

HELLO

my name is

Jesus

**What would you do if you
could meet Jesus again
for the first time?**

Jan. 6 - Apr. 21

**Curriculum for Small Groups
and Personal Studies**

January 2019

Weeks 1-4

Small Groups at The Well

GROUP COVENANT

Groups are encouraged to write a group covenant. The covenant can cover:

- Starting/ending on time
- No cell phones on
- Sharing "airtime" - how the group will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak
- Encourage one another to use the "Step Up/Step Back" guideline. If you have been quiet and not shared, you may want to "Step Up" and speak. If you have been talking a lot, pay attention to when you should "Step Back" so that others have time/space to share.
- "Pass" is always an acceptable statement if someone prefers not to answer a question.
- Observing confidentiality
- Use "I" statements
- Silence is okay! Some people need time to think before they answer a question. When a question is asked, don't feel you need to jump right in to fill the silence. Learn to see silence as another member at the table.
- Respect the beliefs/opinions of others, especially when you do not agree.
- Pray for one another

Welcome to “Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time”, a study about Jesus based on the gospel of Matthew.

Who was Matthew?

Some scholars say Matthew was the tax collector. Most scholars say that all of the New Testament gospels are anonymous, in other words, there is no definitive authorship. Others will say that the words and teachings of Matthew were gathered together, thus the gospel “according to Matthew”. “For Christians, of course, what matters is not the tradition of human authorship, but our confidence that God speaks to us through these texts and that they preserve the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

Date written?

Most scholars place the time of Matthew’s writing somewhere between 60-80 AD.

How does Matthew relate to Mark, Luke and John’s gospels?

Matthew, Mark and Luke are very similar. Matthew, Mark and Luke are referred to as the *synoptic* gospels: *syn* - “with”, *optic*- has to do with looking or seeing. So the three are “seen” together. They tell the same stories, often in the same order. Their use of similar language and sequence of events leads most scholars to believe that they were based on one source document, which is often referred to as “Q” or “Quelle” which means source. Many scholars believe that the gospel of Mark is that source, and that Matthew and Luke expanded on Mark. Other scholars suggest Matthew as the earliest gospel. Each synoptic occasionally uses unique words or a slant on an event.

John’s gospel is very different. Jesus has a longer ministry in John, three years as opposed to one year in the synoptics. Jesus spends a lot of time in Jerusalem, and John’s gospel explores different theological concepts than the synoptics. Events in John’s gospel don’t occur at the same time as they do in the synoptics. John includes some events that are not in the synoptics (raising of Lazarus from the dead).

Who was Matthew’s intended audience?

Matthew is a gospel written by a Jew, for Jews. Mark writes to a Gentile community. Matthew uses language that would have been familiar to a Jewish audience. Matthew speaks of rabbis and teachers of the law, who were regarded as interpreters of the law. Matthew’s gospel treats the texts from Hebrew scripture (the Old Testament) with deep respect. Matthew seeks to show that the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus, that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Matthew writes of Jesus coming not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it, and that the Law will not pass away. “Matthew was written by one who knew and loved the Law, and who saw that

¹ NIV Cultural Study Bible. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, MI. 2016. p. 1603

even the Law has its place in the Christian economy."² Matthew is the only gospel to use the word *church* to describe a group of believers. The synoptic gospels all record the account of Jesus asking the disciples, "Who do people say I am?" with Peter saying, "You are the Christ." Only Matthew adds Jesus telling Peter, ". . . you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18)

Key Passages:

- The Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 5-7 which is Jesus' longest teaching in the New Testament
- The Parables of the Kingdom - Matthew 10
- Greatness and Forgiveness in the Kingdom - Matthew 18
- The Coming of the King - Matthew 24,25
- "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" 28:19

Where does Matthew's gospel start?

Each gospel starts differently. Mark begins with John the Baptist and Jesus first appears when he is coming for baptism. John begins by saying the "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." (John 1:1). Luke begins with the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Luke's gospel has the traditional birth narrative that is heard on Christmas.

Matthew's gospel is the only one to contain the genealogy of Jesus, tracing Jesus through the line of King David (Israel's most important King) all the way back to Abraham. The list includes several women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Uriah's Wife and Mary the mother of Jesus. The birth of Jesus is recorded in seven short verses (Matthew 1:18-25).

Matthew uses the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" instead of "Kingdom of God" as other gospel writers do. He uses Kingdom of Heaven out of deep respect for God's name, which the Jews thought was so holy that it was not uttered or written. In Jewish writing you will often see God written as G-D.

² Barclay, William. p. 7

Week One - Matthew 2:1-23

Ice Breakers - pick one of more of the following questions

Introduce yourself

1. It's December 1st. Are your Christmas decorations put up yet? It's January 1st. Are your Christmas decorations still up? Why?
2. What's the best Christmas gift you ever received - and no fair saying "Jesus" because he was everyone's best gift :-)
3. What is the most meaningful part of Christmas for you and why?

Read Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 2 Common English Bible (CEB)

Coming of the Magi

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. **2** They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him."

3 When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. **4** He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. **5** They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

6 *You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
because from you will come one who governs,
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him." **9** When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. **11** They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Study Notes:

- Typical nativity sets include the Magi, however, the Magi likely did not find Jesus until he was closer to two years old. The Magi were from Persia and were astrologists/astronomers (they were very similar back then) and dream interpreters. They were likely wealthy, because they were able to travel without difficulty. Matthew does not call them "kings", nor does Matthew say anything about a stable.
- What was the star they saw? Halley's Comet appeared in 12-11 BC, but that was before this story. It could have been a Supernova (a star that suddenly becomes very bright as it explodes). It could have been Jupiter and Saturn were aligned. Think about how dark the sky would have been back then, with no lights. Ancient people learned to navigate based on the stars. Something this bright was unusual and so these Magi went in search of its source.
- The Magi coming to King Herod asking where the king of the Jews had been born would have "political dynamite" as N. T. Wright says. Matthew is saying that Jesus is the true king and Herod is the false king, an imposter. The Magi came to Jerusalem, to the king's palace, because that's where they would expect to find the new king.
- Remember that Matthew is written to a Jewish audience who would have known the prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures, so the Magi looking for the fulfillment of this prophecy is significant. The prophecies about the coming Messiah said that his rule would bring God's justice and peace to the whole world.
- Herod, who is not Jewish and doesn't know the Hebrew scriptures, gathers up his brightest and best to tell him about the prophesied (Micah 5:2) Jewish Messiah. It is interesting that Herod gathered the chief priests and teachers of the law, who were Jewish. They told him the new king was to be born in Bethlehem.
- The Magi continue to follow the star until it leads them to the house where Jesus was with his parents.
- Gold, frankincense and myrrh were strange gifts to give a newborn. They were very expensive. Gold was a gift for a king. Frankincense was a gift for a priest, as incense was burned in the temple (Psalm 141:2). Myrrh was used to preserve the body after death.
- After they paid homage to Jesus, they went home by a different route to avoid Herod.

Discussion Questions

1. Why would Jesus' ancestry matter to the Jewish hearers of Matthew's Gospel?
2. What can you learn of Joseph's character based on this chapter?
3. What was Herod's response to the Magi asking him the whereabouts of the new king? Why?

Read Matthew 2:13-23

Escape to Egypt

13 When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him." **14** Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. **15** He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: *I have called my son out of Egypt.*

Murder of the Bethlehem children

16 When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. **17** This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

18 *A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much grieving.
Rachel weeping for her children,
and she did not want to be comforted,
because they were no more.*

Return from Egypt

19 After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. **20** "Get up," the angel said, "and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead." **21** Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. **23** He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

Notes on Matthew 2:16-23

In this study you will read some passages that are rarely preached on, such as Matthew 2:16-18. At The Well, January 6, 2019 is a Sunday for Family Worship, and with children present, this text will not be read. The events of this passage are real and horrific, and need to be addressed and studied so that we can learn from them.

- Dreams and their importance. Magi were known for their ability to interpret dreams. Because their large caravan would easily be spotted by day, they traveled by night to avoid Herod and his army.
- The order to kill all the boys is heinous and hard for us to comprehend. How many boys under two years of age were killed? It's hard to say exactly, especially since Bethlehem was not a big city. Some scholars think as many as twenty baby boys were killed.
- Who is Rachel in verse 18? See Jeremiah 31:15. Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife. Rachel weeps as her people are taken into captivity and exile. Matthew, who was Jewish, would have known that Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem.

Discussion Questions

1. Joseph had a dream that told him to take Mary and Joseph to Egypt.
2. God chose to ensure Jesus' safety. What are the ways the Lord did this?
3. In this chapter we see two completely different responses to the Christ child. Talk about Herod's response and the Magi's response. What are the different kinds of responses to Jesus today?
4. Wrestle a bit with this - why did God ensure Jesus' safety, and yet so many children are harmed in our world through abuse, neglect, war and poverty.
5. N. T. Wright says, "Before the Prince of Peace had learned to walk and talk, he was a homeless refugee with a price on his head."³ How do you reconcile the peaceful nativity scenes on our mantels with the fear, danger, and horror that Matthew spells out? What does it mean to you that Jesus was both homeless and a refugee?
6. Rachel's weeping, and the passage from Jeremiah, while it is about deep tragedy, is also a reminder that God is on the move, that rescue is nearby. Even in the midst of this pain and tragedy, Matthew is hinting that Jesus will bring deliverance again. How might this reminder of Rachel's weeping, and the promise of deliverance, be a sign of hope for you in difficult circumstances?
7. N. T. Wright writes, "This is how Israel's redeemer was to appear; this is how God would set about liberating his people, and bringing justice to the whole world. No point in arriving in comfort, when the world is in misery; no point having an easy life, when the world suffers violence and injustice! If he is to be Emmanuel, God-with-us, he must be with us where the pain is."⁴ Where would Emmanuel be born today?
8. The Magi gave incredible gifts to Jesus; their time, their worship, their devotion, their material gifts. They risked their lives and their reputations. What gifts are you giving to Jesus? Take time this week to look at your own life and devotion to Christ.

³ Wright, N. T.

⁴ Wright, p. 14-15

Closing

- 1) What questions do you have about Jesus? Start a list of questions your group has about Jesus, and re-visit them from time to time during this study to see if you have discovered answers. Send some of your questions to Pastor Karen Bruins, who will be blogging about the questions throughout this study. kbruins@thewellmn.church
- 2) What is God calling you to do, to change or to be, as a result of the passage you studied today?

Prayer Requests

Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer

Lord God of the universe, how amazing it is that you chose to come to us in-the-flesh as a tiny babe. You entered a dangerous world in the most vulnerable of ways. Give us courage to follow you boldly. May we have the faithfulness of Joseph, the love of Mary and the devotion of the Magi.

Week Two - Matthew 3:1-17

Icebreakers - pick between one or more of the following questions. Be sure to introduce yourself before answering.

- 1) Have you been baptized? If so where? How old were you?
- 2) Have you been a baptism sponsor for someone, or perhaps a parent who presented their child for baptism? What were your hopes and dreams as you stood beside this person/baby in baptism?
- 3) If you would like to learn more about baptism, please contact one of the pastors. They'd be happy to meet with you!

Read Matthew 3:1-17

Ministry of John the Baptist

1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea announcing,

2 "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" **3** He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said:

The voice of one shouting in the wilderness,

"Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight."

4 John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. **5** People from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and all around the Jordan River came to him. **6** As they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. **7** Many Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized by John. He said to them, "You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? **8** Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. **9** And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones. **10** The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire. **11** I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. **12** The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out."

Baptism of Jesus

13 At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him. **14** John tried to stop him and said, "I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?" **15** Jesus answered, "Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness." So John agreed to baptize Jesus. **16** When Jesus was baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. **17** A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him."

Study Notes

- It has been 400 years since there has been a prophet in Israel. That is a long, long time for people to be waiting and watching.
- Wilderness/Desert - pay attention when you see the wilderness or desert as a setting for a story. Prophets often went to the desert to teach because it was

safer to teach there, than in one of the cities. In the Bible, God has a long history of using time in the wilderness/desert to shape and mold God's people. The people of Israel spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness! Jesus will spend time in the wilderness before he begins his public ministry.

- Chapter 3 opens with John the Baptist preaching repentance and baptizing in the wilderness of Judea (3:1-12). He rejects Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism because of their unworthiness (3:7-10), and attempts to reject Jesus as a candidate for baptism because of his super-worthiness (v. 14).
- John the Baptist (called Baptist because he baptized people in repentance) fits with the long standing tradition of Biblical prophets who called people to turn from their sinful ways (their personal sinful ways and their nation's sinful ways) and turn to God. He eats locusts and wild honey, some of the few ritually "clean" foods he could find in the wilderness. His food choices, and his clothing choices, show that he has turned away from the world with its self-indulgence and greed.
- Why would Jesus, who was without sin, need to be baptized?
- The Jews believed that Elijah would return before the Messiah came and that he would announce the coming of the King. (Malachi 4:5)
- John wore a camel hair coat and a leather belt, and seemed to fit the description of Elijah. (found in 2 Kings 1:8)
- What's with all the talk about road construction? Roads were often in very bad shape. Before a king came through the area, construction crews were sent out to prepare the way. They would literally fill in the pot holes and smooth down the high spots in the road. John was preparing the way for a new king.
- "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." MT 3:2. Jesus will use this exact same phrase when he begins his ministry. MT 4:17. The Old Testament prophets called the nation of Israel to repent, to turn back to God. John is calling people to turn away from their personal sins and turn to God. It is important to keep both ways (communal and personal) in mind when you think about repentance. To repent means to change direction, to turn around. It's more than just turning from sin, it involves turning toward something, toward God, to the fullness of Shalom that God desires for us as individuals and for our world.
- John calls out the need for repentance wherever he sees it; from calling out the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt 3:7) to calling out Herod's family.
- After John's threat comes a promise, the promise of the one who is coming, who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The word for spirit is "ruach" in Hebrew, which means breath, wind, or spirit. Wind means power. Think of the power of a wind turbine to produce electricity. Another image for the Holy Spirit is fire, which has the power to burn, and to burn away the chaff. If there is a farmer in the group, ask them to talk about the process of separating the wheat from the chaff.
- The Spirit was present in creation. Just as God's spirit brought forth the water, land and animals, so God can recreate us. The Holy Spirit helps us discern truth, and to recognize God's truth. The Holy Spirit is also called the Comforter, as it both convicts and consoles. In verse 16, another image for the Holy Spirit, the dove, appears.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your first impression of John the Baptist? What must life have been like for him out in the wilderness?
2. How do you think religious leaders reacted when John called them a "brood of vipers"?
3. Why does John feel unworthy to baptize Jesus?
4. Why do you think Jesus chose to be baptized? Could Jesus have been relating to the people who were in need of the baptism of repentance? Jesus has a way of humbling himself, to take on flesh, to be among us, to be one of us.
5. Who has been a John the Baptist in your life? How did they prepare you to meet Jesus?
6. Who are today's Pharisees and Sadducees?
7. Are there any John the Baptists in the world today, calling the nation to repentance, as did the Old Testament prophets?
8. Read Micah 6:8 and discuss how this is a prophetic call not just to individuals but also to nations.
9. Read Matthew 3:16-17 again. For whom was the dove sent? Was it for the people? Was it for John? Was it for Jesus himself?
10. Matthew 3:17 says that a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him." (CEB version) What does it mean that God finds happiness in Jesus? Does God find happiness in us? When? What causes God to be happy in us?
11. "This is my Son, whom I dearly love." How would these words affect the different people who heard it? (John the Baptist, the crowd, the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus himself). What would hearing those words have meant to Jesus, knowing he was about to embark on public ministry in which people would reject him?
12. Do you think Jesus, at this very beginning point in his ministry, knew how his story would end? Or do you think his understanding of things unfolded as his life went on? Does it matter to you if he knew from the very beginning?

Closing

What questions do you have about Jesus? Start a list of questions your group has about Jesus, and re-visit them from time to time during this study to see if you have discovered answers. Send some of your questions to Pastor Karen Bruins, who will be blogging about the questions throughout this study. kbruins@thewellmn.church. What is God calling you to do, to change or to be, as a result of the passage you studied today?

Prayer Requests

Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer

Saving God, as you called your people long ago to repentance, and to turning toward you and the fullness of your Shalom, so you call us today. Thank you for the hope and promise of Jesus. Help us be John the Baptists this week, pointing the way for others to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Week Three - Matthew 4:1-17

Icebreakers - pick from these questions, or come up with one of your own.

1. Which is more tempting, something salty or something sweet? Why?
2. When you were seven years old, what tempted you? Does that still tempt you today? When you were seventeen years old, what tempted you? Does that still tempt you today? You could keep going by decade if you wish.
3. Are you afraid of heights?

Read Matthew 4:1-17

Temptation of Jesus

1 Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. **2** After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. **3** The tempter came to him and said, "Since you are God's Son, command these stones to become bread." **4** Jesus replied, "It's written, *People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*" **5** After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, **6** "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*" **7** Jesus replied, "Again it's written, *Don't test the Lord your God.*" **8** Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** He said, "I'll give you all these if you bow down and worship me." **10** Jesus responded, "Go away, Satan, because it's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*" **11** The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

Move to Galilee

12 Now when Jesus heard that John was arrested, he went to Galilee. **13** He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. **14** This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said: **15** *Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, alongside the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, 16 the people who lived in the dark have seen a great light, and a light has come upon those who lived in the region and in shadow of death. 17* From that time Jesus began to announce, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!"

Study Notes

- Review last week's study notes about the spiritual significance of the wilderness/desert.
- The text says he was in the wilderness for 40 days. In the Bible, 40 is generic for "a long time".
- This is only Jesus' first temptation. "Conflict with Satan... is the underlying aspect of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, which is the plot of the whole Gospel of Matthew" .⁵ Throughout his ministry, Jesus will experience conflict with religious authorities. Peter will tempt Jesus to avoid the cross (Matthew 16:23). Jesus will commend the disciples for standing by him in his trials (Luke 22:28). At Gethsemane, Jesus will struggle with temptation once again (Luke 22:42-44).

⁵ Boring, M. Eugene, *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995)

- Each time the tempter tries to tempt Jesus he answers with Scripture. The particular texts Jesus used to answer the tempter are interesting; they all come from the story of Israel in the wilderness. N. T. Wright suggests, "Jesus had to come through the waters of baptism, like Israel crossing the Red Sea. He now had to face, in forty days and nights the equivalent of Israel's forty years in the desert. But, where Israel failed again and again, Jesus succeeded. Here at last is a true Israelite, Matthew is saying. He has come to do what God always wanted Israel to do - to bring light to the world (see verse 16)."⁶
- The highest point of the temple is 100 cubits (150 feet or 46 meters) high, the height of a modern 15-story building.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the temptation? Could Jesus have failed? Why or why not? Jesus is both fully human and fully divine, how does this impact your answer?
2. Hebrews 4:15 says, ". . . we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin." Does that change your answer to question #1? Why or why not?
3. The first two temptations both play off of the response of God to Jesus' baptism (you are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.) Why do you think the tempter started with things about Jesus' identity as the son of God?
4. The temptation of hunger - with Jesus out in the wilderness for forty days, with few food resources, he would have been hungry. What kinds of hunger do we experience? Physical hunger surely, but what other hungers? How does Jesus' response to the tempter guide us when we are experiencing "hunger"? Have you heard the expression "Hangry"? How can be physically or spiritually hungry make us cranky? How can it lead us to making poor decisions?
5. What tool did Jesus use to answer back to each temptation? (Scripture). How can Scripture give you power to fight temptation?
6. The CEB version uses the phrase, "Since you are the God's Son". Other translations say, "If you are the Son of God". The tempter uses a strategy of trying to get Jesus to question who he was. Does the tempter do the same thing to us?
7. The tempter uses three temptations against Jesus. What are they? Why would those temptations have appealed to Jesus (or to us)? What price would Jesus pay if he were to give in to the temptation?
8. What human need is at the heart of each temptation?
9. The tempter tempts Jesus' physical hunger, yet he does not give in. Later in the gospels we read of Jesus feeding multitudes, who had spiritual hungers, yes, but he also fed them spiritually. What do you make of him feeding body and soul? What does this mean for us as a church?
10. The tempter tries to get Jesus to worship him. Is this true today too? What does it look like?
11. V. 7 - Do you think we put God to the test? How do we do it? Why?

⁶ Wright, N. T. , *Matthew for Everyone - Part One*. (Great Britain Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge)

Closing

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2. What is God calling you to do, to change or to be, as a result of the passage you studied today?

Prayer Requests

Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer

Loving Lord, the things of this world are so shiny, so tempting.

When we feel tempted this week, help us to remember Jesus' example, and to fight temptation with the truth of God's Word.

Help us to pay attention to those times when we are spiritually hungry, relationally hungry, hungry for attention, hungry for a sense of self worth. And during those times, O Lord, turn our hearts toward you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Week Four - Matthew 5:1-20 The Beatitudes

Icebreakers - pick from these questions, or come up with one of your own.

1. What makes you happy?
2. What is your favorite spice for cooking?

Read Matthew 5:1-20 Common English Bible (CEB)

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. **2** He taught them, saying:

3 "Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

4 "Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

5 "Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

6 "Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

7 "Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

8 "Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

9 "Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children.

10 "Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11 "Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. **12** Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.

Salt and light

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. **14** You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden.

15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus and the Law

17 "Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them. **18** I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality. **19** Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Study Notes

- In Matthew, the Beatitudes are found in chapter 5, from the Sermon on the Mount. In Luke they are in chapter 6:20 "from the Sermon on the Plain". Matthew's sermon on the mount is longer running from chapter 5-7. Beyond the Beatitudes, it has teachings on salt/light, the Law, murder, adultery, oaths, love for enemies, care for the poor, prayer, worry, judging others and more.
- Matthew's is a teaching Gospel. He begins Jesus' ministry with the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), the first of five major teaching sections (see also 10:5--11:1; 13:1-53; 18:1 --19:1; 24:3--26:1).
- The Sermon on the Mount is more likely a collection of sermons/teachings than a teaching that took place over several days.
- Notice the position from which Jesus taught in MT 5:2. He *sat down*. Teachers of the Law would sit to explain the law. Some scholars compare Jesus' teaching from a mountain to Moses' giving the law from a mountain (Exodus 24:12).
- Each Beatitude begins with the Greek word, *makarios*, which is usually translated "blessed" or "happy." "Blessed" is preferable because of its religious connotations - blessedness is a gift of God. We use "happy" more broadly, often in ways that contradict the Beatitudes... in ways that celebrate our power or the satisfaction of our appetites.
- The Beatitudes are about how we relate with God and other people. The first four beatitudes (poor in spirit, mourn, meek, and hunger and thirst for righteousness) describe the heart of the person who is in a right relationship with God. The remaining beatitudes (merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and the persecuted) describes a person in right relationship with other people.
- The poor in spirit, those who stand in total dependence before God, are also disposed to mourn for a Godless world, to approach others in a spirit of gentleness, to hunger and thirst for righteousness ...and so forth.
- *Ptochoi* means abject poverty. True poverty is a cruel thing. It breaks people. They suffer. Confronted daily with their own helplessness, they know the difference that even a small act of mercy can make. They watch eagerly for a gesture or a glance that might promise help. They long for a bit of kindness. They crave a bit of dignity.
- "Standing before God, the poor in spirit are like that. They know that they bring nothing in their hands that God needs and nothing in their hearts that compels God to accept them. They bring their poverty, hoping for sustenance. They bring their brokenness, hoping for mending. They bring their sin, hoping to receive forgiveness. They bring their grief, hoping to be comforted. They bring their illness, hoping to be healed. They do not come bargaining, because they have nothing to offer. Their *ptochoi* - poverty of spirit - has broken them, making them fertile soil to receive God's blessing."⁷
- Matthew 5:4 blessed are those who grieve, for they will be comforted. The word for comforter here is *paraclete* meaning a comforter or helper in times of need.

⁷ Donovan, Richard. Matthew 5:1-11. Lectionary. com

- Matthew 5:5 in many translations says, "Blessed are the meek". Meek is a word that doesn't translate easily into English. Pastor Karen likes this definition for meekness - "velvet covered steel". Jesus was humble, he was meek in the best sense of the word, but meekness does not mean timid. Jesus says in Matthew 11:29 - "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
- The word for "mercy" is richer than just feeling mercy, it moves beyond sympathy to action.
- Pure means more than just clean. It means to have an undivided heart, a heart fully devoted to God.
- Peacemakers - Peace. This is the Biblical concept of Shalom, which is more than just the absence of conflict. It is the fullness of the world as God intends. It literally translates as "completeness" or "wholeness".
- Notice the shift in verse 11. Before this, Jesus had used "blessed are they", but now it shifts to "you".
- Salt and Light - was a preservative along with a seasoning.

Discussion Questions

1. Matthew uses the word "Happy" in the Beatitudes. Other versions of Matthew, and the gospel of Luke, use the word "Blessed". What does each word mean to you? Does it matter to you which verse a translator used?
2. The Beatitudes are not multiple choice. Which Beatitude are you living out already? In which Beatitude would you like to grow?
3. Go through each of the Beatitudes. How does Jesus exemplify this Beatitude?
4. How would you describe the opposite of each Beatitude?
5. Matthew's Beatitude says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (MT 5:2 NRSV), while Luke's says, "Blessed are the poor." (Luke 6:20). Is there a difference between the two translations to you? Why?
6. How would you hear the Beatitudes if you were truly poor, hungry, grieving, hated/excluded, persecuted? What groups in society would you name as experiencing these things and why? Whose role is it to care for these persons; individuals, the government, churches, pastors? nations? Why do you feel the way you do about who should be standing in solidarity with those who are experiencing these things?
7. Is there a public figure, living or dead (you can't pick Jesus) who is a good model of the Beatitudes? Can you think of a person you know personally who is a good model for living out the Beatitudes?
8. How many lamps or lights do you have in your home? Imagine your home without any lights: no lamps, no blue numbers on a television or DVD, no microwave or stove clocks, no digital numbers on a phone. Imagine what a dark, dark night would be like. What does it mean to say "let your light shine"?
9. How does The Well do at living out the Beatitudes? Which one(s) does The Well do pretty well? Which one(s) do we need to work on? Why?

Closing

What questions do you have about Jesus? Start a list of questions your group has about Jesus, and re-visit them from time to time during this study to see if you have discovered answers. Send some of your questions to Pastor Karen Bruins, who will be blogging about the questions throughout this study. kbruins@thewellmn.church
What is God calling you to do, to change or to be, as a result of the passage you studied today?

Prayer Requests

Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, our Bread from Heaven and our Living Water, we ask that you would so satisfy our hunger that we stop looking to idols to feed us.

Please don't numb our hunger, for you gave us food and water so that we would daily understand how needy we are.

Instead, cause us to be ravenous for you.

Let nothing in this world slake our thirst but your presence.

We confess that we hunger for the gifts of this world, instead of the giver. And yet you sent your son to feed us, to give us life even as we wander in the desert.

Cause your people to crave the righteousness that can only be found in Jesus.

Stir in us a desire to know and love you, to make the things of this world strangely dim in the light of your glory and grace.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.