - b) Why are the poor in spirit blessed? Explain what they will inherit.

- c) How can Christians be poor in spirit? Reflect and discuss how you can become poor in spirit.
- 3) “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (5:6)
- a) What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? What behaviour is that? Are they observable to others?
- b) Why are they blessed? What does this mean? Can we achieve it in this life?
- c) How can Christians hunger and thirst for righteousness? Reflect and discuss how you can hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- 4) In light of what these verses say, do you think that the spiritual discipline of fasting is limited to abstinence from food and drink? If Christians decide to practice the spiritual discipline of fasting during lent, what do you think their purpose should be? Is there something that you should “give up” for God this Lent?

Discipleship Pointers

- In Singapore, we generally consider the people that have the 5C (Cash, Credit Card, Country Club, Car, and Condo) or equivalent to be blessed. That is why we strive after these things.
- But if we look at the beatitudes, what important is our attitude (poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaker and those who righteousness results in persecution). In fact, in Luke’s list, it is the physically poor and hungry who are blessed - certainly the opposite from what we in Singapore consider blessed. James 2:5 tells us the reason - it is the poor (physically and spiritually) who are rich in faith
- Are we striving for the 5Cs or for the 7Fs (Fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, gentleness, and self-control - Gal 5:22-23)? We cannot seek after both!

The Roman Emperor Julian said the following about Christians of his day (whom he called Galileans and whom he considered to be atheist): “Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead, and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism for it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”

This is an outcome of having the 7Fs. If only this was true of the Church in Singapore today!

Family/Group Moments

- Discuss how as a group, you might be able to support each other in prayers in order to “give up” for God.

What Have Ashes Got To Do With Repentance?

DANIEL 9:1-9

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

Lent is a time of self-examination, reflection, and repentance for many Christians as we prepare for the coming of Good Friday and Easter. Why do we repent, how should we repent, and what should we do after repenting? Daniel 9:1-19 records a prayer of penitence that confesses sin, petitions for restoration, and praises God. Daniel's actions of praying in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes may seem very alien to us, but this passage teaches us something about the place of repentance in our Christian living. Let us examine what repentance means for us as a redeemed people.

For Study and Discussion

- 1) We repent in response to God's promises (verses 1-2).
 - a) Daniel's prayer was prompted by God's promise as recorded by Jeremiah that He would restore Israel after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10). If God had already promised to do what Daniel was praying for, why did Daniel turn to God in prayer? (Consider 1 Kings 8:46-51, Jeremiah 29:11-14)

 - b) If we believe that God will faithfully carry out His promises, why should we pray for these promises to be fulfilled?

- 2) We repent by humbling ourselves (verses 3-6)
 - a) What are the emotions and state of mind which the sackcloth and ashes represent? (Consider Job 42:5-6, Esther 4:1-3)

 - b) Ashes and dust are often mentioned together in the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 18:27, Job 30:19). The Bible teaches that we begin and end as dust (Genesis 3:19). How do these descriptions of people as dust and ashes illustrate who we are in relation to God?

- c) How can we have humble and contrite hearts before God? Consider Joel 2:12-13, Psalm 51:17.
- d) Read Matthew 6:16-18. If we are to practice spiritual disciplines and observe an extended period of repentance as some Christians do during Lent, what are we to do and not do?
- 3) We repent and seek God's righteousness (verses 7-9).
- a) Why was all Israel covered with shame, according to Daniel?
- b) Repentance can be defined as a change of mind that results in a change in action. What does true repentance mean for Christians? Consider what change of mind and action we are to take according to Mark 1:14-15, Acts 20:21, and 2 Corinthians 7:7-10.
- c) As believers who have come to a saving faith in Christ, what are the reasons for continued repentance in our lives? Consider why we pray in confession and thanksgiving near the start of every worship service. (1John 1:8-9, Hebrews 10:22)

Discipleship Pointers

- We repent in response to God's promises: God has promised us full forgiveness for our sins through Christ. Therefore, as we confess our sins, we are claiming God's promises in Christ. Repentance is not a work that we do to earn salvation.
- We repent by humbling ourselves: we need to examine our lives in light of who God is and against God's perfect standard. Therefore, our confessions should be marked by soul-searching honesty and integrity that is found in Daniel's prayer and also in the penitential psalms.
- We repent by seeking God's righteousness: repentance is not just about feeling regret or remorse (no matter how sincere this may be). True repentance is turning from sin (rejection of God) to faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, when we repent, we do not dwell in shame and guilt as non-believers do, but we must always turn in faith to Christ, who is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:20). We repent and live the new life that we have in Christ because this is the out-working of our faith.
- The practice of spiritual disciplines can easily turn to spiritual pride. Let us repent with a full knowledge and understanding of God's Word as Daniel did.

Family/Group Moments

- Is confession of sin a regular part of your personal/group prayer life? Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16).

- e) If we were to follow Peter's example here, how are we to treat the usage of the OT today?
- f) One of the very first thing Peter did was to explain the obvious (v15), if Christians today are counter-culture and different, how should we begin the presentation of the gospel by explaining the "obvious" – what would this "obvious" be for us today?
- g) What was the logical conclusion Peter arrived at? (v36)
- 2) Read Acts 2:37-41
- a) What was the reaction of the audience? If you were in the audience, would you have reacted the same way?
- b) How could they obtain salvation? (v38) Who was eligible? (v39) How many believed? (v41)

Discipleship Pointers

- The Gospel is life-changing. This is seen in the actions and words of Peter described in this passage in contrast to his actions eight weeks earlier when he denied Jesus. Let us reflect on how the Gospel has changed our lives.
- We have joy because we are saved. What does it mean if we are saved yet unhappy? Do we grumble like the people whom God had saved from Egypt? Let us reflect on how precious God's grace was to us the hour we first believed. Rejoice! Because of God's amazing grace.

Family/Group Moments

- Share how the Gospel has changed your life. Pray for each other that the Gospel will continue to transform you!

A Day of Reflection

PSALMS 92

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

This psalm encourages its readers to acknowledge God as King who reigns in majesty. The idea of God's kingship began in Exodus 15:18 where God will reign forever. But in 1 Samuel 8:7, Yahweh exhorted his people through the prophet that they had rejected God as King over the people of God. In the New Testament, the idea of the Kingdom of God helps us to focus on the way God relates with and governs His people. How do we worship today with God as King? How should we approach Him on the day where and when believers gather in worship? How does this conviction of us being God's subjects influence the way we come together in worship?

For Study and Discussion

This is the only biblical psalm that has a title stating that it is "for the Sabbath." As the Old Testament says very little about worship ceremonies performed on the Sabbath beyond the customary daily sacrifices, it is likely that the psalm was used in conjunction with sacrificial offerings. Since Psalm 92 is a psalm of thanksgiving, it may have been sung when thanksgiving offerings were made.

Psalms of thanksgiving were written to help people respond to God after being delivered from some difficulty that had caused sorrow, grief, or pain. Psalms of thanksgiving have the following characteristics: (1) They (usually) begin with statement of thanksgiving that is followed by reasons for giving thanks. (2) They recall a time of difficulty that led the psalmist to ask God for protection or deliverance. (3) They restate the petition previously made or sum up God's answer and its result. In addition to Psalm 92, psalms of thanksgiving include Psalms 18; 21; 30; 32; 34; 40:1–11; 66; 103; 116; 118; 138; Isaiah 38:9–20 and Jonah 2:2–9.

- 1) vv 1–9 Thanksgiving and praise
 - a) According to the psalmist, what does praising God involve?

 - b) In the ESV, verse 1 of the psalm is translated as "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High." How is praise and thanksgiving related? Is praise and thanksgiving characteristic of your worship of God?

 - c) What reasons does the psalmist give for thanking and praising God?

 - d) What reasons do you have for praising God?

 - e) What words does the psalmist use to describe people who do not acknowledge the great things that God has done in the world? Note: The psalmist is not referring to different types of people but these are different descriptions of people who reject God

- f) What is the psalmist's warning for those who do not worship God?
- 2) vv 10–11 Recollection of personal difficulty
- a) What is the nature of the trials that the psalmist face and how did he overcome them?
 - b) While the nature of the psalmist's trial is clear, the details are not clearly stated. As a rule, psalms of thanksgiving do not give explicit historical examples. How do the Psalmist's words of praise reflect your own thankfulness for the times when God had carried you through grief, pain, or embarrassment?
 - c) Why do you think that it is important for us to praise God and proclaim his love and faithfulness (v2) before other people for what He has done for us personally?
- 3) vv 12–15 Final declaration of God's protection
- This final section contains ideas that are similar to Psalm 1 in that it compares the righteous person to a tree. Palm trees are known for their long life and the cedars of Lebanon grew to over 35 meters in height and up to 10 meters in circumference.
- a) Who are the righteous? Consider Philippians 3:8-9.
 - b) What do the comparisons with a palm tree and a cedar of Lebanon tell us about the characteristics of the righteous? Consider Proverbs 10:25.
 - c) What promises and encouragement do verses 12-15 hold for us as believers? How do these apply to us, whatever our age or spiritual maturity?

Discipleship Pointers

- Though some Christians try to distinguish between thanksgiving and praise by saying that we thank God for what he has done and praise him for who he is, this concept is not found in the Bible. Rather, the Bible speaks of thanking and praising God both for what he has done and who he is. (Note that in Ps 92:1–2, the psalmist thanks and praises God for his steadfast love and faithfulness—both characteristics of God's being that are worked out in relationship. In v 4 his thanks and praise reflect upon God's work, particularly his protection from enemies.) The difference between thanks and praise is not the content or reason for speaking out about God, but our audience. We thank God by letting him know we appreciate what he has done and who he is. We praise God by letting other people know that we appreciate what he has done and who he is and encouraging them to join us in praise.
- Psalm 92 is often thought of as exhibiting common ideas from biblical wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes). A biblical wise man is not the same as an intelligent or educated man. Similarly, a fool is not the same as a simpleton or uneducated person. Rather, a wise person is one who relates rightly to God, orders his ways according to God's revelation, and lives a moral life. Conversely, a fool is someone who rejects God, refuses to obey him, and lives an immoral life.
- If you have struggled through a difficult time and have seen God deliver you, a psalm of thanksgiving, like Psalm 92, is a model of how we can bring thanks to God and praise him before our friends and family members so that they can thank and praise him too.

Family/Group Moments

- Share with your small group the things that you can thank God for today and together praise Him!

The King Reigns

PSALMS 93

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. If that is truly our belief as Christians, it should determine how we worship and praise God. Psalm 93 encourages us to acknowledge God as King, whose throne was established long ago and who still reigns. The conviction that God is King should influence the way His subjects live and come together in worship.

For Study and Discussion

- 4) Worship the King (Psalm 93:1-2)
 - a) Does God need our worship? Explain your answer.

 - b) From verses 1 and 2, list the reasons why God is deserving of worship.

 - c) How do we praise God (i) for what He has done and (ii) for who He is?

- 5) The King Reigns with Might (Psalm 93:3-4)
 - a) Discuss the possible meanings of the references to seas and waves.

 - b) How will believing that God is king and God is mighty change your perspective of crises and chaos in the world as well as the ups and downs in your life?

- 6) The King Reigns Eternally (Psalm 93:5)
 - a) What kind of King is described in verse 5?

- b) Who do we usually turn to in the face of changes, conflicts and confusion? Why is it that we usually turn to God as a last resort even though He is the most powerful person who can help us?
- c) What are the reasons for praising God during trials and tribulations?
- 7) How does Psalm 93 help us to worship God in our daily life?
- 8) Consider your attitude towards worship every Sunday. What might we do differently as individuals when we gather on Sunday to worship the King who Reigns?

Discipleship Pointers

- God is the King of all creation and He is actively involved in His creation. Whether the world acknowledges Him as king or not does not affect the reality of His kingship. God is a mighty king, a just and good king, a trustworthy king and one who reigns eternally. If He is a sovereign and trustworthy king, then we can trust Him with anything and in any circumstances. Let us worship him as He deserves to be worshiped!
- God is mightier than all the things that we are encountering and all the things we don't understand: trials, problems, insecurities, illness, and uncertainties – no matter what may be overwhelming us at this moment. Let us give thanks to Him in all circumstances and trust Him no matter what.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

Family/Group Moments

Read the record of Jesus calming the storm in Matthew 8:23-27. Share practical examples of trusting Jesus in the storms of our lives.

Daily Prayer Guide

Sunday: The Church

Church members & families
Visitors
Pastor & church leaders
Sunday School teachers
Worship leaders
Small group leaders
Other churches
Outreach efforts

Monday: The Workplace

Supervisor
Co-workers
Subordinates
Customers & suppliers
Difficult situations
Work attitude
Work performance

Tuesday: Acquaintances

Mentors & mentorees
Accountability partners
Friends
Neighbours
Merchants
Public servants
Teachers & other school Workers
Children's friends & their families

Wednesday: My Country

Public officials - executive, legislative, & judicial
Armed forces
Public morality
The media
The economy

Thursday: The World

International peace & understanding
Missions and missionaries
Persecuted churches
Hunger, sickness, & disaster relief

Friday: My Spiritual Growth

Maturity
Understanding
Faith
Love toward God
Love toward others
Servanthood

Saturday: My Family

Spouse
Children
Grandchildren
Parents
Brothers & sisters
Extended family
Unsaved loved ones

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." - Jeremiah 33:3

Little Steps To Great Learning!

Preparation:

- Attempt all questions in the relevant Bible study before your group meeting.
- Expect spiritual growth by thoughtfully working on the Bible study questions (and the suggested reading, if any) throughout the week.
- Seek the Holy Spirit's insight and guidance by praying daily in reflection of what you have learned through the Bible study.

Group Time:

- On the following Sunday, take notes during sermon to assist in focusing your thoughts.
- Be punctual for your group meeting.
- Share the insight gained through the sermon with your group.
- Be frank in sharing your response to the questions in the discipleship pointers.
- Encourage others by attesting to God's goodness and reality by sharing to the group (and others) how the Word has changed your thinking and action in response to your study in the past week.
- Using the front sheet, summarise how the lessons have helped you to understand God's revelation in the Bible through Jesus Christ, and your response to the revelation.

THE BIBLE is to be...

Read through...

Reflected in...

Lived out...

Given away...