



ESSENTIAL 100

Your journey through the Bible
in 100 readings

SERMON
OUTLINES

E100 Bible Reading Challenge

Using these Sermon Outlines

These outlines are intended to provide a framework for sermons to support the daily readings in the E100 programme. For those able to preach on the reading every week there are twenty suggested outlines, shown as Series A

For those who prefer to preach less frequently on the selected readings there is a second set of eight outlines covering larger blocks of material, shown as Series B.

The aim in each set has been to give an overview locating each block of readings within the broad stream of God's purposes.

The outlines are intended to give a starting point and will need adapting to fit local circumstances. Overall titles, section headings and application can be accommodated to local situations and needs

The themes are designed to pick out connected threads which run through Scripture. For the sake of simplicity the number has been limited, which inevitably leads to over-simplification. Many others could have been included, and the ones which have been included cover a much wider range of ideas than the term might at first suggest. Obedience, for example covers a whole range of lifestyle issues, faith naturally incorporates both saving faith and the daily trust in God, salvation brings in all the varied ideas which fall under the broad term – including, for example, redemption, reconciliation, adoption, deliverance and liberation.

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In the beginning

The big picture

God creates a good world and is in relationship with man and woman. This relationship is destroyed by human disobedience as a result of which the world is spoiled.

Themes

Creation Grace Obedience Promise Salvation Sin

Overview

God creates a good world and makes humans who bear his image, are to live in relationship with him and are to be his representatives on the earth. The first humans' desire for independence from God and their act of rebellion leads to humanity being alienated from God and the disruption of the created order.

Despite this we have glimpses of hope for the future in the promise to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15) and the story of Noah who is saved through God's gracious initiative and with whom God makes his covenant (Genesis 8:20-9:17). Even the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) which at one level is further evidence of human pride, also demonstrates that God is in control of the affairs of men and contains hints of grace. After the disaster of human rebellion God is working to bring about restoration.

Sermon title

In the beginning

Outline

- 1 A good world (Genesis 1,2)
- 2 A broken world (Genesis 3)
- 3 Hints of hope
 - a The promise of ultimate victory over evil (Genesis 3:15b)
 - b The grace of God leads to salvation (Genesis 6-8)
 - c The ultimate control of God (Genesis 11:1-9)

Application

God assures us of his creating power and his saving love and invites us to enter into his grace and live in obedience to him.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

The big picture

In the face of human failure, God promises to bless all the nations through Abraham's descendants, a promise ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

Themes

Covenant Grace Election Faith Promise

Overview

The promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 is a pivotal point in Scripture. His conviction, against all that made sense, that God would fulfil that promise makes him the model of those who live in relationship with God by faith. As the subsequent story of Abraham and his immediate descendants shows that faith was not consistent, but God was always faithful, renewing his covenant promise and preserving those in the line of promise. The promise was threatened by Abraham's lack of faith before Pharaoh (12:10-20) and Abimelech (20:1-18), by the decision to have a child with Hagar (16:1-16) and by the subsequent behaviour of both Isaac and Jacob.

Through it all God remains true to his promise and ensures that it stands despite human failure.

Sermon title

Promises, promises

Outline

- 1 Promise given (Genesis 12:1-9)
- 2 Promise threatened (Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-16)
- 3 Promise renewed (Genesis 15:1-21; 17:1-27)
- 4 Promise tested (Genesis 22:1-19)

Application

We can always trust God to keep his covenant and be true to his promise.

Joseph

The big picture

In the face of difficulty and opposition God remains in control and preserves his people and his promise.

Themes

Faith Promise

Overview

The story of Joseph is one of family breakdown, political intrigue and national disaster and recovery. One man stands at the heart of it, but God is the true initiator of the action as Joseph recognises in Genesis 50:28.

This was a time of international upheaval with people migrating in search of food. Through it all God is working out his own purposes. The promise to Abraham which again seems to be under threat is maintained. In the process Joseph is preserved from his brothers and from the seductions of Egypt – financial and sexual. He obtains his freedom and a position of authority. Finally we have a picture of transformation and reconciliation as Joseph and his brothers come together.

Sermon title

'God intended it for good' (Genesis 50:28)

Outline

- 1 God preserves his promise
- 2 God preserves his people
 - b Joseph's life is saved (Genesis 37)
 - c Joseph's integrity is safeguarded (Genesis 39)
 - d Joseph's freedom is secured (Genesis 40, 41)
 - e Joseph's family is reconciled (Genesis 42-47)

Application

Life may seem impossible but God can and will achieve his purpose for our lives.

Moses and the Exodus

The big picture

God delivers his people from slavery, showing himself to be a saving God and foreshadowing his ultimate act of salvation.

Themes

Faith Grace Salvation

Overview

The Israelites in Egypt must have wondered where God was and what he was doing. But he sees their plight – a lot could be learned from a study of the verbs in Genesis 2:24,25. He meets with Moses, reveals something of his character – chiefly that he is mysterious and beyond full human comprehension – and commissions Moses. Moses may not seem the ideal person for the job – he certainly didn't think so. Nevertheless it is through him that God works.

God's salvation when it came involved death. The Passover was a key festival for Israel, remembering the deliverance from Egypt. But it takes on a far greater significance when Jesus becomes our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Sermon title

The God who is and who saves

Outline

- 1 God sees (Exodus 1)
- 2 God calls (Exodus 3:1-4:17)
 - a God's nature
 - b God's man
 - c God's plan
- 3 God saves (Exodus 6-14)

Application

Our great and powerful God can use unlikely people in his service.

The Law and the Land

The big picture

God's covenant with Abraham is worked out through the gift of the law and the land which identify the people of God.

Themes

Covenant Election Faith Grace Obedience

Overview

The promise to Abraham involved land and descendants. Genesis tells the story of his first descendants. Exodus confirms the promise as the people of Israel are established by God as his people. The giving of the law is a key moment. They were chosen, loved and saved by God before the law was given (Exodus 19:1-6). The law is not the way to salvation under the Old Covenant. It is given to mark out the people by defining how they are to keep their side of the covenant by living in obedience to God and in community with one another.

The land, too, is a gift; God opens the way, parting the Jordan and giving them victory in battle. The land is given not so that they can exhibit a sense of superiority over other nations but so that they have a secure place in which to grow, to worship God and to be a witness of God's saving power and love to the surrounding nations.

Sermon title

The Law and the Land

Outline

1 The gift of law

- a Is given to a saved people (Exodus 19:1-4; 20:2)
- b Calls for whole-hearted worship (Exodus 20:3; 32:1-35; 34:11-17)
- c Requires single-minded obedience (Exodus 19:5,6)

2 The gift of land

Application

God still calls for our whole-hearted worship and single-minded obedience.

The Judges

The big picture

The struggles of God's people demonstrate human inability to remain true to God, but God's forgiving grace is always present – a pattern evident throughout Scripture. In Ruth we see a key part of God's long term plan falling in to place as we are introduced to David's family line.

Themes

Grace Forgiveness Obedience Salvation Sin

Overview

Judges tells a sorry tale which can best be summed up in its closing words, 'everyone did as he saw fit' (Judges 21:25). The repeated cycles of disobedience, falling under foreign oppression, crying out to God and experiencing his deliverance can make for depressing reading but our relationship with God is often worked out in similar ways. The book underlines the importance of being true to God and emphasises the consequences of failure. It also demonstrates the patient and forgiving love of God.

The action recorded in Ruth took place during the time of the Judges, possibly around the time of Jephthah and Samson. Its gentle love story stands in contrast to so much of Judges. In addition to showing the value of fidelity we can also see, with the benefit of hindsight, how God is moving from the promise given to Abraham to the coming of Jesus.

Sermon title

Round and round we go

Outline

- 1 Disobedient people (Judges 2:11-15)
- 2 Patient and forgiving God (Judges 2:16-18)
 - a Listens to his people's cries
 - b Provides a way out
 - c Prepares his long term salvation (Ruth 4:13-22)

Application

While we can always depend on a forgiving God, disobedience has consequences.

The rise of Israel

The big picture

Israel's kings at their best demonstrate qualities of God's rule and foreshadow God's ideal king, Jesus.

Themes

Election Faith Kingdom Promise Sin

Overview

Eli's story shows us that even faithful servants of God can get things wrong, something we see in many Bible characters and experience in our own lives; no human leader is perfect. The move towards kingship is not seen as a completely positive move by the Old Testament writers, but at their best the kings provide wise and just leadership and a sense of national unity which had been missing under the judges.

Saul started well but through disobedience eventually forfeited the right to the throne. God requires in those who will lead his people character traits of obedience, submission and faithfulness. These David demonstrates, although he will later get things wrong. He is committed to God, has confidence that God will work out his purposes for him and he is prepared to wait patiently without manipulating things for himself.

Sermon title

Bad King, Good King

Outline

1 Failed king

- a A good start (1 Samuel 10:17-27)
- b A disappointing end (1 Samuel 16:1)

2 Faithful king

- a Total commitment (1 Samuel 17:26; 2 Samuel 6:12-23)
- b Complete confidence (1 Samuel 17:37; 23:7-14; 2 Samuel 5:19,23)
- c Quiet patience (1 Samuel 24:8-15)

Application

We may not understand what God is doing, but we can have confidence in him to work out his plans for us.

The Fall of Israel

The big picture

Through good times and bad times God never loses sight of his ultimate purpose.

Themes

Forgiveness Kingdom Obedience Sin

Overview

This week's readings cover around 400 years of history. They were eventful years in which the united kingdom of David and his son Solomon split into two, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The sin of the northern kings, exemplified by Ahab, resulted in the fall of the capital city, Samaria in 722BC. This marked the end of Israel. Judah failed to learn the lesson and was taken into captivity in Babylon in 587BC.

These centuries, like the period of the Judges, are marked by times of disobedience and times of obedience, the difference being that the kings have a significant influence on how things develop.

David, in his response to God over the Bathsheba affair, reminds us that our failure need never be final. Repentance will bring God's forgiveness; the trouble with much of the idolatry that we find in other kings is that there is never any hint of repentance. Despite all his wisdom this is a lesson that Solomon never seems to have learnt. His priorities, so firmly fixed on establishing a centre for the worship of God at the outset were later diverted and idolatry crept in. The heart of failure in every situation is moving the focus away from God.

Although David was restored there were long term consequences of his failure. But he is still a key figure in God's fulfilment of his promise to Abraham.

Sermon title

Decline and fall

Outline

- 1 David's unhappy failure (2 Samuel 11:1-12:25)
- 2 Solomon's notable achievements (1 Kings 8:1-9:9)
- 3 Elijah's outstanding victory (1 Kings 18)
- 4 Israel's slow decline (1 Kings 3:3; 16:29-34; 2 Kings 25)

Application

Keeping God in the first place is the most important thing

Psalms and Proverbs

The big picture

Psalms show the people of God responding in prayer and praise; many point forward to a new reality to come. Proverbs gives us practical wisdom for living but also introduces the idea of God's wisdom personified, picked up in the New Testament as one way of thinking about Jesus.

Themes

Faith Forgiveness Kingdom Promise Sin

Overview

Psalms are enormously varied; exuberant praise, urgent pleas, complaint, and longing can all be found. The E100 selection can only give a small sample. Although Psalms are a human response to God that does not mean that we cannot hear God speaking in them. It is God who stimulates the praise, who responds to the plea, who acknowledges the complaint. The Psalms give us a model for dialogue with God and words in which we can express our own feelings.

Psalm 23 expresses confidence in a God who watches over and cares for his people. Psalm 51 is one of the most profound recognitions of failure that we have, recognising that all sin is an offence not simply against others but against God. Psalm 103 dwells on the character of a just, compassionate and gracious God.

Proverbs 1-4 introduce us to wisdom who calls out to all who will listen (Proverbs 1:20), inviting them to share the fruits of wisdom as they are found in God. Proverbs 16-18 shows us the essentially practical nature of wisdom touching on every aspect of life lived out before God.

Sermon title

Worship and Wisdom

Outline

- 1 Responding to God
 - a Trust (Psalm 23)
 - b Confession (Psalm 51)
 - c Praise (Psalm 103)

- 2 Living with God
 - a The source of wisdom (Proverbs 2:1-15)
 - b Living wisely (Proverbs 4)

Application

The whole our lives are lived out in the presence of God.

The Prophets

The big picture

The Prophets call God's people to the whole-hearted worship and single-minded obedience he looks for but as the nation declines they offer a better hope in the long term fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham – blessing for the nations through his descendants.

Themes

Covenant Kingdom Obedience Promise Salvation

Overview

Again, we can only be highly selective. None of the prophets had an easy calling – Jeremiah's call and the story of Jonah make this clear. Their role was multi-faceted. In Jeremiah 2 and 3 we hear the call of God to a people who have forsaken him. We need to hear the pain and the longing that God expresses as he longs for his people to return to him. Jonah reminds us that God's nature is to forgive and the scope of his love is not limited by national boundaries.

Isaiah 51-53 gave hope to Israelites in exile with a promise of restoration, but look beyond to a greater restoration. The figure of the servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 has occasioned much debate, but the New Testament demonstrates that only in Jesus do these prophecies come to complete fulfilment in Jesus (Acts 8:32-35). The hope of Israel is given international dimensions (Isaiah 51:5; 52:15).

Malachi, writing at the end of the Old Testament period, probably a little over 400 years before Jesus, touches on similar themes. Worship was still lacklustre, obedience to God patchy. And like Isaiah he projects the hope forward to a new age in the future. The Old Testament closes with a sense of longing and expectation.

Sermon title

New world coming

Outline

- 1 The prophet's calling (Jeremiah 1:1-19)
- 2 The prophet's challenge
 - a Love God (Jeremiah 2:1-3:5)
 - b Obey God (Malachi 2:10-3:18)
 - c Love neighbour (Malachi 2:5)
- 3 The prophet's vision
 - a A better hope (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Malachi 3:1-4; 4:1-6)
 - b An inclusive hope (Jonah; Isaiah 51:5; 52:15)

Application

We are called to model a way of love, obedience and justice, thus inviting others to recognise the presence of God among us.

The Living Word

The big picture

At last, after almost 2000 years the promise to Abraham is fulfilled with the birth of Jesus.

Themes

Grace Promise Salvation

Overview

Luke gives us the detailed narrative, John gives us the theological narrative; but both set the birth of Jesus in the context of the Old Testament. John by his use of concepts and language from Greek philosophy and Luke by his inclusion of Simeon's prayer (Luke 2:32) emphasise that Jesus is for all people. For both (and for Matthew) Jesus is seen as the eternal Word, sharing the nature of God and as the fully human child of Mary – Word and flesh, with a family line going back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38).

John the Baptist looks and sounds a little like an Old Testament prophet; he both bridges the gap and acts as a fulfilment of prophecy, coming as the promised forerunner (Luke 3:4-6). Jesus' baptism and temptation further identify him as one of us, sharing our humanity and our physical weakness. The battle with the devil which starts here will, in different ways, mark the whole of Jesus' life.

Sermon title

Promise fulfilled

Outline

- 1 Eternal Word (John 1:1-4)
- 2 Incarnate Son (John 1:14)
 - a Conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38)
 - b Born of the virgin Mary (Luke 2)
 - c Tempted as one of us (Matthew 4:1-11, see, too, Hebrews 4:15)
- 3 Promised Saviour of the world (Luke 2:29-32)

Application

When we come to Jesus we come to one who knows and understands what it is to be human but who is fully God.

The teachings of Jesus

The big picture

At the heart of Jesus' teaching is the kingdom (or the rule of God). In him the kingdom has come. God is present with his people in a new way.

Themes

Grace Kingdom Obedience Salvation

Overview

Jesus' teaching comes in many forms. Often he used parables, apparently simple stories but often with a sting in the tail and always designed to make the hearers think and respond. The story of the Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) challenges us to redefine our understanding of those whom we accept. Luke 15 goes further with stories which are designed to challenge existing ideas about the scope and nature of God's love. They show us that God's love is for all, even those we might tend to think of as unacceptable. The kingdom is wider than we might expect, but also, perhaps, as the parable of the sower and others in Matthew 13 suggest, narrower than we might like to think

The Sermon on the Mount is more straightforward teaching, much of it about behaviour. It defines the way in which kingdom people live out their lives and in so doing rewrites Old Testament law. The new standard is harder than the old – but grows from a new inner motivation, a relationship with One whom we can call Father (Matthew 6:5-14) and who cares about our daily needs (Matthew 6:25-34)

Sermon title

Kingdom people

Outline

- 1 Kingdom lifestyle (Matthew 5-7)
 - a new standard
 - b A new relationship
- 2 Kingdom membership (Luke 10:25-37; 15:1-32)
 - a Grounded in the love of God
 - b Available to all

Application

We can rejoice in the love of God but being loved by him brings responsibilities.

The miracles of Jesus

The big picture

Jesus' miracles confirm that in Jesus God has come into the world in a new way.

Themes

Faith Grace Salvation

Overview

Jesus' miracles take different forms. In the Gospel accounts they are nearly always linked in some way with the revelation of his true identity. The feeding of the 5,000 is reminiscent of God's act of provision through the manna, is set in the context of teaching about the kingdom (Luke 9:11) and is linked with Peter's recognition of who Jesus is, 'the Christ of God' (Luke 9:20) – Christ being the Greek version of Messiah or Anointed One. After the storm, the disciples acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 14:34). The blind man, with perception the leaders lack, sees that Jesus must have come from God (John 9:33). The demons recognise Jesus as Son of the Most High God with ultimate authority (Mark 5:7). Martha, like Peter, sees Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of God (John 11:27).

The miracles demonstrate that God's kingdom has arrived (see Luke 11:20), a time of healing and peace and life, when all that opposes God will be eradicated. It may not have arrived in all its fullness but it has truly arrived.

Sermon title

The King is here

Outline

- 1 Signs of the kingdom
 - a Authority over demons (Mark 5:1-20)
 - b Miraculous provision (Luke 9:1-36)

- 2 Revelation of Jesus' identity
 - a The Promised Messiah (Luke 9:20; John 11:27)
 - b The Son of God (Matthew 14:34; John 9:33)

Application

We can be sure that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore has power to transform people and situations.

The cross of Christ

The big picture

God's answer to the sin and failure of humanity is found in the cross of his Son Jesus.

Themes

Covenant Forgiveness Grace Promise Salvation

Overview

Each of the Gospels devotes a disproportionate amount of space to the last week of Jesus' life. This, as he had recognised and taught, was the point to which his life was leading. This was the culmination of God's plan, the moment which throughout John's Gospel is seen as the moment of glory (eg John 12:20-36).

The intimacy of the Last Supper is fragile, marked by the presence of the betrayer. It provides a key link with the Old Testament models of salvation. Jesus is the ultimate Passover sacrifice who will guarantee the deliverance of men and women from the power of sin. There are also overtones of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (John 18:22; 19:3). Through it all Jesus is the obedient Son, who although he may shrink from the fate that awaits him will do it because this is the way that God, Father, Son and Spirit, has determined. At no point is Jesus an unwilling victim. He voluntarily goes to the cross, drinking the cup of God's anger against sin (Luke 22:39-46).

His resurrection is the vindication of his death, the confirmation of his victory. It, too, was foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures (John 20:9). Having returned to the Father, his work complete, he reigns in glory and sends his followers into the world (John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8)

Sermon title

The glory of the King

Outline

- 1 Passover Sacrifice (Luke 22)
- 2 Suffering Servant (John 18,19)
- 3 Obedient Son (Luke 22:39-46)
- 4 Risen Lord (John 20,21)
- 5 Ascended King (Acts 1:1-11)

Application

We have forgiveness through the death of Christ and new life through his resurrection.

The Church is born

The big picture

With the birth of the church all nations are drawn to the love of God in Jesus

Themes

Faith Grace Promise Salvation

Overview

Jesus had promised his followers that they would receive new power and this was their experience at Pentecost. With the coming of the Spirit, a weak and faltering group is transformed into a close-knit community and a powerful force for mission. The outpouring of the Spirit immediately results in a significant move forward. All those present hear the praises of God in their own language – a further fulfilment of the promise to Abraham.

As the church grows it becomes a community of teaching, prayer, fellowship and the celebration of Jesus' death. Their community life sustains them but this is no closed community; it has mission at its heart. It meets in public (Acts 2:46). Whenever the opportunity arises they draw attention to Jesus (Acts 2:22-28; 3:1-16). They will not stop speaking about him (Acts 4:18,20; 27-30).

Stephen and Philip in their different ways continue reaching out in Jesus' name; persecution merely opens up new possibilities. When Peter faces the ultimate challenge of taking the good news into Gentile territory we know that the promise to all nations has been fulfilled.

Sermon title

Growing church

Outline

- 1 Filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:1-13; 4:31)
- 2 Focused on Jesus (Acts 2:22-41; 4:18-20)
- 3 Sustained by community (Acts 4:42-47)
- 4 Motivated for mission (Acts 4:47; 6:1-8:40; 10:1-11:18)

Application

We, the church of today, are also called to mission in the name of Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

Paul's travels

The big picture

The good news reaches an increasing number of people, spreading across the Mediterranean world.

Themes

Election Grace Salvation

Overview

The story of Paul's conversion is well known. This dramatic meeting with the risen Christ led to a complete transformation. It was the key that shaped the whole of his future life and ministry. With his conversion came the call to take the gospel to 'the Gentiles and their kings...and the people of Israel.' (Acts 9:15). The rest of his life was dedicated to that task.

Acts 13:1-3 describes his sending out from the church in Antioch and we then follow the course of his mission to a number of towns in what is now southern Turkey. The reception was mixed, with considerable opposition, but in each town he left a number of Christians. His experiences in Antioch (Acts 13:46-48) confirmed a special calling to the Gentiles, but not to the exclusion of Jews. Acts 15 is a crucial chapter because it confirms the inclusion of Gentiles without the need to observe all the intricacies of Jewish regulations.

Paul's subsequent journeys take him to Greece and finally to Rome. He may be under arrest but the firm commitment to preach the gospel whatever his circumstances and however strong the opposition are as evident as ever. In all this he is driven by his sense of God's call on his life, a living experience of the risen Christ, an appreciation of the transforming power of the Spirit and a sense of the urgency of the task. These must be our motives for ministry, too.

Sermon title

To boldly go

Outline

- 1 Conversion (Acts 9)
- 2 Calling (Acts 13)
- 3 Commitment (Acts 20:13-38)
 - a To God's love for all people
 - b To the work of mission

Application

We can be challenged to emulate Paul's model of commitment to mission, openness to God and sensitivity to the Spirit.

Paul to the churches

The big picture

Working out the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection for belief and behaviour.

Themes

Covenant Faith Grace Obedience Salvation

Overview

Paul's letters were not written in a vacuum. They are addressed to churches that he knows and loves. Most are written to combat erroneous teaching, encourage the young Christians in their faith or correct problems in behaviour or relationships.

His answer is to place the focus on Jesus and what he has done. Romans 8 and Colossians 1 are classic explanations of the person and work of Jesus. Romans 8 holds out an assured future reminding us that nothing can separate us from God's love.

The requirement to live in distinctive ways is a common theme which is clearly expressed in Galatians 5:16-6:10. Paul exhorts the believers to adopt certain patterns of behaviour but at the same time acknowledges, as he does in Romans 8, that we are not alone; the Spirit is at work in us to produce the fruit. While we may come under attack we can know the protection of God (Ephesians 6:10-20). It is worth noticing that, although Paul does not have a developed and explicit doctrine of the Trinity, his thinking is thoroughly Trinitarian.

Philippians 4:2-9 deals with the vexed subject of relationships within the church – as much a problem in the first century as now,

Sermon title

Living as the people of God

Outline

1 Standing firm

- a Focused on Jesus (Colossians 1)
- b Reconciled through Jesus (Colossians 1)
- c Held by the love of God (Romans 8:29-39)

2 Living well

- a Transformed lives (Galatians 5:16-6:10; Philippians 4:2-9)
- b Empowered by the Spirit (Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5:16-26)
- c Protected by God (Ephesians 6:10-20)

Application

What we believe and how we live both matter.

Paul to the leaders

The big picture

As the church grows it needs leaders who will ensure that it remains true to its calling as the people of God.

Themes

Faith Obedience

Overview

In every sphere of life leaders make a difference. As the church grows so good leadership becomes an important issue. Leaders are to be people of good reputation; character is key and Paul sets the bar high (1 Timothy 3:1-13).

One of the key tasks of the leader is to ensure that those in the church have a good understanding of truth – and that is centred on the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Paul would have been thinking of the Old Testament but we can legitimately include the New Testament as well. The instruction to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2), probably includes both instruction and evangelism (2 Timothy 4:5). Teaching is not for the sake of academic learning it is to ensure that they know what they believe – leaders are to take care of the church (1 Timothy 3:5). Teaching will be relevant addressing those issues which are causing difficulties in the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11).

Leading, in whatever capacity, is a high calling (1 Timothy 3:1), but it is not an easy task. It involves hard work and diligent study (2 Timothy 2). Leaders are required to set an example to the church (1 Timothy 6:3-21). They may well be called to suffer (2 Timothy 3:10-12; 4:6-8).

Sermon title

Wanted: Good leaders

Outline

- 1 The Leader's character (1 Timothy 3:1-13)
- 2 The Leader's calling
 - a Teaching the truth (2 Timothy 3:10-4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)
 - b Taking care of the congregation (1 Timothy 3:5; 6:17-21)
- 3 The Leader's lifestyle
 - a Working hard (2 Timothy 2:1-25)
 - b Setting an example (1 Timothy 6:3-21)

Application

Those who lead in any capacity have a high calling and a tough job; they need the support and prayers of others.

The Apostles' teaching

The big picture

God's new covenant people are called to live in a needy but hostile world.

Themes

Faith Obedience Promise Salvation

Overview

One of the issues that the early church faced was how they lived in relationship to those around. How were they to establish their identity as the people of God? In one sense, as Peter puts, it they were 'aliens and strangers' (1 Peter 2:11). And yet God had placed them in the world with a mission.

They were people with a distinctive hope – unlike so many of those among whom they lived. In a world of uncertainty they could rest assured in the love of God, knowing that their future was secure. This was because they, like Old Testament Israel, were God's chosen and special people.

So as loved people they are to be people who show love to others. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul extols the virtue's of love – primarily in the context of the church and the way in which we relate to brothers and sisters. But even here he has an eye to those outside. John, likewise, is primarily concerned with the love which we have for one another – but this love, as he well knows, is the primary evidence that we are disciples of Jesus. We may be weak, but the gospel we proclaim is an inestimable treasure (2 Corinthians 4:1-18) and we are called to share it (2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2).

For James the practical outworking of faith is they key. Unless faith makes a difference in the way that we live and relate to others it is of no value

Sermon title

Living in the world

Outline

1 Our assurance

- a A living hope (1 Peter 1:1-2:3)
- b A special people (1 Peter 2:4-12)

2 Our calling

- a A community of love (1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3:11-4:21)
- b Ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 4:1-6:2)
- c Active faith (James 1,2)

Application

As God's people we are called to live in distinctive ways.

Revelation

The big picture

God brings his plan for the redemption and the restoration of the world to completion.

Themes

Creation Faith Promise

Overview

By the end of Revelation we have come full circle. God's creation is back where he had always intended, the home of peace and righteousness, inhabited by a redeemed humanity who will share fellowship with God for ever. The future hope promised from the fall onwards has come to its final fulfilment.

It is not without pain and struggle, however. Revelation depicts a church which is suffering persecution and in many ways is a call to endure in the light of the future hope. Right now the world may look a mess and the people of God an insignificant minority, it may appear that the forces of evil are winning the battle. But that is not the way it will end up. The future is secured by the death of the lamb and the power of God; the Spirit is always active in the world.

Revelation is not an easy book to interpret and Christians have not always agreed on the details. If we remember the nature of apocalyptic writing, use our imagination and concentrate of the broad sweep we shall gain the most.

Sermon title

Future perfect

Outline

- 1 Present struggle (Revelation 2:1-3:22)
- 2 Future Hope
 - a The power of God (Revelation 4:1-11; 19:1-8)
 - b The death of Jesus (Revelation 5:1-14; 7:14-17)
 - c The presence of the Spirit (Revelation 4:5; 20:17)
- 3 Eternal glory (Revelation 21,22)

Application

We can endure the struggles and questions of the present knowing that God will bring all to perfection.

Creation and Covenant

The big picture

God's good creation is ruined by the sinful determination of humans to do things their own way, but God still has plans to do good for all nations.

Themes

Creation Covenant Election Faith Grace Obedience Promise Sin

Overview

The opening words of the Bible set the theme for the whole; 'In the beginning God...' God is the theme of the Bible, but we have too often lost sight of this and assumed that we are the centre of the story. This comes close to repeating the sin of Adam and Eve.

Genesis shows us a God who creates – whatever our views about the mechanism by which the world was made and sustained the fact that God is the Creator is not open for debate by the Christian. His creation was, and is, good; but it has been marred as a result of human sin.

One might have thought that would be the end of the story, but God never gives up on the world or the people that he has made. The promise to Noah and then to Abraham assure us of his continuing plans for the human race.

When we see Joseph preserved, against all likelihood, we are assured that God remains in control of all situations and will work out his plans for us.

Sermon title

God on the case

Outline

- 1 God of Creation (Genesis 1-3)
- 2 God of Promise (Noah and Abraham)
- 3 God of Preservation (Joseph)

Application

Despite human failure God is working towards the redemption of the whole of creation. We can therefore look forward with hope despite the apparent confusion of much of life.

God delivers his people

The big picture

The Exodus, the giving of the Law and the entry into the promised land are defining events in the history of Israel, but they also point forward to the greater salvation that God will bring about in Jesus.

Themes

Covenant Election Faith Grace Obedience Promise Salvation

Overview

Exodus to Judges covers a period of around 300 years. Again the focus is on a God who acts when his people are incapable of acting and who delivers them from Egypt, forming them into a covenant community. In this covenant God promises to be with his people; they for their part are to be obedient to him. The law is given not to save people but to those who have already been saved. It defines how they are to live and what God requires of them as his covenant people.

Israel witnessed God's power in the Exodus, the giving of the law and the victories over the enemies they encountered when they entered the land. Despite such evidences of God's power they repeatedly went their own way. On many occasions God has to call them back – the foreign oppressors of Judges are marks of a discipline that longs to restore, not an arbitrary punishment. The Judges themselves are a mark of God's protecting hand.

Ruth shows us a God who cares for the details and provides for his people – a note echoed in chapters of Exodus that we do not read. As we are introduced to David's family line we see God's long term plan moving forward.

There is much in the history of Israel that mirrors our own Christian experience – in receiving God's grace and in making our own wrong choices.

Sermon title

God delivers

Outline

- 1 The God who delivers (Exodus 1-14)
- 2 The God who provides
 - a material needs (Ruth)
 - c directions for worship (Exodus 19:1-20:21)
 - b structure for stable society (Exodus 19:1-20:21)
- 3 The God who protects (Joshua, Ruth)

Application

As the people of God we experience his gracious salvation; in return he looks for our obedience and devotion.

The rise and fall of Israel

The big picture

Israel despite much promise, ultimately fails to be what God requires in order to fulfil the promise to Abraham. There are hints of better things to come in the person of David.

Themes

Election Forgiveness Kingdom Obedience Promise Sin

Overview

In many ways the story of Israel's later history repeats the cycle of Judges. There are good kings and bad kings. This assessment is not based on political or military success but the degree to which they were obedient to God, encouraged true worship and established justice. These are seen to be the qualities which God's anointed kings are intended to demonstrate. Their ultimate failure to achieve this prepares the way for the future coming of the ideal king who will establish God's rule as God had always intended. In the short term the nation has to face the consequences of their decisions, the northern kingdom coming to an end and the southern going into exile. Even after the return, life never achieves the qualities which God is looking for.

As God's chosen people, followers of the ideal king, we are encouraged to demonstrate those qualities which God expected of his kings of old. We shall be assessed by the same standards as they were. We shall fail; but we can draw encouragement from the story of David. Failure is not the end; repentance provides a way to restoration.

Sermon title

The best of times, the worst of times

Outline

- 1 The ideal king
 - a Pure worship (1 Kings 8:1-9:9)
 - b Full obedience
- 2 Failed kings
 - a Idolatry (1 Kings 3:3;16:29-34)
 - b Disobedience (1 Samuel 16:1; 1 Kings 18:16-19)
 - c Moral failure (2 Samuel 11:1-12:25)
- 3 The consequences for the nation (2 Kings 25)

Application

Despite human failure God continues to love his people and pursue his plans for their salvation.

Psalms, proverbs and prophets

The big picture

As hope dies for Israel, a new and better hope of God intervening in new ways begins to emerge.

Themes

Covenant Election Faith Kingdom Obedience Promise Salvation Sin

Overview

The Psalms provide us with timeless responses to God – praise, thanksgiving, anguished complaint, longing. They enable us to give speech to our deepest feelings and their inclusion in Scripture reminds us that God encourages an honest and rounded response to him. It is hardly surprising that they have formed not only the hymn book of second temple Judaism but have helped shape the worship of the Christian Church through generations. Our selection can only give us a limited picture, but it is worth looking for some different responses and asking how far our worship reflects the whole spectrum.

Proverbs provides us with practical and godly wisdom for daily living – an essential in a world which assumes that it has all the answers.

The prophets both issue a call to return to God and his standards – they are concerned for justice and for obedience to God. Their concern is that unless God is made central in society it will fall. As the fall becomes inevitable the prophets give us a longer vision of hope beyond the shorter term tragedy. They keep the age-old promise alive but give it a new twist. We live in the fulfilment of that hope

Sermon title

Wise living, true worship

Outline

1 Hearing from God

- a a call for repentance (Jeremiah 1:1-3:5)
- b a hope for the future (Isaiah 51:1-53:12)

2 Responding to God

- a Praise (Psalm 103)
- b Confession (Psalm 51)
- c Confidence Psalm 23)
- d Wise and just living (Proverbs)

Application

As God's chosen people we can rejoice in the fulfilment of his promise, and can know that he wants our honest response to him.

The Life of Jesus

The big picture

The fulfilment of the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his descendants comes to its fulfilment in Jesus.

Themes

Covenant Faith Grace Kingdom Obedience Promise Salvation

Overview

God's answer to the sin of the human race and the problems which it creates is found in Jesus. In him we see the supreme revelation of all that God is. He is at the same time fully human. The prologue to John and the birth narrative of Matthew and Luke leave us in no doubt on either count. In his temptation and in his baptism he identifies with us. This dual nature, human and divine is clear throughout his life. His teaching shows a full understanding of human nature but comes with an authority that puzzles his hearers. While his teaching does give knowledge, its primary purpose is to give understanding and to evoke a response. The central thrust is that the kingdom of God has come and that in order to be part of it we must make a response of obedience.

His miracles demonstrate divine power. Many, such as the feeding of the five thousand, the stilling of the storm and those brought back from death recall acts of God in the Old Testament. Others, particularly the healings also show a deep compassion in the face of human need.

Any look at the life of Jesus will evoke a sense of wonder and a response of worship. An examination of his teaching will require from us a determination to live in obedience to him.

Sermon title

The King is here

Outline

- 1 Living Word (John 1:1-4)
- 2 Incarnate Son (John 1:14; Luke 1,2, Matthew 4:1-11)
- 3 Compelling Teacher (Matthew 5-7; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 15)
- 4 Powerful Lord (Mark 5:1-12; Luke 9:1-36; John 11)

Application

To recognise that God has done something new in sending Jesus is to acknowledge the need to live in the light of what he did and what he taught.

The death and resurrection of Jesus and the birth to the church

The big picture

The death of Jesus provides the answer to human sin, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees new life for those who follow him and who live in the power of the Spirit.

Themes

Covenant Faith Grace Forgiveness Kingdom Promise Salvation Sin

Overview

The Gospels all give a disproportionate amount of space to the last week of Jesus' life. For the Gospel writers his death and resurrection were the key events in securing salvation. His death is seen in the context of the Passover, the Old Testament sacrificial system, the promise of the suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) and the failure of the old covenant and the promise of the new (Jeremiah 31:31-33). There is nothing accidental or unforeseen about Jesus' death; it is the heart of God's plan and God's promise.

The climax of the Gospels is the resurrection. It is noteworthy that in the preaching of the early church the resurrection has a more prominent place than it does in some contemporary preaching where we tend major on the cross as the source of our salvation. The early emphasis was on both this and the resurrection as the source of our life.

Those who believe and who receive new life also receive the promised Spirit. Thus a new community is born. The people of the new covenant stand in continuity with the old but are now a community drawn from all nations – the promise to Abraham is now seen to be fulfilled.

Sermon title

New covenant, new people

Outline

- 1 Our sacrifice (Luke 22; John 18,19)
- 2 Our life (John 20,21)
- 3 Our community (Acts 4:42-47)
- 4 Our mission (Acts 6:8-8:40; 10:1-11:18)

Application

As members of the worldwide church our lives are shaped by the death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit. We are called to witness to this in our communities and in the broader world.

Paul's travels and letters

The big picture

The news of salvation is taken to all nations.

Themes

Election Faith Grace Obedience Promise Salvation

Overview

Paul's call sets out the agenda for the rest of his life. He is to carry the name of Jesus before both his own people and the Gentiles. His travels take him to Asia (modern Turkey) and then to Greece and finally, albeit as a prisoner, to Rome. This charts the spread of the gospel through the Mediterranean world.

Founding churches as he went and moving on, often after a period of only a few weeks, Paul inevitably had to deal with a range of theological, ethical and relationship problems. He faced opposition from rigid Jewish thinkers and this gave rise to much of his theological reflection, looking for ways of spelling out the implications of 'esus' death and resurrection for the world wide people of God where ethnic barriers no longer have any force. This led him to his emphasis on grace, his understanding of the nature of Jesus death and of new life in Christ. In the melting pot of the first century his reflection under the inspiration of the Spirit spells out for us the content of the gospel.

His other major concern was to ensure harmony in the churches, that the new Christians have fully understood the need to live in appropriate ways and that they were growing in the faith. Then as now there was an ever present danger of reverting to old beliefs and ways of living. Writing to Timothy he is concerned to ensure that the church is structured and led in ways that will enhance its mission. None of the letters is written in a vacuum; each addresses specific problems raised by the rapid growth of the early church.

Sermon title

On a mission

Outline

- 1 Paul's call (Acts 9; 13)
- 2 Paul's journeys (Acts 15-28)
- 3 Paul's gospel (Romans 8; Colossians 1)
- 4 Paul's concern (Acts 20:13-38; Galatians 5:16-6:10; Philippians 4:2-9; Ephesians 6:10-20)

Application

What we believe matters and so does the way that we live.

The Apostles' teaching and John's vision

The big picture

We live now in the light of God's future when he will bring all things to a glorious completion and all will be restored.

Themes

Creation Faith Kingdom Promise Obedience Salvation

Overview

The so called general letters, like the letters of Paul were written in specific contexts. In broad terms they are designed to ensure that Christians stand firm, hold the truth, love one another and bear witness to God's salvation in the way that we live and in the words that we speak. Although we live as 'strangers' in a hostile world we can demonstrate the quality of divine love in our relationships with one another and with those around us. In all this we are focused on the future. We are people of hope.

Revelation looks very different but the nature of its writing should not obscure the fact that it is a letter. Written to the struggling persecuted churches at the eastern end of Asia (modern Turkey), it is an encouragement to stand firm in the face of opposition, in the conviction that God is working out his purposes and remains in control. The Roman Empire may appear powerful but God has the ultimate power and he will have the last word.

Sermon title

Living in the light of the future

Outline

- 1 Love one another (1 John 3:11-4:21)
- 2 Live as God's people (1 Peter 1:1-2:12; James 1:1-2:26)
- 3 Stand firm (Revelation 1-3)
- 4 Look forward (Revelation 21,22)

Application

As people with a secure future we are encouraged to look forward, holding to the truth of the gospel and offering hope to a confused world.