

## Living it out (Application):

In what ways do you try and earn God's approval? Why? Do you need to take the reality of the Fall more seriously?

## Coming Up at St Mark's

**Watoto Children's Choir. Free concert in St Aidan's School, Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March.** Not to be missed!

**Pablo is going back to California** on March 21<sup>st</sup>! His last Sunday will be with us on March 18<sup>th</sup>. We are listening to see whether God will bring him back. In the meantime, thank you Pablo for your loving ministry of the Kingdom among us.

**Dates for your dairy: Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> June.** Special service for the Jubilee – an opportunity to invite friends.

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July.** Church picnic with hog roast (!) to welcome Andy and Claire Patrick.

**Clothes Swap Shop at Café Culture.** 19<sup>th</sup> March, 7.30pm. Tickets £8. In aid of Saba Saba orphanage, Iringa.



prayer

## Please pray together for...

**Sophia Haynes:** Give thanks to God for good health improvement, more sleep, and her leg becoming "calmer". Pray for her foot which is becoming stretched through pointing toes, causing muscular pain.

**Pablo** - as he returns to California.

**Barry and Sue Brown** – for strength and good medical treatment.

**Hugh Davis** – leg is getting there, but he suffered a nasty viral infection last week in Scotland.

**Kath and Simon Lee** and family.

**The Robinson family** – Keith, Bev, Jena and Amy, after a difficult season.

**Audrey Watson**, undergoing treatment

**Mike and Janet Moore** – Mike has broken his hip in hospital.

### Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for Monica Bettencourt, working in Iringa, but attacked in her home last week. She is receiving urgent medical attention in Nairobi.

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!**

Don't forget your Lent Project for the Bible Society! Some fantastic things happening so far...

# GROUP STUDY NOTES

## Lent Worship/reflection:

Week beginning: 18<sup>th</sup> March  
2012

Read Mark 15: 9-13 and 15. Get a whip - or equivalent object/picture!. Place it before your cross. Thank Jesus for all the pain he endured. Pray for the persecuted church – particularly Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani. Next week you will need: **a crown of thorns, or something equivalent!**

## This week's readings (Get the reflections on email):

**Monday: Gen 3 Tuesday: Gen 2: 15-20 Thursday: Rom 1: 18-25  
Friday: 1 John 3: 1-3; Mark 12: 41-44**

## Fallen from Our Call

**Genesis 3.** Mothering Sunday is a day for coming back, **returning to reality**. And we come on to the part of the story of the Bible now which explains so much about reality in our lives in our world. Looking at the Fall, Sin, death, brokenness, and all that goes with it **square in the face** is the only way you can have hope in your life. Because only a realistic truth can offer real hope. Here are some hopeless messages that you hear a lot today: *We can sort the world out. You can become perfect. You are not to blame. Evil is an illusion. God doesn't care about your sin.* Why are they hopeless? Because they are a **denial of reality**. They either trivialize evil, ignore it, or have been found wanting.

Rom 3:23 says to us, "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" We are not what we are made to be. We like to pretend, because actually part of our condition is that sometimes **we are unable to recognize how desperate our plight is**. Not only do we manage to live as if global poverty was normal, but we find ways of making our own hypocrisies seem less destructive. Usually by comparing ourselves more favourably with others, like the Pharisee who compared himself with the tax collector.

But Jesus said the tax collector, who could only ask God for forgiveness, got it right. He understood how things are. As did the woman in Luke 7 who washed Jesus' feet with her

tears. **The woman was honest with her sin, and profoundly knew her need of God.** She was not deluded into thinking of herself more highly than she ought. **But the Pharisees were offended at the very idea of sin needing to be forgiven at all.** Everyone who got Jesus knew two things – they were loved. And their self-righteousness is filthy rags.

We fell. How? In what way? Why are things like they are? What's the root? Did you notice what the serpent said to Eve to try and get her to ignore God? He doesn't deny the command of God at first. He just raises a question. Something like this: "Really now, did God say you can't eat from any tree of the Garden? Really?" **Eve stops trusting God.** This is the root of everything. And she starts **changing reality to try and account for her lack of trust.** She makes subtle changes to what God actually said. The Lord had said, "You may eat freely." But Eve simply reported that He said, "We may eat." Then she added to what God had prohibited. The Lord had said nothing about touching the tree. But Eve claimed that God had said, "Neither shall you touch it." A lack of trust, leads to changing reality, leads to thinking God is out to spoil our lives, leads to directly ignoring His order. All sin is based in the root of the serpent's lie which claims that God is not to be trusted. The lie holds that there is a way better than God's way. **God is not really giving you the best.**

And it's rooted as well in a **bad picture of God.** A bad picture that **fails to see the depth of His love,** and instead just tries to please a taskmaster. Or a bad picture that **fails to see His holiness.** God is pure holiness, goodness, truth and beauty. He lives in unapproachable light. That is why He deserves nothing less than total holiness. God is not like us. He is holy. He is loving. When you see His holiness and His love, the catastrophic reality of the Fall is obvious.

Adam and Eve eat of the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil.** Isn't it good to have knowledge of good and evil? And why is the original tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Why not the tree of lust, idolatry? Satan says to Eve: What's so bad about it? Eve looks at it and sees it's good. The devil asks, "**If God was loving, why wouldn't he trust you with that?**" But this is the most profound mistake ever made. It creates wars, conflicts, pride, judgementalism, racism, hatred, gossip. Why? **Because essentially human beings are being tempted to be wise like God is wise. To define in ourselves what is good and evil. We effectively become our own gods. We stop referring to Him, stop seeing ourselves as obedient and faithful to Him, and instead make our own path.** But as soon as we do that we lose our way. Because apart from God, we have no way of really knowing how to flourish. When people sin, in some ways we always see it as a good – that's why we go for it. No one goes for something that is ugly to them. We call evil what is good, and call good what is evil – that's the root of sin.

So we don't trust God. We have the wrong picture of Him. And we even seek to be Him. But the results of this Fall are clear in Scripture. The wages of sin is death. We perish. It can start now as we disintegrate, instead of being made new. And ultimately it can lead to the thing that most breaks God's heart – that there may be nothing of us that can stand in a holy God's presence. This is not about God giving us what we deserve, this is **the natural consequence of turning away from the love and holiness of our creator. God, we are told, does not want anyone to perish.** But sin itself has a built in mechanism that leads toward perishing. We die the further we get from God. Sin is literally killing ourselves.

We can sense the effects of it in **the cooling of our desire to worship and obey Him.** We find that we don't want to talk to God, we only want to talk about God. And it has wider effects than our well-being. **The fall has led to human society becoming deeply fragmented when anything but God becomes our highest love.** We are into God-replacement. But only if God is your ultimate good and life centre will you find your heart drawn not only to people of all families races and classes but to the whole world. It is really hard to have a self-identity that doesn't need to exclusion. But the ultimate effect of sin is this: **We don't know who we are.** Identity apart from God is inherently unstable. Everyone else and all else will eventually disappoint you. If you build your identity around your children, what do you do when they disappoint you? If you build your identity around your spouse, what do you do when he walks out, when she leaves? If you build your identity around business success, what do you do when you retire?

This is the reality of the way we are. I believe Genesis Chapter 3 gives a profoundly realistic picture of our hearts, and the heart of the problem. Hiding from God. Scrabbling around for meaning. Fragmented world and society. Cool in our desire to obey and love Him. Sin leads to spiritual death, but sin is a parasite. A distortion of who and what you are made to be. **God – all holy, all loving, does not look at you with anger, but with pain.**

What's the remedy? **Firstly, a recognition.** You cannot save yourself. Then an acceptance - we know there is a remedy. **It's the cross.** The beautiful love, forgiveness, acceptance, grace of Jesus' self-offering of Himself. He looks at you, and says, "I know what's wrong. Because I have taken it on myself. For you. Be made new." **The depth of the remedy shows how serious the disease is.** But the remedy is so much more than the problem. Because as far as the east is from the west.... **Do you know this story? In your bones? In your experience? Because without it you will never fully understand the amazing love of your Father.** And you will never be able to approach Him, or others, like this: In Vienna in Austria there is a church in which the former ruling family in Austria, the Hapsburgs, are buried. When royal funerals used to arrive the mourners knocked at the door of the church to be allowed in. A priest inside would ask 'Who is it that desires admission here?' A guard would call out, 'His apostolic majesty, the emperor'. The priest would answer, 'I don't know him'. They would knock a second time, and again the priest would ask who was there. The funeral guard outside would announce, 'The highest emperor'. A second time the priest would say, 'I don't know him'. A third time they would knock on the door and the priest would ask 'Who is it?' The third time the answer would be, 'A poor sinner, your brother.'

## Study:

- Isaiah 59:1-2.** What does this tell us about God? What about the effect of sin?
- Rom 8:5-8.** What are the consequences of the sinful nature?
- James 1: 13-15.** How does sin "happen"?
- Eph 2: 1-3; 11-12.** What light does this shed on our predicament without Christ?
- Rom 3: 9-19.** Why should the world be accountable to God?
- Jude 24.** Should we fear the power of sin?
- 1 John 1:8.** What do these words do for your self-identity?