

## Spiritual Senses- Taste and see

### Taste

What's the first verse that springs into mind when I say I'm going to do a supplemental on Taste?

#### [Psalm 34:8](#)

*Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

We are sensual beings and that to connect with people we need to engage their senses. In Jesus' ministry He didn't just talk at people he connected with them, when he healed them, he touched them even the lepers.

So for today's exhortation I want to look at another of our senses, taste. In particular how God uses the imagery of taste to describe how our spiritual lives are to progress as we get to know God and Jesus in our walk towards his kingdom.

I read at the start a verse from Psalm 34 and I'd like to read you another verse from Psalm 119.

#### [Psalm 119:103](#)

*How sweet are your words to my **taste**, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

In the Jewish community this has been taken literally. Around the 12th century, a custom developed in Germany of bringing a child to school for the first time on Shavuot.

Shavuot is a [Jewish holiday](#) that occurs on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of [Sivan](#) (late May or early June). Shavuot commemorates the anniversary of the day [God](#) gave the [Torah](#) to [Moses](#) and the Israelites at [Mount Sinai](#).

The custom is as follows: on Shavuot the children are brought by their parents to the synagogue and the children are placed on the lap of the rabbi who teaches them. The parents bring with them a slate upon which are written the Hebrew alphabet and the following verses:

'Moses commanded us the Torah' (Deut. 33:4), 'may the Torah be my occupation,' and 'The Lord called to Moses' (Lev. 1:1). The rabbi reads every letter of the alef-bet and the child repeats after him, and then the rabbi reads the rest of the verses and the child repeats them.

Then the rabbi puts a little honey on the slate and the child licks the honey from the letters with his tongue. And then they bring a honey cake upon which is inscribed 'The Lord God gave me a skilled tongue to know...' (Isaiah 50: 4-5), and the rabbi reads every word of these verses and the child repeats after him. And then they bring a peeled hard-boiled egg upon which is written 'Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll... and I ate it and it tasted as sweet

as honey to me' (Ezekiel 3:3). And the rabbi reads every word and the child repeats after him. And they feed the child the cake and the egg."

Brother Bob Lloyd said in one of his talks that actually scripture isn't particularly tasty to babies, they need small sweet bits to get a taste for it. It then becomes satisfying once you have got a taste for it.

The Jewish community knew this and so they got the child to associate the scripture with the sweetness of honey. Which is very good psychology. I know my mum obviously knew this as there were certain treats that were reserved for certain things, like a can of coke and a mars bar came after doing a piano exam.

Jesus knew this and he knew our psychology, that's one of the many reasons he taught in parables. A short sweet taste of the gospel in the form of an easy to listen to story. And yet Jesus' parables can be taken at many levels and there is so much to gain from studying them in greater depth once you have got a taste for them.

Do you remember the first time you ever tasted chocolate? Did you take a little nibble and then say, no that's enough for me? Or once you've had that first taste, did you crave more and end up eating the whole bar?

## **1 Peter 2**

*<sup>2</sup>Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup>now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Unlike a craving for chocolate which is not the healthiest thing to crave, the Apostle Peter encourages us to crave spiritual milk. Peter was writing his letter to the new churches that had sprung up throughout Asia. Many of these disciples would be newly baptised so would be very much spiritual babies born again into Christ. The spiritual milk he is referring to is the word of God. New born babies need milk every few hours, and we are the same. Regular bible reading will help us grow and to help us develop our spiritual lives.

The writer to the Hebrews had something similar to say. However the Hebrews that he was writing to had not followed Peter's advice and were not developing as they should.

## **Hebrews 5**

*<sup>11</sup>We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! <sup>13</sup>Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup>But solid*

*food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

Like with babies milk is just the beginning. A baby doesn't develop into a toddler by just drinking milk. Infact once a baby has moved onto solid food it also needs to start trying out the things it sees its parents do. It needs to play, it needs to try to crawl and then to walk.

Likewise once we have got a taste for the word of God in order for us to move onto solid food we need to start putting the things that we have learnt into practice. *"<sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."*

Our growth as Christians is dependent upon what we have learnt being reflected in our lives.

This process of continual growth will also help prevent us loosing a taste for the word of God.

I doubt there are many people who still have a taste for their mothers milk. Likewise if after ten years of bible reading, you had still only read one parable, it is likely that you would have lost the taste for it.

When you lose your sense of taste then food that you once liked becomes no longer palatable.

#### **Luke 14:34**

*<sup>34</sup>"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? <sup>35</sup>It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.*

*"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Pure salt in Jesus' times was a valuable commodity. It was possible to get salt from the dead sea by evaporation but the salt you would get that way would be full of other contaminates, sand and minerals and would not be the sort of salt you would want to put on your food.

Jesus in this verse is comparing our faith with salt. Our faith when it is pure and is reflected in the way we live our lives, is a valuable commodity, and it is useful as a witness to others to give them a taste of the goodness of God.

However if our faith loses its saltiness by being diluted like salt being diluted with water, or the salt from the dead sea which is full of all kinds of other contaminates and isn't pure, then it is very difficult to make it pure again and is certainly not useful.

Once salt has become contaminated, it is not useful for anything. If you put it on the land or in your compost heap it will contaminate the soil and prevent anything from growing or bearing fruit. In the same way if we let other teaching dilute our understanding of the bible, or let sinful practices from the world around us into our lives then we can rapidly become useless and no longer bear good fruit for God.

## Colossians 2

<sup>20</sup>Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: <sup>21</sup>"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? <sup>22</sup>These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup>Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Paul here is actually saying the same sort of thing. He condemns the excess regulations from the law, because rather than help the believer they actually water down the teachings of God and make them harder to keep." If salt loses its saltiness it is fit neither for the soil nor the manure pile, it is thrown out."

So the lessons for us are clear, the word of God is wonderful and can fill us and sustain us whatever level of spiritual maturity we are at; starting with small sweet morsels until we can handle solid food. And that we should keep what we learn pure by not letting teachings of man dilute the word of God so that we can have salt in ourselves and be at peace with one another.

And so we come to remember Jesus who:

## Hebrews 2:8-10

*In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. <sup>9</sup>But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might **taste** death for everyone.*

<sup>10</sup>*In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

Jesus only tasted death. Death did not have a permanent hold over him. And in going through all that he suffered he through the grace of God the means of our salvation is sure. And that salvation is opened up and offered to each one of us.

Just think of the parable of the great banquet that Jesus told in Luke 14. Remember how the master of the banquet initially invited all kinds of important guests. But each one of them turned down the invitation. So we read

## Luke 14:23-25

<sup>23</sup>*"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. <sup>24</sup>I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a **taste** of my banquet.' "*

What a contrast there is then between what our lives before acceptance of Christ and our lives afterwards. We were all set to die forever. But even if Jesus remains away, now like Christ we will only taste death because he has something better planned for us. He has invited us to his banquet, but not just to taste eternal life, but to have it as a complete gift from God.

And so it is fitting that Jesus in his wisdom gives us the command to remember him in bread and wine. So as we remember Jesus and everything that he's done, taste the bread, taste the wine and as you do so realise that this is just a small taste looking forward to the eternal life that is set before us by the grace of God and the love of our saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

## **Open my eyes**

### **Open my eyes that I may see** (the wonderful things in your law)

Psalm 119:18

“<sup>18</sup> Open my eyes that I may see  
wonderful things in your law.”

I want to think about the next in our series of senses – Sight.

### **I would like to start with a little example that I would like a volunteer to help me with.**

If anyone else wants to try this at the same time please feel free to try it.

To start with I want you to close your eyes.

Now when you open them I'm going to ask you to look at and identify everything in this room that is red. I'm going to give you 3 seconds to do that, after which I want you to close them again.

Ok so look now.

And close them again.

So .....tell me what red items are in the room.

Now keeping your eyes closed tell me what blue items are in the room?

Okay you can open your eyes now.

You notice how, because you weren't looking for blue items you didn't see and remember any of them.

This is what the world of psychology calls filtering. We all do it every day of our lives. We see what we want to see and what our character and life experiences have taught us to see. For example I am an electrical engineer and when I go into a room, the electrical engineer in me is automatically looking at the lights, the power sockets etc. Whereas when my wife Julia enters the same room she will immediately be more interested in look at the people in the room.

### **Mark 8:22-25**

<sup>22</sup>They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. <sup>23</sup>He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

<sup>24</sup>*He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."*

<sup>25</sup>*Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.* <sup>26</sup>*Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."*

Not only is this an amazing miracle, it's also a very good demonstration of the complete power of God. When the blind man was healed the first time, Jesus asks him what he sees. The blind man's response is that he sees people looking like trees walking around. He was filtering what he saw with the experiences he knew as someone who was blind. After Jesus first touched his eyes he could see people that looked like what trees must have felt like, a tall column. When Jesus touched his eyes again we read that his eyes were opened, his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. When Jesus touched the man's eyes the second time, this time he was healing his mind and gave him the knowledge to interpret his sight.

This is something that the medical world can't do. If medical science comes up with a way of giving sight to someone who is born blind, what they won't be able to do is give them all experience of a lifetime to interpret what they see. This miracle therefore demonstrates that when someone was healed by Jesus, it wasn't like healers who you may see today who claim to heal people. People who were healed by Jesus went away completely restored and he healed both their body and their mind instantly.

However the reason that I decided we should look at this parable is because of its example of the filters that can be on our eyes. The filters that we use on our sight either consciously or unconsciously can act either positively or negatively. The blind man didn't have a choice about the filter on his eyes after Jesus touched him the first time. He had no knowledge of the visual difference between people and trees.

Filters are really just like looking through binoculars. For example on this slide if we just believed what we saw through the binoculars on this screen we would believe that cats are scared of mice.

However if we remove the binoculars and see clearly, actually we realise that cats are actually scared of dogs.

The majority of our visual filters however are influenced by our beliefs.

For example if you believe that all young people these days are lazy good for nothings who just hang around on street corners and cause problems, then that's what you will be looking for whenever you see young people. When you go out on the streets you will be looking for the young people who cause trouble, the young people who fit your image of young people and you will remember the examples you see that fit your beliefs. Likewise because of the way your

beliefs filter what you see, you may walk past a young person helping an old lady with her shopping and not even notice.

This is a similar concept to what we spoke about in our first session, the people who Jesus compared to see that fell on the path. These people don't want to hear and understand God's word so they ignore it.

So as Christians what filter should we have for our eyes?

## **Matthew 25**

*<sup>31</sup>"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

*<sup>34</sup>"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

*<sup>37</sup>"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

*<sup>40</sup>"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

*<sup>41</sup>"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'*

*<sup>44</sup>"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'*

*<sup>45</sup>"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'*

*<sup>46</sup>"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

The king Jesus is talking about here is himself. Jesus is telling us quite clearly that when we see somebody in need, we should be treating them as we would Christ. As though we are seeing them through a filter.

## Hebrews 12

<sup>2</sup>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy set before him** endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. As Christians we are followers of Christ. Christ is the reason for our salvation. So his is the author of our faith. Jesus in the way he lived his life was the perfect example of how to live a Godly life of faith. So he is also the perfecter of our faith.

With our eyes fixed on Jesus, we should be trying to see the world through the eyes of Christ. When we see people in need, we should help them in whatever way we can, like Christ would.

### John 4:31-38 (New International Version)

<sup>31</sup>Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

<sup>32</sup>But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

<sup>33</sup>Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

<sup>34</sup>"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. <sup>35</sup>Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? **I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.** <sup>36</sup>Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for **eternal life**, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. <sup>37</sup>Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour."

In this incident the disciples did not have their thoughts focused on the same things as Jesus. Jesus' focus was on telling people the good news of the gospel. Open your eyes, he says. The fields are ripe for harvest, the crop for eternal life. The filter that Jesus had on his eyes was for doing the will of God, preaching the good news and helping those he came into contact with.

Again as we fix our eyes on Jesus and try to see the world as he saw the world, we should always be looking to tell people about the gospel.

### Luke 11:33-34

<sup>33</sup>"No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. <sup>34</sup>Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.

Let's look at those two verses in turn, first verse 33.

Our life as faithful disciples is our light to the world. The way we act towards other people, the way we talk to people about our faith is our light. What we know about the gospel is a bright light that we should want to share with other people, so we should act so that other people can see that light.

Verse 34

The eye is the lamp of the body. This again comes back to the concept of filters. What our eyes see will affect our whole bodies. If our eyes are always fixed on Jesus and we are seeing the world as Jesus would, then we will be filling our bodies with good things and our hearts and mind will be good and in turn our light will be good and shine brightly. If we filter our eye sight to see only bad and sinful things then those things will fill our minds and our hearts.

The apostle Paul summarises this nicely in his letter to the Philippians

Php 4:6-8

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

Like we said in our last talk, if we focus on the troubles of this life, money, jobs etc, it doesn't help us. What will help us to develop as Christians and resist the weeds that can come up and choke us is to develop our relationship with God through prayer. And to focus our thoughts on the things of God. Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

## **2 Corinthians 4:17-18**

*<sup>16</sup>Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup>**So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.***

Again Paul reminds us that these things of this life are only temporary and therefore we shouldn't waste our time concentrating on them. By fixing our eyes on what is unseen Paul

means that we should be looking focusing on the example Jesus set us and looking forward to the glory of eternal life that God has set aside for us.

This is why our faith is so important. We must be able to focus on the Lord Jesus even though none of us has ever seen him. He is our example. Jesus himself looked forwards beyond his immediate suffering when he was enduring the cross, as we read in Hebrews.

Hebrews 12:2

***for the joy set before him** endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

## **A pleasing aroma**

### **Sweet Smelling Aroma**

#### **2 Corinthians 2:14-17**

*14But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? 17Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.*

Isn't that the most amazing thing that we are to God the aroma of Christ! And that God is using us to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ!

That is more than just beautiful writing. The use of the imagery of a pleasing aroma is used a lot in the bible and I want to look at just a few examples which demonstrate what smells good to God and therefore how that should influence our lives as Christians.

Our first example is of Noah and we're going to read a couple of verses about what Noah did after the great flood.

#### **Gen 8: 20-21**

*20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.*

This is the first example in the bible of what smells good to God. The important thing to note in this example is that Noah wasn't told to build an altar to the LORD. He just got on and did it. He didn't build the altar and make the sacrifice because he had done something wrong that he wanted God to forgive him for. He just built an altar and sacrificed to the Lord because that was what he wanted to do. And we read that the burnt offerings, the sacrifices that Noah made were a pleasing Aroma to the LORD.

Our next example is from Leviticus. Leviticus is the book of the Old Testament that records all the laws that God gave to the nation of Israel. Leviticus also describes all the sacrifices that the people were to make and the reasons that they were to make those sacrifices.

#### **Leviticus 1:1-9**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

<sup>3</sup> " If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. <sup>5</sup> He is to slaughter the young bull before the LORD, and then Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. <sup>6</sup> He is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. <sup>8</sup> Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. <sup>9</sup> He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

The book of Leviticus is full of sacrifices that the nation of Israel was to make. There were sin offerings which were sacrifices that the people were to make when they sinned unintentionally. There were guilt offerings which were sacrifices that the people were to make when they broke the rules of the law unintentionally. The sacrifices that were prescribed for this were to make Atonement for the sins that had been committed. That is to make the people right with God. But the bible never describes these types of sacrifices as having pleasing aromas to the Lord.

However the verses we have just read are about freewill offerings. These are offerings that people chose to offer to God. Not because they were guilty of a sin, but because they wanted to bring an offering to God, just like the offering that Noah made.

Like any of the other sacrifices, freewill offerings had to be perfect without blemish. But they are the only offerings that are described as being "an aroma pleasing to the LORD". A freewill offering didn't have to be an animal. There were also freewill offerings for the Israelites to bring the first fruit of the harvest and offer them to the Lord. But they always had to be the best of whatever was being offered. So the best animal without blemish. Or the first fruits of the harvest straight out of the field.

Leviticus also explains what would happen to the Israelites if they disobeyed God and did not keep his Laws.

### **Lev 26:27-31**

<sup>27</sup> " If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, <sup>28</sup> then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. <sup>29</sup> You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. <sup>30</sup> I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you. <sup>31</sup> I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.

So we can see that the way in which a sacrifice is offered and the reason it is offered is more important to God than what the actual sacrifice was. The sacrifice could be 50 of the best most valuable lambs. Or it could be several tonnes of wheat, but that wouldn't matter if the person offering it had been worshipping idols. If the person or indeed the whole nation of Israel were offering the sacrifice whilst being disobedient to God. If they were breaking God's laws and not being faithful to God the God would take no delight in the sacrifice. That sacrifice would not please God. So whilst it may be a sacrifice that should have smelled good to God, actually it would be something that would not give God any pleasure.

The prophet Hosea emphasizes this point. Speaking to Israel he says:

### **Hosea 6:6**

*<sup>6</sup> For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,  
and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*

We see from this verse that the actual sacrifice wasn't what God desires at all. What God desires and has always desired is the acknowledgement that He is God. That he is the only God.

This principle is repeated in the New Testament.

### **Mark 12:28-34**

*<sup>28</sup>One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"*

*<sup>29</sup>"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'<sup>31</sup>The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

*<sup>32</sup>"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup>To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

*<sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*

Jesus in this response is saying that the most important principle that was detailed in the Old Testament law is to Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And to 'Love your neighbour as yourself!'

And Jesus affirms the answer of the teacher of the law that these two commandments are more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices that were detailed in the Law of Moses in the Old Testament. Again it is not the sacrifices that God desired. God desires that we love him with all our hearts, all our soul and all our minds and that we love our neighbour as ourselves.

I have already explained how our first few examples of sacrifices that were pleasing to God were freewill offerings. That is offerings that the people didn't have to give but gave because they wanted to. So now let's have a look at a couple of New Testament examples of freewill offerings.

### **Philippians 4:16-18**

*<sup>16</sup>for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. <sup>17</sup>Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.*

The apostle Paul had received help from the church at Philippi in the form aid when he was on one of his missionary journeys. Paul describes these freewill charitable gifts of the believers as being a fragrant offering and acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God. Again like before the church at Philippi didn't have to give Paul anything, but this was something they wanted to do. A freewill offering.

When Paul is writing to the Corinthian church about giving he writes the following:

### **2 Corinthians 9:7 (New International Version) – Can expand with other verses from this chapter**

*<sup>7</sup>Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

This just emphasises the point that what God wants if for giving to be free will, not because someone tells us to.

This then is a principle that we can apply to ourselves. When we give, whether the gift is our time, or our money or anything else, the gift should be given by our own free will, rather than because we are compelled to and give grudgingly. That gift then is something that that smells good to God and is pleasing to him.

As in all things though the best example of a fragrant offering pleasing to God is Christ himself:

## **Ephesians 5:2**

*1Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Like all of the other offerings we've read about that are pleasing to God, Christ's offering was a free will offering. But rather than just being a part, a tithe or a single good deed, Christ gave everything. Whilst he was alive on earth his life was an offering of service to the Lord continually doing the will of God at every opportunity. And several times God's response was

## **Luke 3:22**

*"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well **pleased**."*

His life therefore was our ultimate example of how to smell good to God and please him, and as Christians we should be looking to give up our own self and instead let ourselves be filled with the fragrance of the knowledge of God which we will spread everywhere we go.

Jesus did however go further than we ever could and in his death, he was the ultimate freewill offering, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

## **John 12:1-11**

### **Jesus Anointed at Bethany**

*<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup>Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

*<sup>4</sup>But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup>"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." <sup>6</sup>He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.*

*<sup>7</sup>"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*

Let me give you a bit of background to this event. We read in Luke 10:38-41 about a previous visit by Jesus to the house of Mary and Martha. On this occasion Martha was busy doing the work preparing the meal. Whereas we read that Mary was sat at Jesus' feet listening to Jesus as he taught. When Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to come and help her in the kitchen, Jesus responds that actually Mary is doing what is more important. That it is more important to listen to the words of Jesus than to concern oneself with the mundane things of this world.

Later on in John 11 we read about how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. We read in verse 2 that Lazarus was the brother of Mary, the same Mary who read about in chapter 12 pouring perfume on Jesus' feet.

So we realise that Jesus was very close to this family, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And we also start to realise that they will have heard a lot of Jesus' teaching and that they had a strong faith.

Jesus quite often talked to his disciples about his own death and what he would have to go through. For example : Mark 10:32-34

*<sup>32</sup>They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. **Again** he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. <sup>33</sup>"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, <sup>34</sup>who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."*

I believe that Mary would have heard Jesus speak like this. But unlike the other disciples I think that she took this to heart and did something about it. So coming back to John chapter 12 I put it to you that Mary knew that Jesus was about to be betrayed and put to death. She knew that this was her last chance before the Passover and these events to anoint Jesus. In the parallel account in Mark 14:8-9 it says:

*<sup>8</sup>She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. <sup>9</sup>I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

So Mary believing that Jesus was going to be put to death shortly did what she could beforehand to prepare Jesus for his burial. It is an act of love and devotion to her Lord. But also an act of faith, believing that what Jesus said about himself would come true.

So one last thought to conclude our study. We have learnt that sacrifices that are fragrant and pleasing to God are those that are given of our own free will. We give them because of our love and devotion to God and because it is what our faith drives us to do. Not because we are compelled to give them by a third party. And we have learnt that the offerings that God desires us to give are those that involve loving the Lord of God with all our heart, soul and mind and loving our neighbour as ourselves.

## **Romans 12**

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual<sup>[a]</sup> act of worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Paul therefore urges us to give our very bodies and lives as living sacrifices to God. By which he means that all the things we do and think should be devoted to God as our spiritual act of worship. And in order to do this we should renew our minds. Any to renew our minds we must feed it with the word of God and by acting on what we've learnt.



**Touch me and see**

**Touch me and see**

## **Puppets**

I would like to start this session by getting you all involved.

Please turn to person next to you and just say hello.

Ok that wasn't too hard was it?

Ok now turn to the person next to you and give them a hug

I hope you noticed the different between those two acts. When you just said hello, there is no touch involved. You do not need to come close to the other person.

Whereas when you give someone a hug, you have to touch them. You feel them, you smell them, you create a connection between yourself and the other person.

And because of these things hugging someone will make you closer to that person that just talking to them.

I mentioned how in our session on hearing, that Jesus knew people. Jesus knows everything about us. When Jesus met people he knew what to do and what to say to make a connection with them. In our session on hearing, we looked at how Jesus used stories to make the word of God easier to understand and take in.

In this session I want to look at another way Jesus connected with people through the use of touch.

I'd like you all now to close your eyes and picture if you can that you are in Israel 2000 years ago at the time of Jesus. It's a cold day outside and you are walking down a crowded street. There

are people walking in front of you, behind you and pushing past you. And you are being jostled as you walk along.

Then all of a sudden the crowd parts ahead of you and you see a person dressed in rags, with untrimmed beard and their head covered. He is shuffling slowly awkwardly down the street and as he does everyone moves to the other side of the street and turns their back on him.

Then you see one man who doesn't move out of the way. Instead he looks straight at him. And as leper kneels down you see Jesus stretch out his hand and touch him.

Imagine, that you are that leper. That for years now you have lived in isolation outside of the town away from all other people. Imagine that in all that time you have never touched anyone, or had anyone touch you. No-one has even taken anytime to talk to you face to face.

Then you come to Jesus. This is a man who you've heard is so powerful that he can heal just by saying the word. And you kneel there before Jesus and you ask him to heal you. And rather than just saying the word, he reaches out and touches you. The first touch you have felt in years, and with it you also feel yourself being healed.

#### **Matthew 8:2-4**

*2A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

*3Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. 4Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

Jesus knew what this man needed. He didn't just need to be healed. He needed what we all need. He needed to be touched like a normal human being. Jesus made that connection.

Julia my wife spend several months in India. Whilst she was there she visited several people with leprosy. And as I've described what these people wanted so much was to be touched. It is a very sad situation with leprosy in India, because leprosy as we know it is only contagious to people who are hungry and weak and not as well as they could be. And to get better, in addition to modern medicine what these people need is to be well fed and well looked after. But in India, because of the stigma and fear of leprosy, these people get cast out of families and are disowned by their friends. So they have no means of support and not means of getting the food and nursing that would make them well.

The example of Jesus however is completely different, he identified the needs of people and met them. And in all the examples we're going to look in this session, the need of the people we're talking about is the need for touch.

#### **Luke 7:6-10**

<sup>6</sup>So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. <sup>7</sup>That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

<sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." <sup>10</sup>Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

In this example we see the full power of God and of faith demonstrated. The centurion had such a strong faith in the power of God that he knew that if Jesus said that his servant would be healed, it would be so.

Our next few examples however are completely the opposite

## **Matt 9**

### **A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman**

<sup>18</sup>While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." <sup>19</sup>Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

<sup>20</sup>Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. <sup>21</sup>She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

<sup>22</sup>Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

<sup>23</sup>When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, <sup>24</sup>he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup>After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. <sup>26</sup>News of this spread through all that region.

There are two incidences of touch in these verses. The woman who touched Jesus' cloak was absolutely desperate to be healed and she believed that Jesus could heal her. And she believed that she only needed to touch his cloak to be healed. And Jesus who knew her through and through let her be healed. But he made it clear to her that it was her faith that healed her, not the specific touching of his cloak.

We also read about the ruler in verse 18. He says "come and put your hand on her and she will live". Again unlike the centurion, he needed to see the physical action of Jesus touching his

daughter to believe. So Jesus goes along with the ruler and he takes that girl by the hand and she gets up alive. Jesus could have just said, get up but he didn't, because the ruler only had enough faith to believe that his daughter would be healed if Jesus touched her. But that was enough faith, Jesus knowing what the ruler needed touched the girl. And that would also be what the little girl needed. For her to wake from her sleep having her hand held by Jesus and reassuring her. It was touch that these people needed and it was touch that Jesus gave.

A few more examples of how Jesus interacted with people in this way.

### **Matt 17:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup>There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup>Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

<sup>4</sup>Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

<sup>5</sup>While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

<sup>6</sup>When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. <sup>7</sup>But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." <sup>8</sup>When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

This was a really awesome event and we read in verse 6 that the disciples were terrified. But Jesus knew that they were scared and he knew what to do to comfort them. He goes over and he **touches** them. He lifts them up on their feet and reassures them. He knew what they needed and he helped them.

### **Matt 20:29-34**

<sup>29</sup>As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. <sup>30</sup>Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

<sup>31</sup>The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

<sup>32</sup>Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

<sup>33</sup>"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."

*34 Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.*

Again Jesus could have healed these blind men just by saying the word, but that's not what he does. Jesus touched their eyes and then they received their sight. I think that Jesus knew that these blind men need to feel Jesus doing something to believe that they were healed, and that's what Jesus did, he touched their eyes and they were healed.

### **Mark 7:32-34**

*32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.*

*33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").*

On first reading, Jesus putting his hands into this man's ears and spitting and touching the man's tongue seems like such a funny thing, But this was a deaf man. If Jesus told him he was healed he couldn't hear him say it. So Jesus touches him, just like the blind man as a prompt for his faith, so that he knows that he is going to be healed.

The power of faith is so important and stronger faith is something we should always be praying for and working towards by acting on what we know.

But also recognising the influence that our actions can have on the faith of others is also so important. The faith of all of the people in these examples was strengthened by Jesus' use of touch.

The world we live in may in some ways be different from the world at the time of Jesus but there are still people who have needs who need to make connections. People who need to form relationships.

Last year 7.8 million single people logged onto internet dating websites. That's almost 15% of the population.

As we saw in the puppets show at the start of this session, people have a need to have relationships, both for love and for friendship. Yet the world we live in certainly in the UK seems to be unable to provide for the needs of so many people.

When we think about the way that our relationship with God and Christ changes our lives surely we must also realise that we have something amazing to give.

Jesus found out what people needed and gave it to them. We should all be trying to do the same. In this western world of lonely people, there are so many people who need relationships, family and community. And we having felt the touch of Jesus are well placed to give it to them.

And the better we get to know people the more we'll know how to meet their needs and show Jesus' love to them.

Jesus also understood that some people only had a very small amount of faith. In fact Thomas one of Jesus' own disciples refused to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead.

John 20:24-29

*Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.*

*So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."*

*A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*

*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

*Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

*Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Thomas was probably still suffering from the disappointment of Jesus' death. Some of the disciples had believed that Jesus was going to over through the Romans and save the Jewish nation there and then. They hadn't understood when Jesus had tried to explain to them that he had to die. So when he had been put to death it would have been a real shock and disappointment for Thomas. Thomas therefore did not want to have his hopes raised by the other disciples talk of Jesus being risen. He couldn't take to be disappointed again so he insists that he won't believe until he touches Jesus himself.

Jesus however knew this. He knew what Thomas needed and so he appears among the disciples. And he tells Thomas to touch his hands where the nails had been and to put his hand in his side. I find several things encouraging about this example. Firstly I find it really comforting that Jesus helped the unbelief of the disciples. As such we should always be praying for God to strengthen our faith as we know that he hears our prayers and that Jesus did help the disciples. Secondly Jesus calls those who have not physically seen Jesus blessed. That means all of you in this room who have come here to study God's word because you believe that Jesus is risen from the dead. Jesus calls you blessed.

Eph 1:18-23

*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his*

*incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,*

*which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

Amen

**He who has ears to hear**

**He who has ears to hear**

**Talk**

Reading – Matt 13:1-23 Parable of the Sower

The parable of the sower is a wonderful parable. It is one of the few parables that we have Jesus' explanation of the parable recorded for us. Jesus not only tells us what the parable is about, he also tells us why he tells parables and why he has told this parable.

Parables are stories with a message. By telling stories Jesus delivered the word of God in a simple, easy to listen to message.

Everyone loves stories, right from when we're little kids it's ingrained in us that when someone says, let me tell you a story, we stop and listen.

I have two brothers and a little sister. My mother tells the story of how when we brothers were too old to be told bedtime stories, but my little sister was still being told bedtime stories, when she was telling my sister a bedtime story that us boys still liked, one by one we would sneak into her bedroom to listen to the story. Until were all there listening, even my Father too.

Jesus knew how much we love stories and so a lot of his teaching was in the form of parables.

In verses 11-17 of the chapter we had read Jesus explains that there are people who have hardened their hearts to God, who do not want to hear Gods word. Telling the word of God in parables, gave people no excuse. A parable is easy to listen to so there was no excuse for not hearing it and taking it in. But for those people who want to get to understand the word of God, the parable means that they have to think about the message to understand what it means.

And so the parable of the sower is actually about what different people do with the word of God when they hear it.

In this parable the seed represents the word of God. Jesus explains that the seed that falls on the path is like people who hear the word and do not understand it and so it is taken away. As I said earlier, Jesus has already explained in verses 14 and 15, that people do not understand because they do not want to understand. It has nothing to do with them being unable to understand, or an evil being called the devil preventing them understanding. When Jesus talks about the devil, he is talking about anything that is opposed to God and most often and indeed in this case it is our own evil desires that are that opposition. So the seed that falls on the path are people that do not want to understand.

## 2 Timothy 4:2-4 (New International Version)

<sup>2</sup>Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup>For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of **teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear**. <sup>4</sup>They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

People are very good at hearing what they want to hear, and not hearing what they don't want to hear. In England we call this 'Selective hearing'. For example a child who has perfectly good hearing, may decide not to hear when his parent calls him to come in from play as its bed time. Equally I've never known a child not hear when you tell them you have a present for them.

At the time of Jesus there were people who saw the most amazing miracles that Jesus performed and yet would still not believe.

John 10:22-28

<sup>22</sup>Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>24</sup>The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

<sup>25</sup>Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, <sup>26</sup>but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup>My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

So there are people who don't want to hear the word of God, because they want to carry on living their lives the way they are. And these people will perish. But for the people who do hear the word they will have eternal life.

Verse 20 of the parable

<sup>20</sup>The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup>But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

In the other talks this weekend we will be looking at how we develop a good root so that we do not fall away when trouble or persecution comes.

## Hebrews 2:1

*"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have **heard**, so that we do not drift away."*

The first two chapters of Hebrews details the importance of staying true to our faith. And in this verse the importance paying close attention to what we have heard, because it is literally a matter of life and death. How we hear the word of God and what we do with what we hear means either everlasting life in God's kingdom or everlasting contempt as those who will die forever.

Again I will be spending quite a bit of time this weekend in the next few talks explaining how we gain a good root to prevent us wilting away when trouble or persecution comes because it is so important.

Verse 22

*"<sup>22</sup>The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."*

This is something that is a big problem for Christians in England. We have very busy lives with demanding jobs, and the nature of living in that sort of country means that it is very easy to become preoccupied with all of the worries of life and therefore not having time for God.

Thorns therefore are often of our own creation. If we are preoccupied with things of the world then these thorns will become bigger and bigger. And really the things of this world are not important.

How much importance do we put on the things of the world? The more importance we place on them, the more likely it is that like the weeds they can choke us.

Jesus says the following in Matthew 6.

### **Matthew 6:20-22**

*<sup>19</sup>"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

*<sup>22</sup>"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup>But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

*<sup>24</sup>"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

*<sup>25</sup>"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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup>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? <sup>27</sup>Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*

*<sup>28</sup>"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. <sup>29</sup>Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup>Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Jesus makes it quite clear that as God is looking after us, there is no need to place high importance on the cares of this life. The material things of this world are temporary, they can be

stolen or lost or broken. But focusing on the things that God wants us to care about will help us as we head towards God's kingdom.

So instead of worrying about the things of this life we should instead focus on growing like the seed that fell on good ground.

Verse 23

*<sup>23</sup>But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."*

Notice how Jesus describes the seed that falls on good soil. It is the man who **hears the word and understands it**. It is so important once we have heard the word, to take it into our hearts and minds, to fully understand it and so that we can produce a good crop for God.

### **James 1:19-21**

*<sup>19</sup>My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup>for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. <sup>21</sup>Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

*<sup>22</sup>**Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.** <sup>23</sup>Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup>and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup>But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, **and continues to do this**, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

*<sup>26</sup>If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup>Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James is very clear in what he says. Verse 22 **do not merely listen to the word and so deceive, yourselves. Do what it says**. Did you also notice how in verse 25 James says doesn't just say that we are blessed in what we do for just reading the word once and then forgetting it. He says that the man who **continually** looks into the word and does what it say, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Becoming a Christian, is not just about hearing the word of God. It is about continually looking into the word and doing what it says.

The word of God, is God talking to us, it is God telling us how to live our lives. It is God telling us how much he loves us, how much he wants to give us eternal life and how much he wants us to have a relationship with him.

Jesus said

### **Luke 8:21**

*<sup>21</sup>He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."*

So God doesn't just want to get to know him, Jesus says we can be part of God's family, if we hear God's word and put it into practice.

The really amazing thing is that for us to grow into a crop that brings forth many times what is sown, we need to develop a relationship with God and Jesus.

Like any good relationship, our development as Christians isn't about just hearing the word of God and putting those words into practice. It's about talking back to God so that you can develop that relationship.

So how do we talk to God?

Do any of you know what God's phone number is? It's really easy to remember and so useful when trying to develop a relationship with God.

It's Jeremiah 33:3

**Jeremiah 33:3 (New International Version)**

<sup>3</sup> *Call to me and I will answer you*

It's really as simple as that. Talk to God, and he will answer you. Pray to him and he will answer your prayers. Like any relationship, the answer may not always be the answer you want but God will answer your prayers.

It's useful to remember the following: "God always answers our prayers. Sometimes the answer is 'Yes', sometimes it's 'No' and sometimes it's 'wait'."

Someone once told me a story that is also helpful when thinking of our relationship with Jesus.

There were two Christians who went away on holiday together. They had booked a twin room in a hotel and when it came to bed time the first Christian had gone up to bed early and spent half an hour on his knees by the side of the bed in prayer. Just as he was finishing the second Christian came up to the room, knelt down in prayer for 10 seconds then got into bed. The first Christian said "how come you've got so little to pray about"? The second Christian answered saying "when you've been talking all day all you need to say in the evening is good night!"

This next verse is my favourite bible verse:

**James 4:8 (New International Version)**

<sup>8</sup> *Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

That is absolutely amazing but so important. Just like in any relationship, the closer you move to God by prayer and doing all the things instructed in his word, so he will come closer to you.

**Workshops/Discussion**

We said in the talk that God wants us to develop a relationship with him and to do this we need to pray to him.

But does God really hear our prayers, and what are his answers and when do they come?

**Luke 1:13**

*But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been **heard**. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.*

What do you think that Zechariah was praying for when his prayer was heard. Why? What do we learn about prayer from this incident?

James 5:13-20

How important do we think prayer is having read these verses?