

Daily Spiritual exercise



Family

Last week I introduced you to “women” who appear in the genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew 1. In the 21st century, Jesus’s genealogy appears normal. Many of us have “family members” that we tend not to mention. We all have family secrets.

In Jesus’ time it was totally different. They measured people by being honourable or shameful. Honour expressed your social standing which could have been inherited/ascribed (being a member of an honourable family or clan with your genealogy as proof) or acquired (how you acted in public through challenge and response). Genealogies were important to establish your identity and honour. Usually in the Biblical genealogies, no women would have been mentioned. In Jesus’s genealogy there are 5 women mentioned, namely Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary – three foreigners, one prostitute and an adulteress.

The first readers of Matthew’s Gospel would have been shocked to find out that Jesus came from a shameful and ill-reputed family! This was intentional as Matthew was trying to make the point that God does not choose “perfect” people as His disciples. He calls people who are faithful and willing to be His servants of love.

In lockdown many people are using their time to research the genealogy of their families using online research websites and retrieving their old photos from the attic – reminiscing on quality family gatherings and trying to figure out the identity of long forgotten family members. I am sure there are many who discover shameful old secrets and family scandals along the way. But as believers, we do not have to be ashamed. God loves us – full stop! He commanded us to love HIM, ourselves and others too! Amen

Monday 18 May 2020

Matthew 1:1 “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

Heavenly Father,
please bless our
families with Your
love and protect
us from harm.
Give us grace to
forgive, strength
to overcome the
difficulties we
face and keep us
together when
the world tries to
pull us apart.

Amen



Daily Spiritual exercise



Debt

In a recent news article, it was reported that the chancellor warned that "The UK faces a significant recession", after figures showed the economy shrank by 2% in the first three months of the year." (<https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-uk-facing-significant-recession-chancellor-warns-after-gdp-falls-2-11987378>) Articles like this make us worry about our income and job security. We wonder and worry whether we will have enough money to feed our families and provide all their basic needs. We wonder if we will have jobs to return to in the aftermath of Covid-19. We worry about debts and whether we will be able to repay them.

In the New Testament Jesus used parables to criticise certain ill practises that existed in an oppressive and conflicted society controlled by the Roman authorities. In all cases Jesus is urging His followers to show mercy to anyone who owes them debt. In Matthew 18:23-35 the "king" showed mercy to one of his servants who owed him bags of gold. He wrote off his debt. But when this servant went out, he did not show mercy to someone else who owed him much less than he owed the king. Instead he ordered him to be thrown into prison until he could pay off his debt. The standard Hellenistic-Roman procedure for dealing with insolvency was to either imprison the "debtor" or to sell the debtor and his family as slaves. Torture was against the Jewish law. Jesus advocated mercy, forgiveness and grace.

As believers we have a moral and Christian responsibility to help our brothers and sisters who are in financial need. We are called by our Lord and Saviour to show "mercy and grace" by either writing off debts (if possible) or giving people the time and opportunity to repay their debts. We should not be more interested in financial gain at the expense of our brothers and sisters in need. As believers we should be leading the world in how to deal with debt through our examples of mercy, grace and love. Amen

Tuesday 19 May 2020

Matthew 18:25-27

"Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go."

Heavenly Father,
I come before you
today to ask for a
financial blessing to
improve my life. I only
ask for enough money
to relieve my financial
woes and ease this
stress. Give me the
means to do your
work, and spread your
Love.

Amen



Daily Spiritual exercise



Worries

In one sentence Jesus tells His followers and listeners not to worry and in the next that “each day brings troubles of its own”. It dawned upon me that what He was trying to tell his listeners, and us, is that God provides in many ways. He looks after creation and sustains everything. We as humans need to trust Him unconditionally just as nature does. Then He explains this by means of a powerful picture, namely that of the lilies. He says to his listeners, and us, to look at the lilies of the field. He sustains the lilies despite the desert-like conditions. He provides the means for them to grow. Jesus is urging his followers that they must first seek the kingdom of God. He is telling them that they need to focus on the things that they really need in life and not necessarily the things that they want. They need the presence of God in everything they do. Sometimes they must trust him unconditionally like the lilies which He sustains despite the desert-like conditions. They must give God priority in everything they do. God will provide all their needs!

Life is not simple and most of the time it is a constant struggle to make sense of everything that happens to us, especially now. Sometimes we get impatient with God. We know that we need to be more trusting. For everything there is a season. In Spring the daffodils appear after a long winter. Just like the daffodils, we know that after every trying situation, after a long winter, there will be blessings and joy. In Africa we used to say, “if a door closes in your face a new journey starts to find the open window”. God will provide what we need and not necessarily what we want! But we must trust him enough to know it will be for the best. We cannot pray for a Mercedes Benz if we do not have a valid driving licence. To worry constantly is not a good option. Instead we need to find ways to channel our worries so that the worries become opportunities for action and change, especially when we ask God for His help! Amen

Wednesday 20 May
2020

Matthew 6:25-27

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?’

Dear Father, Help me to not worry about tomorrow but instead focus on what you’re doing in my life right now. I want to trust in your promise to take care of every one of my needs — financial, relational, physical, social, spiritual, and emotional. Help me to trust you more and worry less. I pray in Jesus’ Name.
Amen

MR. WORRY

By Roger Hargreaves



Daily Spiritual exercise



Disease

In Biblical times disease or illness would have been viewed as the punishment for sins committed, hence the practise of ritual cleansing. The authors of the biblical texts lived at a time before any human being understood the causes of illness in terms of bacterial or viral contamination. They lived in a pre-scientific age, and it was easier to blame "sin" as the root of a disease or illness. Today we know it is not sin that causes disease.

To say that they did not understand social distancing and the dangers of cross contamination, would be an untruth. They experienced first-hand the dangers of certain diseases/plagues that seemed to be spreading along lines of human contact and made sure that all people who suffered from disease had to stay outside the walls of cities. The "infected" also had to warn all people who approached them by shouting out loudly, "unclean, unclean!". According to Leviticus 13 and 14 all the walls of the infected houses should be washed, left uninhabitable for 7 days and clothes should be burnt. They were not blind to the dangers of cross-contamination.

Unfortunately, they did not have the medical science to prove that leprosy was not contagious and only a form of skin disease like eczema. The leprosy in biblical times is not the same leprosy of modern times caused by the organism *Mycobacterium leprae* which is also called "Hansen's disease". Modern leprosy/ Hansen's disease targets the skin, respiratory mucous membrane, eyes, and the peripheral nervous system. While the Bible does not **per se** tell us anything about Covid-19, it does tell us how to be sensible and safe. The cleansing laws in the Old Testament were noticeably clear and, in the process, saved many lives. It also says something about caring for your neighbour despite the sacrifices being made. Amen

Thursday
21 May 2020

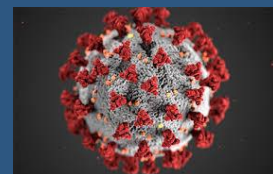
Leviticus 13:45-46

"Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall [a]dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp."

Lord, we admit that we are afraid. The spread of the Corona virus is happening rapidly and throughout the world. We do not know what will happen next or how we will be impacted. We want to fiercely cling to control or somehow prepare more fully, yet we know that You are ultimately in control of our lives.

Help us to focus on Your Holy presence in the days to come.

Amen



Daily Spiritual exercise



Mourning/Bereavement

In Old Testament times the people had no faith in a resurrection after death. The Old Testament often referred to *Sheol* or the underworld as the place where the departed would gather. There is a reference after the Babylonian exile, of a belief that there would be a resurrection of the dead (see Daniel 12:2). It is only in the New Testament, after the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus that believers have the living hope of inheriting the Kingdom of God. Usually the funerals took place immediately after dying, even on the same day. This could have been due to the hot climate. The only exception would be if it happened on the Sabbath day or another Holy Day. They usually washed the bodies, wrapped them in linen and carried them to a cave. It was regarded as shameful not to bury the bodies of the departed. Mourning the departed was an essential part of any funeral which "formally" lasted for seven days. The family would lament by wailing and crying, even torturing themselves. They would tear their clothing and put ash on their heads as a sign of their grief. No wonder they had "professional mourners" who also were called the "singing men and women" (2 Chronicles 35:25). Their laments were usually accompanied by musical instruments with the flute as the preferred instrument of mourning (Jeremiah 48:36).

In our day people often forget how important it is to mourn the death of a loved one. I am astounded when people say to the bereaved "they must just get on with it" or "why is it taking so long". The people in biblical times made sure that they said their farewells in a structured and meaningful way. They understood that mourning formed an important part of the healing process after death, which we often miss.

Amen

Friday 22 May 2020

Job 2:8

"Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes."

God our refuge and
strength, close at hand
in our distress.
meet us in our sorrow
and lift our eyes
to the peace and light
of your constant care.
Help us so to hear your
word of grace
that our fear will be
dispelled by your love,
our loneliness eased by
your presence
and our hope renewed
by your promises
in and through Jesus
Christ our Lord.

Amen

