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**Sunday 12 February 2023 to Sunday 19 February 2023**

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Sunday 12 February 2023

**Keep it simple**

by Ruth Olsen

### Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’, ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one (Matthew 5:37).

Read Matthew 5:21–37

Even though the crowds were coming to Jesus, in this chapter, Jesus is initially teaching his disciples (verse 1). The following verses spell out ways of living that are totally opposite to the ways of the world – and the thinking of the world is the ‘water’ we swim or live in here on earth, impacting us from day one.

Do you take notice of what you are thinking? How much are your thoughts influenced by advertising or what you watch or read or hear?

Do you notice what prompts you to self-indulgence and what moves you to care for others? Which of these are you pursuing?

The ways of God are continuously self-giving. The ways of the world are continuously self-grasping. Earlier in Matthew 5, Jesus calls us to be like salt and light right where we are (verses 13 to 16); because he came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them (verse 17). And then he tells us his perspective, his teaching from our heavenly Father’s perspective regarding murder, adultery, divorce and oaths. Then Jesus ups the ante: ‘anyone who is angry … who looks at a woman lustfully … who divorces … do not break your oath (vow) … ‘.

The law will not save us. It simply reveals our sin, our self-focus, our being ‘turned in on ourselves’, as Rev Dr Harry Wendt often speaks in the Crossways materials. Looking at self, we forget to look up or look out for others.

As Jesus says, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36). And:

‘I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth … who will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’ (John 14:16–18,26).

Our lives are no longer led by self-effort but through learning to follow our Helper, who teaches us Jesus’ perspective and moves us to walk in his radical ways, so different to the ways of the world.

**Lord Jesus, only you can enable me to keep it simple, to simply love with your love, to see life through your eyes, by the power of your Spirit. Please guide me, day by day.**

*Ruth is Steen’s other half, lives in Adelaide, and loves reading. From the Bible, books on Christian living, biographies, especially of someone’s journey of faith, through to Reader’s Digest, the Inquirer section of The Weekend Australian, or travel information etc., many things are opened through reading. That’s also why she enjoys helping Afghani women learn to read and write in English, when they were denied that opportunity with their own language as children.*

Monday 13 February 2023

**Come into the light**

by Ruth Olsen

***This is the verdict: Light has come into the world … whoever lives by the truth comes into the light… (John 3:19,21 NIV).***

Read John 3:16–21

God loves the world; he does not condemn the world but saves the world through Jesus. Whoever believes in him, who takes him at his word and trusts him, is given the gift of eternal life. And God’s desire is for **all people** to be saved, to come to know the One who is truth, whose truth sets us free (1 Timothy 2:4–6; John 14:6). That’s the Father’s heart for all humankind!

We are warned to not love the world, that is, the realm of sin with its cravings, lust and boasting, by which ‘the god of this age’ blinds people, to lead them astray (1 John 2:15–17; 2 Corinthians 4:4). The reason Jesus came was to destroy the devil’s work (1 John 3:8), that people may come to know the truth that sets us free (John 8:32,36).

So there’s tension, there’s a continuous battle from within and without, and we each make our choices every day, towards darkness or towards light. But John reminds us ‘… the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world’ (1 John 4:4–6). I am deeply grateful to the Spirit of truth, our Helper, who leads us into God’s truth, revealing to us the things of God that change, heal and transform us, so that we reflect Jesus to others around us – his light shining through us. That’s amazing!

Daily we are invited to come into the light. That may seem scary, because light reveals things of sin or wounding or hurt in us that we prefer to keep hidden. Without realising or recognising it, we continue to do what Adam and Eve, our first parents, did – to hide from the Lord (Genesis 3:1–11). What light does Jesus throw onto Genesis 3? Hasn’t he dealt with the curse for us? (See Galatians 3:13). As he said to Nicodemus, '... whoever lives by the truth comes into the light ...'.

***Lord Jesus, light from God, who sets free from the curse and condemnation all who trust in you, we thank you, praise you, worship you, and bless you!***

Tuesday 14 February 2023

**John’s testimony**

by Ruth Olsen

***He must become greater; I must become less (John 3:30 NIV).***

Read John 3:22–36

Have you learnt to walk in humility? What helped you learn that?

I am struck in these verses by the humility of John the Baptist. He does not claim centre stage, where his disciples think he should be, but steps aside and points people to the One he describes as ‘the Bridegroom’, the Christ. What’s more, John is full of joy when he hears what Jesus and his disciples are doing.

Any parent of a 2–4 year-old knows the challenges of helping their little one learn that they are not centre stage in everything. As adults, we still tend to struggle as we learn that ‘it’s not all about me’ – that there is a bigger picture of what God is doing in the world, even in our time. Discipline is needed to help us learn to let go of our own wants, to instead give room to others. Paradoxically, submitting to discipline helps us discover that we really are sons and daughters; we are loved when healthy boundaries are applied. Enduring hardship is part of the process of discipline (Hebrews 12:4–11). It’s not fun at the time, but it helps us grow in humility.

Jesus also walked this road (Philippians 2:1–11), even though he is ‘the one who comes from above’ (John 3:31,32). Humility is needed for us to be willing to trust the Lord in the little and big things that happen in life. Humility does not happen automatically but requires our participation. Maybe one day we can ask John the Baptist, and Jesus, how they learnt to walk in humility? Jesus knows what it is like. And John the Baptist demonstrated it too.

John the Baptist gave totally submitted testimony to Jesus, and declared that Jesus testifies to what he has seen, heard and lived, in the Father’s love of him and for the world. John’s testimony acknowledges that Jesus was sent by God and spoke the words of God, that anyone who believes Jesus has eternal life.

***Father, by your Spirit’s power, please inspire millions more people to receive and believe the message of Jesus, to discover the life you give through him.***

Wednesday 15 February 2023

**Revelation at Jacob’s Well**

by Ruth Olsen

***Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he’ (John 4:26).***

Read John 4:1–26

There are several layers of revelation in this story. It’s an example of God wanting to do something wholesome for someone, to bless them out of their socks! That’s an unfolding process, moving from the surface and going deeper. Do you recognise that as you read it?

The Lord is usually gentle when he is trying to reveal something hidden in us that is blocking or diverting us from receiving his forgiveness, love, peace or assurance in his relationship with us. Through stuff that happens in life, we blindly set up protective walls that, in effect, keep the good out and let the bad in. I did instinctively, and I imagine you may have also. Pain is often involved in the unravelling. But, when the light is let in, truth is received and believed, setting us free; then healing and restoration can unfold. That can be quite a difficult process. But it does not have to be.

The Lord desires us to be real and honest with him, to trust him and his faithfulness to us. Jesus said the worshippers the Father seeks are those who worship him in spirit and truth. He knows our heart (1 Samuel 16:7) and desires our hearts to be receptive to the truth that Jesus, who is truth in person, brings into our lives.

How and where does the Lord meet with you? Have you given him the chance to come closer to you? And if you have, what are some ways he has met with you?

Are we not like that Samaritan woman who was hiding hurts and was closed off to more hurt? Does our pride get in the way of us humbling ourselves to ask the Lord to search our hearts (Psalm 139:23,24)?

We need revelation to enable us to recognise something we are blind to, including who Jesus really is and the expanse of his love for us – personally and together – for us to become rooted and established in his love (Ephesians 3:16–21). What a relief when a burden is lifted and gone, replaced by his love!

***Holy Spirit, open the eyes of our hearts to Jesus more and more, please. Thank you!***

Thursday 16 February 2023

**Surprised?**

by Ruth Olsen

***And because of his words many more became believers (John 4:41 NIV).***

Read John 4:27–42

We continue our walk through this chapter, pausing to reflect, to notice some surprises.

The disciples arrived with lunch and were surprised to find Jesus talking with a woman (v27), as she herself had been surprised earlier (v9). Jews didn’t associate with Samaritans, and Jewish religious teachers rarely spoke with women in public. As one commentary says, ‘The words of the Law were to be burnt rather than taught to a woman. A man should not speak in public to his own wife’!

Jesus cuts through these constricting man-made rules to reveal God’s compassion to someone ostracised by society. She, whom society did not value, was highly valued in God’s eyes. That’s what God’s love is like – so different to our human expectations. And the disciples sensed not to confront Jesus about breaking these protocols.

Jesus had been tired earlier (v6), and now he doesn’t partake of the food the disciples brought from the village but says he has other food to eat. When we are in a ministry situation, and sense that God is doing something in that moment, physical food can be far from one’s mind.

Why did many of the Samaritans from that town believe in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony (v39)? Wasn’t she an outcast, collecting water in the middle of the day? And yet her manner and her words were compelling. Wouldn’t the disciples have been perplexed when they saw the woman rushing back to the well accompanied by lots of the townsfolk? God was at work, in unexpected ways.

Jesus was tired, yet he was tuned in to what his Father was doing. Seeing the Father’s heart for an outcast woman, perhaps our surprise can shock us into examining what we let divide us, reflecting the ways of the world instead of the Father’s heart?

***Lord Jesus, help us see our heart-attitudes through your eyes of compassion for people. Father, forgive us. Change our hearts and renew our minds by your Spirit’s power.***

Friday 17 February 2023

**Faith in action**

by Ruth Olsen

***Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live’ (John 4:50a NIV).***

Read John 4:43–54

After staying at Sychar in Samaria for two days as requested by the townsfolk, Jesus and his disciples continued their journey on to Galilee, his home territory. That’s a long way to walk! But here he was welcomed because his reputation had gone before him, and they hoped to see more miracles happen.

Jesus came back to Cana where the disciples had witnessed his first miracle (John 2:1–11) and had placed their trust in him. Others had naturally heard of that miracle, stirring curiosity, anticipation and perhaps faith.

‘A certain royal official’, an officer in Herod’s service, had also heard. He came to Jesus begging him to come to his home to heal his desperately ill son. As one commentary says, it seems this royal official thought it necessary that Jesus be present in order to heal the son. Therefore, Jesus reproves his weakness of faith with the reference to seeking signs and wonders. But the father presses in: ‘Come down before my child dies.’ Then Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live’.

The father’s concern for his son prompted him to press in for help, thereby taking a step of faith, expecting that his son would be helped. There are times when the Lord wants us to ask again because, in the process, our faith, expectation and receptivity grows. We become more ‘engaged’ in what we are asking for, moving from a ‘maybe’ to a ‘yes, please’.

There’s a difference between passively agreeing with something we hear, or hearing something and acting on what was heard. The father took Jesus at his word, turned and started for home. He was no longer requiring Jesus to go home with him but was acting on the word given. On hearing of his son’s recovery, he recognised the connection to Jesus giving his word. Faith grew, impacting a household.

Is there some promise in God’s word that the Spirit is impressing on your heart with regard to something troubling you?

***Lord, enlighten the eyes of our hearts to recognise more of what you are doing, to take you at your word and to actively trust you.***

Saturday 18 February 2023

**We ask for insight, Lord**

by Ruth Olsen

***Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees … (Psalm 119:33 NIV).***

Read Psalm 119:33–40

Have you ever read Psalm 119 in one sitting? Have you noticed the psalmist’s cry from the heart?

My NIV Study Bible describes Psalm 119 as a devotional on the word of God. It is most likely composed originally in writing (rather than orally) and intended to be read instead of sung or recited. Most of its lines are addressed to God, mingling prayers with professions of passionate devotion to God’s law, that is, to God’s word. The author humbly acknowledges the errant ways of his heart and life, the pain and fruit of the Lord’s discipline through affliction, and his suffering from those who are hostile toward him. Highlighted are God’s directives for life, and God’s promises. Shaping the psalm as an alphabetical acrostic, he uses 8 verses for each Hebrew letter.

Hear the deep longing and desire of the psalmist’s heart in today’s reading. Can you make them your own requests of the Lord? I am so grateful that God’s Holy Spirit lives in me, teaching me, giving me insight to God’s word, deepening my understanding, changing my heart, renewing my mind, transforming me as a dearly loved child of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and by Jesus’ Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit.

The psalmist was crying out for a deeper work of God in him that would enable him to walk in the ways of the Lord, to take God at his word into daily life. He was hungry for a growing relationship with the Lord, recognising that only God could turn his heart toward the Lord and turn his eyes away from worthless things.

Jesus knew the psalms, and I can imagine he joined the psalmist in this cry of the heart, for Jesus was limited in becoming one among us (Philippians 2:1–11) but relied on the Holy Spirit to help him in whatever way needed. Likewise, let us be intentional in relying on the Holy Spirit to bring God’s word alive in us and through us.

***Lord, we ask for insight into, and understanding of, your word and ways every day.***

Sunday 19 February 2023

**God’s glory**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***A voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my own dear Son … Listen to him!’ When the disciples heard the voice, they were so afraid they fell flat on the ground (Matthew 17:5,6).***

Read Matthew 17:1–9

What a passage – full of bright imagery and mystery.

Peter’s response to this display of glory is: ‘I can add to this wonderful situation – contribute by building something that captures the moment.’

Leviticus tells us about the type of tabernacle Peter wanted to build. In the festival of Booths, the Israelites built temporary outside shelters (booths) in remembrance of God’s sustaining grace to them in them in the wilderness. Then they lived in tents under the open sky, with God’s tent (tabernacle) in the middle of their camp.

Peter couldn’t resist the impulse to contribute by doing something similar, perhaps trying to re-capture the history of Israel in a moment. We might laugh at what seems inappropriate and ineffective, but Peter acted from what he knew. He followed ingrained tradition which told him a tabernacle was a place to welcome and honour the glorious grace of God. Peter was trying to worship in the way he knew how. That’s exactly what we do: We get a sniff of God’s glory and want to contribute; want to contain it; add to it; preserve it and understand it in terms of our familiar traditions. It’s hard to worship when things don’t match our accustomed ways.

God’s ways are mysterious, unfathomable – like the creation of the world and the redemption of a sinful humanity. It is only when the ‘shining cloud’ overwhelms, and a voice booms from within, that the disciples fall on their faces. They are floored, rendered speechless and humbled before the presence of God. Thrown on their faces by The Voice, they have nothing to add. Nothing to grasp. They stop wanting to build a physical church to contain God. They forget their centuries of tradition and ‘how things are done here’. They worship. They realise their attempts at contributing are a way of resisting the Spirit in his glory – of compartmentalising him to fit in our pocket. The disciples learn; ‘Heaven is his throne; the and the earth his footstool … ‘‘What kind of house will you build for Me’’, says the Lord, or where will My place of repose be? Has not My hand made all these things?’ (Isaiah 66:1–2a).

***Father, your glory overwhelms us. Sometimes your ways seem strange to us. Sometimes they are frightening. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear your glory – to know you just as you are and not as we think you should be. Dispel our fears and give us unfettered hearts to worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.***