

and crucifixion, is responding to his disciples' anxiety about the future, and he does so by contrasting their present with the future that God has planned for them - a future that begins now, in this life, but which will be experienced in all its fullness when Jesus returns.

3. What constrasts (now - then) can you identify in this passage? In what ways are these relevant to us now - how do they encourage and reassure us?

Read: Revelation 21:1-5

4. In this beautiful picture of God's future, what most resonates with you, what most touches or moves you - and why do you think that is?

Read: Isaiah 6:1-5; Rev. 21:22-27

Consider this:

A fully biblical world view requires that we hold tightly to three things . . . First, the goodness and God-giveness of the present creation: the whold world is full of YHWH's (God's) glory, and any attempt to suggest that the created order is bad or shabby is a denial of that glorious truth. But, second, as Isaiah protests, the world is also full of radical evil, of human wickedness . . . to deny that is to live in a sentimental cloud-cuckoo-land. Sometimes . . . this second truth is allowed to trump the first, so that the evil in the world blots out the recognition of goodness, of the presence of the creator's glory. But, thirdly and vitally, biblical books from Isaiah to Revelation, and not least the great New Testament theologians Paul and John, speak of new heavens and a new earth. And when they do do, they speak in particular of the New Jerusalem . . . a city that comes down from heaven to earth, in the final fulfilment of Jesus' prayer.⁵

After death, this is what we look forward to - God's purpose, God's future, God's glory.

Notes:

1. Thiselton, A. C. (2012). *The Last Things: a new approach*. SPCK.
2. Merrill, E. H. (1994). *Deuteronomy*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.
3. Thiselton, A. C. (2006). *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
4. Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24). Broadman & Holman Publishers.
5. Wright, N.T. (2014). *Surprised by Scripture*. Harper Collins. p.201

St Peter's Anglican Church

Wanneroo

Bible Study Notes

~ for use by individuals or home groups

Weeks beginning

June 5th, 12th and 19th, 2023

For each week the readings for the following Sunday are listed.

The reading which will be the focus of the sermon is shown as the main reading; the two additional readings for the 7.45am service are in *italics*.

Introduction

For the next three weeks we will be focusing on particular topics rather than on specific passages of scripture; these topics will be the focus of the sermons for the three Sundays. The passages set for the Bible readings at the Sunday services and for the home group studies are relevant to the topics, but there is much more in scripture that is relevant. The aim is to encourage thinking about these issues, and in discussion in home groups there is the opportunity to share something of your own understanding of the topics, and learn from (and challenge!) each other.

The topics are:

Stewardship - how we are to take care of and to use well all that God has given us? That's a challenge for us as individuals, as church communities, and of course for our wider society. The term 'stewardship' in a church context is often associated with money and with our financial giving to the church. This is an important part of our stewardship, our wise and generous use of all that God has given us in the service of the Kingdom of God. We have, however, been given far more than our material possessions—we have our time, our energy, our skills, our experience, and so on. How do we use those in the service of God's kingdom? How do we balance our own needs with our service of God's kingdom?

The 'Last Things' - death, and what follows after our death. The term 'the last things' traditionally refers to death, judgement, heaven, and hell - topics that we tend to leave in the 'too hard' basket. One of my favourite theologians, now aged in his eighties, published a book in 2012 that had the title 'The Last Things' and which began in this way:

There is a practical . . . element to the present book. The author is in his seventies, brought back to life after a near-fatal stroke. It remains a stunning source of perplexity, puzzle, and mystery why so many in their seventies, eighties and beyond, often seem less to contemplate the inevitability of death, which may come at any time, than many young people or previous generations. . . . Many . . . live life as if death did not exist. But this does not help us to live life to the full at all.¹

As with the topic of stewardship, we can't do more than scratch the surface of an enormous topic - but I hope we can open up some thinking and discussion.

Week beginning: 19th June, for Sunday 25th June

Main passage: John 16:16-24

Other readings: *Genesis 1:25 - 2:3; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; Revelation 21:1-4*

Theme: The Last Things: (1) Resurrection life - God's new creation

Christians sometimes talk about life after death as if it involves an escape from this world with its injustices, wars, suffering and pain. It's as if we will escape from this world, which is doomed, and go to another place called heaven. Some of our older hymns seem to reflect this. There's some truth in this picture: we will be in heaven with Jesus after we die. But that's not the whole story. God has not and will not abandon his creation. The picture scripture gives us is that when Jesus returns as Lord and Judge, God will renew his creation, restoring it to how he intends it to be - and Christians will receive new bodies, resurrection bodies, and enjoy God's renewed creation. One writer has coined the phrase 'life after life after death' to describe this wonderful future that is God's purpose for his creation.

1. **Before you read on, spend a few moments thinking about how you imagine the second coming, the return in glory, of Jesus.**

We are told that it will be *personal* and *visible*, Jesus himself will return (John 14:3, Acts 1:9-11, 1 Thess. 4:16); it will be *unexpected* (Matt. 24:42, 44; Luke 12:40; Ro. 13:11, 1 Thess. 5:6), and unlike the first coming of Jesus, it will be *triumphant and glorious* (Matt. 24:30, 1 Thess. 4:16), it will involve *judgement* (Matt. 25:31-46).

Read: Genesis 1:25-2:3

A very familiar passage of scripture: but try to read it as if you were reading/hearing it for the first time.

2. **What is this telling us about God's creation? What stands out for you?**

Read: John 16:16-24

Jesus, talking in the Upper Room with his disciples before his arrest

2. In vv.17-19 Paul suggests that if there is no resurrection, if Christ was not raised, then we are in the same boat as unbelievers and our 'faith' is a waste of time (see v.32b). The resurrection of Jesus is central and foundational for the Christian faith - because it happened, *and* because of what it means for us, the hope it gives us. Our understanding of death and how we respond to it is therefore shaped above all by the resurrection of Jesus and by the promise of our resurrection.
3. Consider this: "The earliest Christians readily spoke of death as 'sleep' (v.18). For sleep not only comes to the weary and exhausted as rest but also contains within itself the very promise of awakening to a new day. How do we view death? Do we perceive it as an episode en route to the dawning of a glorious day when we shall see God face to face (13:12) in glory (15:54)."² - and, of course, in sleep we have no sense of time. **Do you find this quotation helpful? Does it fit with the way you see death?**
4. In v.19 Paul states that without resurrection "we are of all people most to be pitied". **What do you understand him to mean by this? Should this perhaps be more of a motivation for our witness to others, for evangelism, than it is?**

Read: Luke 23:32-43

One commentator states of the repentant criminal that he "did nothing to deserve it, but he went from a sinner's cross to the arms of God in a moment". He didn't have any of the usual 'qualifications' which show someone to be a Christian, is 'saved', but in his heart he recognized and responded to Jesus - the Holy Spirit at work!

5. The word translated as 'paradise' often refers to a park or garden, and only occurs here, in 2 Cor. 12:4, and in Rev. 2:7; some scholars suggest that it links back to the garden in Gen.2:8 with the 'tree of life' - a garden of joy and pleasure. **What thoughts does this bring to mind for you about what happens when we die?**
6. "The criminal would experience salvation. He would not 'today' experience the resurrection, for the resurrection of the dead will only occur at the second coming of Jesus. Whatever the temporary state may have been, however, he would have a conscious experience with Jesus in paradise." **Does this view fit with your understanding?** Consider also the parable of Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31.

Week beginning: 5th June, for Sunday 11th June

Main passage: Luke 20:45 - 21:4

Other readings: Deuteronomy 14:22-29; *Psalms 138, Romans 15:23-29*

Theme: Stewardship — A Christian Lifestyle

Read: Deuteronomy 14:22-29

The Old Testament practice of tithing – giving a tenth, and the best, of an individual's or family's produce or income – has a number of features. Tithing –

- ♦ served the purpose of "instilling within the Israelite a proper reverence for the Lord as the Sovereign, the one to whom he was ultimately accountable (v. 23)"¹;
- ♦ made provision for worship – v.27-28a;
- ♦ allowed provision to be made for the poor – v.28b;
- ♦ was a recognition that all we have comes from God, and that we are to trust him for all that we need in this life

In the Old Testament tithing was not optional, the Jewish law required it; and since the Israelites lived in circumstances where they were far more vulnerable than we are today, it would have been a challenge. We are not required to tithe in the literal 10% sense since we now live under grace, not under the law.

1. **When you think about the practice of tithing, what personal reaction to do you have? Does tithing have anything to teach us? Is it still a useful guide for us?**

Read: Luke 20:45 – 21:4

2. **In 20:45-47 Jesus has some strong words for the 'teachers of the law'. What do you think motivated the behaviour that Jesus was criticising? Are there similar traps for us as Christians today?**
3. **Was Jesus critical of the rich people he saw putting their gifts into the Temple treasury, or just making an observation?**
4. **Did Jesus establish a principle in 21:1-4 that should guide us in our giving? If so, how would you express that principle, and do you**

think it is (a) reasonable and (b) practical?

5. Are there any implications from these verses for our life as a Christian community at St Peter's?

Read: Romans 15:23-29

Paul shares his plans with the Romans. In v.24 he writes that he hopes "to have you assist me on my journey" (to Spain). We don't know whether that assistance was practical or financial. In vv.26-28 he describes a task he has of taking financial support from Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem, and spells out what he sees as an obligation for the Gentiles to assist Jewish Christians who are in need.

6. Do we at St Peter's think enough about supporting other Christians or churches, or are we too caught up in our own concerns and our own financial needs?

Read: Psalm 138

Vv.1-5 speak – *sing!* – of the wonders of God's love, goodness and faithfulness, which should lead all to "*sing of the ways of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord is great*" – v.5.

Then, in vv.6-8 the Psalmist reflects on God's goodness to him, an example of the qualities for which he believes God should be praised.

7. Do we give – whether our money or our time, energy and skills – from a sense of duty, or from a sense of gratitude for God's love for us and goodness to us?

Some general questions on stewardship:

8. Do we give as much thought to giving our 'talents' – our time, energy, and skills – in the Lord's service as we do with our money?
9. How could we be better stewards of our non-financial resources – time, energy, skills, etc.? How could we find a better balance between all the legitimate demands on our time and energy and 'putting the Lord first'?
10. In our giving, individually and as a Church, how well do we balance our financial giving between our own needs as a local church and other needs - such as missionary societies, overseas aid agencies, and welfare agencies helping those in need in Australia? What can guide us in making these decisions?

Week beginning: 12th June, for Sunday 18th June

Main passage: 1 Corinthians 15:12-26

Other readings: Luke 23:32-43; *Psalm 116:1-2, 10-19;*
Deuteronomy 32:48-52, 34:1-8;

Theme: The Last Things: (1) Death and beyond

In a 'Western' country such as Australia we live in a culture that is in many ways confused about death, perhaps even afraid of death. Death is all around us in popular entertainment - but whilst we see many dead bodies in movies, in real life many people rarely if ever see a dead person. Think too about the way we now refer to death as 'passing', and about moves towards 'assisted dying'. As Christians, we have - or should have - a distinctive view about death, but we easily slip into the prevailing social pattern of avoiding discussion of death.

Scripture does not give us a detailed 'road-map' of what we will experience after our death, but some things are clear:

- ◆ Death is inevitable and not to be feared by Christians - it is an enemy that has been overcome; we should however accept that we will die, and live our lives in the light of that reality.
- ◆ We will be with the Lord after we die: see Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:22-23 . . .
- ◆ . . . and this will be an 'intermediate state' until Jesus returns as judge and Lord of all, when we will receive our resurrection bodies in God's new creation.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-26

Paul is challenging, strongly, the way some in Corinth questioned the resurrection of Jesus, and of Christians. Some in Corinth seemed to believe that the resurrection of believers had already taken place in some spiritual sense (see 2 Tim. 2:18), others couldn't accept the idea of the resurrection of the body.

1. In vv.12-19, Paul points out the consequences of denying the resurrection of Jesus. What consequences does Paul identify?