

Study

Revelation 1: 12-19. In what ways does this contrast with the Buddy Jesus? What mindset and habits will help us avoid treating God as if He is there to serve our needs?

James 5: 7-19. A time to seek healing...and a time to persevere. How does James hold the two together?

Mark 6: 30-32, 45-46; 2 Cor 12: 1-10. Why do we need for solitude? How can you see a connection between being alone with God, and being at peace with the things we can't understand?

Living it out (Application):

When can you set aside time to be alone in God's presence? What would help you to draw close to Him?

Coming Up at St Mark's

Trip to the Holy Land. March 2015. There will be an introductory meeting at Guy's at 7.30pm on Tuesday 4th March.

Naked Truth Prayer Event.

Saturday 1st March 7.30pm. Led by Ian Henderson. Seeking to pray for our area and to challenge the grip of pornography.



Please pray for...

Those wrestling with questions, or whether to commit their lives to Christ, that God would give them the ability to trust Him.

Pray for Michelle, Alison and Susie as they begin their new roles at the beginning of March.

Pray that this Lent we will encounter God powerfully through prayer and see the Kingdom grow as we pray together.

Pray for our prayer ministry team and an extension of our healing ministry.

Pray for the people of the Ukraine, for a peaceful resolution to their conflict.

Pray for those wrestling with addiction to pornography, and for restoration to the sexually broken.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for Ron and Jeanette Happ in Nepal, particularly for wisdom as Ron prepares guidelines for students.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

These are the last Study notes before Lent...there will be a booklet for everyone next Sunday outlining the whole journey we will be going on as a church up to Easter...

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 23rd February 2014

Worship/ reflection:

What do you hope Lent will mean for us as a church community this year? Listen to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt4WxQ6dnn0>. At the same time read Col 1: 15-18, slowly. Spend time in silence.

Luke 4: 31-44. 2 principles of a happy life for those with incomplete understanding.

A few years ago there was a film called Dogma which mocked religious hypocrisy – never a problem – and introduced “Buddy Christ” to the world. Buddy Christ is a figure that **fits in with life as you know it, that is there to meet your needs, and can basically be what you need him to be.** For example, I find a lot of atheist talk about Jesus often revolves around creating a Jesus made in an image you don't really find in the Bible, and then pulling it apart. The buddy Christ can easily be ignored when you want, or called upon when needed. He will never disturb your life, he will never challenge your preconceptions. He will never require you to make a leap of faith.

There are many things about Jesus that comfort me and make sense, but **there are things I don't yet understand.** This disturbs my inclination to make a buddy Christ. The main problem is not that we **have questions** – to my mind the fact that we can't tie everything up is a sign that we are onto the true, unmanufactured God who is bigger than our minds can fully comprehend. What we need to really know is **what we do with our questions**, and how we love and follow Him **while not necessarily understanding everything.** There are things I have questions about, but there are things I do know. I do know that God through Luke has been gracious enough **to give me evidence to base my faith on**, so that while my faith goes beyond evidence, it never goes against it. There are plenty of eyewitness details here to give me confidence that this Jesus is not made up. We are being introduced to a real person, in real time and space. If you are someone who is exploring faith, there are many questions you might need to wrestle with but the fundamental ones are these: **Who is Jesus? And how do I respond?** Everything stems from there. You can have confidence in this evidence. For example, note the **eyewitness details** such as how Jesus went down to Capernaum from Nazareth. That's a drop of 1800 feet – from 1200 above sea level to 600 below! Note how Luke records Simon's mother-in-law as having a **high fever** – a medical

term which chimes in with Luke being a doctor. You can even visit Capernaum, and stand above the floor on which this miracle happened! Come on the trip next March if you can. **Trusting in Christ is not a blind stab in the dark** – that’s not what faith means. It’s a reasonable step of faith, based on things we can know, that we can understand.

I do understand too that there is a **spiritual conflict in this life**, which is unseen, but real, and has a bearing on how we view evil, suffering, and sometimes sickness. What is interesting for me in these stories, and what adds to my ability to believe them, is how the demonic obviously recognizes Jesus, **but has no comprehension of what he is doing there**. This makes sense to me in that, if there are spiritually rebellious forces, **they would not get the idea that God should love his enemies, that he should humble himself**, that he should become flesh, and that he should offer himself. **Jesus’ mission would go against all their expectations of the most High God**. No wonder they both recognize Him, “You are the Son of God!” but simultaneously don’t get him, “What do you want with us?” Another thing I understand too is **Jesus’ authority**. This is what distinguishes him from a lot of the religious quacks of the time, and of today, who go about dealing with the occult with a load of mumbo jumbo. **Jesus doesn’t need this**. He simply tells them to be gone. It’s credible to me that this is how He should operate, and how the crowd recognize His authority. But there are many things about this I don’t understand, and find it hard to make sense of. The whole spiritual landscape is by nature unseen. This makes it hard to grasp. Am I saying that illness, particularly mental health issues, has a spiritual dimension? When do I pray in this way? When do I know I’m struggling with a principality or power? The simple answer is, “Often I don’t know.” But a simple rule of thumb is this: sometimes you just need to take your medicine, sometimes you need to rest, but sometimes it is good to cover the bases in prayer – **praying both for body and spirit**, and simply telling any spiritual force to depart in Jesus’ name. When I’ve been asked to go round to people’s houses because they sense something amiss, I always go with someone else, and take simple authority, **with the minimum of fuss**. I can’t see the landscape, but I know whose model I want to follow.

Another thing I understand is that for Jesus **words and actions always went together**. What we’ve got here in Luke 4 is Jesus announcing the Kingdom – God’s will being done on earth in setting oppressed people free, bringing wholeness and life. **But Jesus never talks about something without doing it as well**. In fact, his pattern was to more often do things, and explain them afterwards. **Actions, then words**. I understand that God’s kingdom is about restoring people, and the world. It’s about putting His life on display. I understand this is my main calling in life. And the Kingdom is holistic – it’s about mind, soul and body. That’s why we pursue physical healing. Because **it’s a sign, a foretaste, an announcement in a fallen world of God’s healing rule**. I had a friend who was healed of kidney stones. I had a teacher who was healed of cancer. I was at a conference where someone’s leg grew. I know there are people here who have experienced God do amazing things. I think people who follow Jesus, and who love Him, simply and humbly seek to do the things He does. But the healing rule of God’s kingdom contains so many things I don’t understand, so many paradoxes. All the people I’ve just mentioned will probably get ill again and die. Lazarus, who was raised from the dead, died again.

Healing is complex, as we were exploring a few weeks ago. We know that we live between Jesus’ first and second coming, at a time when the Kingdom has begun to infiltrate, but is by no means complete. We know we are in a spiritual battle. We know sometimes for Paul God’s grace was enough in his weakness...Sometimes we need to have a lot of wisdom – when do we stop praying for physical healing? How do we do it well? I will keep on seeking to do what Jesus did – demonstrating what the Kingdom means more than I talk about it. But how I would love to have easy answers!

In the midst of my incomplete knowledge and understanding, I think there are two principles here which provide **the place for us to meet these dilemmas in the right way**. Jesus said he came to bring “good news” – news that would bring life, happiness, wholeness. I believe these are the secrets to a happy, fulfilled existence in the middle of a life and universe which is far greater than you and I can possibly fathom. **The first principle is to get your life from where Jesus got his**. Using your mind is of course vital. But on its own it will never bring resolution. Instead, you will notice how Jesus, having worked all night long praying for people, **disappeared to spend time alone with His Father**. He went to a solitary place. We can talk, we can think, we can wrestle with things as much as we like. We can wonder whether or not to pray for people, which particular action to be taking, what path to take, even whether to commit our life to Christ. But in my experience, **it’s in the regular solitary place with God that we can most find wisdom, that we can know who and where we are**. **If Jesus, the Son of God, needed time alone with His Father, do we not think that’s important for us?** Every weekday morning I spend time in quiet with God. Sometimes I am just still, sometimes I read a bit of Scripture, sometimes thoughts are whirling round my head. But I know that the more I simply put myself consciously in the place of His love, curled around His beautiful cross, the more I am able to sense His leading, **the more I can deal with the things I don’t understand**. Without that encounter I dry up. If you are wrestling with faith today, **why not find time to be solitary and ask God to reveal himself to you?** He loves you profoundly, more than you can imagine, and delights in the quietest of prayers. The world will throw a million reasons at you why you should not make it a regular habit. But you will never flourish if you can’t drink from the source of your life. That’s why this Lent, **we are going to do as much praying as talking about prayer**...I would encourage you to take whatever opportunities you can to draw near to God in prayer with others.

Finally, within all of our questioning, **we can never be happy if we are trying to make Jesus fit into our requirements**. We will never actually be happy with a buddy Christ. Resist doing what the people of Capernaum tried to do – **keep Jesus for themselves, make Him into their own private Saviour**. They could have so easily have said, “Wow, Jesus, it’s amazing that you heal the sick, set the oppressed free...you must go and tell others..Go!” But instead they do what we do – domesticate him, follow him as long as he fits our picture, our needs. This keeps a lot of people from giving their lives to Him I think. We want Him to come into our lives. **But really, being a Christian is much more about entering into His**. We want Him to bless what we are doing. But really, a happy life is one in which we join in with what He is doing. We want Him to answer our questions. Buddy Jesus would say, “Hey. I’m here for you whatever you need.” But maybe the Lord Jesus says, “Will you surrender your life and follow me? Will you put me at the centre? Will you spend time with me?” It’s only when that happens, I believe, that the things we do understand, and the things we don’t find their right place.