

## **Bible Sunday**

### **A sermon Preached by Emma Hodge on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020 at St. Michael & All Angels Church, Sandhurst**

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

Amen

Today is Bible Sunday, the day each year where we think about what the bible means to us, and give bibles to children going into year 3 at school who come to St. Michael's church; and in preparation for this week's service I asked you all to think of your favourite bible story and why.

Are there any volunteers to share their favourite bible story and the reasons it is their favourite?

#Feedback

No? Perhaps you may have chosen a well-known story, one you may have heard as a child such as the good Samaritan, or perhaps you may have chosen one slightly more obscure, such as the one of Miriam leading the people in worship.

I wonder if any of you had trouble deciding on what your favourite bible story was? I know I did, there are so many to choose from, and so many different types, from the story of creation, to the historical stories (one of which we will be studying in the next few weeks – the story of Nehemiah) to the parables of Jesus; to name just a few,

While I was considering which was my favourite bible story, I tried a different angle, I stopped and worked out what I enjoy most about a particular story, it is the ones where there are questions that are raised, the questions could be as simple as "what happens next?" or they could be more complex such as what was the culture that the story happened? Did that person act within the societal norms of their time or were they different? What would it have felt like if I was actually there when the story occurred?

I also find that sometimes more questions are raised when I read the story in a different version, as each version is slightly different and sometimes different words are used.

Our first Old Testament reading, may be familiar to many from the King James version,

### *1<sup>st</sup> Old Testament Reading*

Our first Old Testament reading from the prophet Isaiah is one that we may associate with advent, and not mid-September, and Handel famously set it to music in his oratorio the Messiah “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, Saith your God”, and it is a passage that goes on to fore-tell the birth of John the Baptist some 6 centuries before it actually happened; and this was my question about the passage, (how long was it between the prophecy being made and the prophecy being fulfilled)

However today, I do not want to focus on the prophecy from Isaiah about John the Baptist and Jesus being born, instead I want to focus on a couple of verse after this, verses six to 8,

These words are clear, that we shouldn't listen to earthly people, we should only listen to God, and those who speak his word. Isaiah uses the analogy that many people both then and now will be familiar with, that of plants, and how they are short lived. We see this in our gardens, our parks, flowers come into bud, the buds then open and then they bloom, but after this, the petals fall off and the flowers are no more. Isaiah is relating this to the celebrities, those who people pay attention to, but are not speaking God's word. Their words last for a short time, but God's word lasts for ever, far longer than a flower.

### *If we now turn to our Gospel Reading*

The reading from Matthew's gospel builds on the theme of God's word lasting forever when Jesus states that he has come to fulfil the law and the prophets. However our gospel reading is not only looking backwards to the Old Testament. When Jesus states this, it is a statement about who he is, and the fact that he is not just a wondering rabbi, one that, as Isaiah

put it, would wither and fade like flowers and grass, but as he is the son of God, what Jesus would say would endure for ever.

The words in the gospel reading may be familiar to us, and are no surprise, but I want you to imagine that you were hearing Jesus speak them for the first time. Matthew wrote his Gospel for a mainly Jewish audience so as you listen to Jesus speak the words assume that you are familiar with the Old Testament, the law and prophets, in the culture of the time, there would have been several rabbis who were not attached to a particular place but instead wandered around teaching as they went. In Jewish culture there is the waiting for the Messiah to come.

Jesus saying that he has come to fulfil the law and the prophets is not what a wondering rabbi would have said. What is your reaction when you hear the words “I have come to fulfil the law and the prophets”? Excitement because this is the messiah, unbelief, wondering if you heard it correctly?

This is not the end as the passage moves on and in the next verse, Jesus looks forward to the end of the age, which is still to come. We don't know when the end of the age will come, only that it is some time in the future.

Jesus reinforces that all of scripture, both the Old Testament, and what he is speaking and doing, is relevant then and now, and will continue to be relevant until the end of the age.

A reminder to all of us, that we need to read the bible, read God's word. Read and understand it, and by implication, apply it to our lives.

Our *second Old Testament reading* is from one of the books of the Torah, the book of Deuteronomy.

The question that I asked when looking at this passage was “What comes before?” and before this passage is the ten commandments, which appears both in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

The passage reinforces how important scripture is and it encourages not just reading scripture, something that could be done on their own, but makes it a community activity by encouraging of teaching to others, especially to children, but also to discuss it with families and friends.

The reading goes even further, it says to proclaim them to the wider community, by writing them where people can see them.

The importance of these verse can't be under-estimated, in Jewish culture, these verses are the start of an important prayer.

As Christians living in 21<sup>st</sup> century we have a wide range of ways we can learn the scriptures, we can read them, study them with bible commentaries, use daily bible notes to name just a few. We can also join house groups so that we can discuss them and we can share them with our families.

I want to leave you with these thoughts

God word is still relevant today, as Isaiah put it  
*The grass withers and the flowers fall,  
but the word of our God endures forever*

It doesn't matter which version of the bible we use, all are slightly different and what is best for one person, may not be best for another person. What is important, is that we read the bible so that we know God's word, ask questions about it and discuss it with others.

You may like to this week, re-read your favourite bible story and consider what question you would ask about the story.

I started this sermon by saying that children going into year 3 will receive a bible today, as everyone leaves church today, I would ask you all to pick up a book mark (to be COVID safe, please only touch the bookmark you actually take),