

2011

# PRAYING THE GOSPEL

## with MATTHEW

**Prayers about the mission, and what it takes.**

**by Ian Robinson**



*First century synagogue at Capernaum*

This will re-source you,  
Drill down and find life.  
That's my prayer and my passion.  
So, take a few breaths. Close  
your eyes.  
You are in Galilee, in Jerusalem,  
in the gospel places.  
Read the gospel passage twice.  
Don't skip this step. Read it.  
In that light, read and dwell in  
the prayer/ meditation.  
Work it out.  
Wait a while. Do it all again.  
When you know what God is  
sharing with you,  
Go and do it boldly.  
Otherwise, stay very still.

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### **Matt 1.1-17**                      **Genealogy**

We know who he is and we know all his people.  
 In 28 generations, Matthew says, the line tells  
 of five women,  
 most of them famously wronged.  
 The men include some famous cheats and  
 failures.  
 It says this story runs hard alongside humanity  
 at its best and worst.  
 The exodus is forgotten but the exile says it well  
 enough -  
 these people are redeemed for a reason.  
 God's purposes roll on and around  
 and back again towards its goal, Jesus Christ.  
 Will he too fail? Cheat? Wrong the women? Be  
 forgotten?  
 This gospel will unfold, as real families do,  
 With a love a legacy and a murder or two.  
 Sounds like the 7 o'clock news.  
 Sounds like good news.

### **Matt 1.18-25**                      **Immanuel**

Immanuel, we welcome you into our lives.  
 Like Joseph we welcome you to interrupt our  
 thinking.  
 Like Mary we welcome you into our bodies.  
 Like both, take over our family, our future, our  
 dreams, our sex life.  
 And being welcome, we offer you all our  
 obedience.  
 We do not fear that such an out-of-control  
 surrender  
 will reap a whirlwind from our neuroses,  
 for you have saved us from our sins.  
 Your name is "Jesus".

### **Matt 2.1-23**                      **Wise Men**

Who are these New Agers,  
 tripping over to investigate  
 the latest and the greatest  
 in new spiritual phenomena?  
 Who is this political prima donna,  
 brimming with slaughter and infanticide,  
 raging with jealousy over any new king?

### **All who seek will come to bow before the infant King.**

Who are these theologians  
 looking in the books for the right answer  
 but unable to read the signs of the times?  
 Who are the mothers who weep Rachel's tears  
 all over again,  
 and when will their pain ever end?

### **Whether blind from intellectual pride or from painful tears, the Light of the world has come.**

Who is this little family,  
 fleeing like refugees across the border?  
 And where on earth is this "Nazareth",  
 the nesting place for the world's First Family?  
**As the Kingdom floods across human history,  
 no one is forgotten, no place is too hard.**  
 All alike are floating on a great ocean current  
 that moves the mind into dreams,  
 and explodes the very stars in the sky.  
 God, you spoke through the prophet  
 and now you act for all to see in history.  
**We see you. We worship you.**



*The desert of Judaea*

### **Matt 2.1-12**                      **Epiphany**

You show yourself in a wayward star,  
seemingly lost to the billionth degree among  
the emptiness of space.  
To some eyes, not lost, not wayward, but  
guiding.  
You show yourself in the scriptures,  
lines by the thousand jostling for interpretation,  
future promises wrapped in their origins  
and waiting for the mystery to be revealed.  
To some theologians, patient and humble,  
the pattern and the place of your purpose  
emerges from the pages.  
You show yourself in dreams,  
images becoming icons in the wells of the  
unconscious,  
symbols lobbing messages  
over the walls of our mental blocks.  
To some dreamers,  
their neuroses can be distinguished from your  
surprises.  
And you reveal yourself in a child at the knee of  
a young mother,  
housed temporarily in Bethlehem  
like refugees who have stumbled into a war.  
To some of us, God is on the move,  
and to you we surrender every precious thing  
we have and are,  
for the privilege of a life lived in worship of the  
God who reveals.

### **Matt 3.1-12**                      **Repent**

Like a meteor from the past comes the word of  
Isaiah,  
And in its wake the one who dresses like Elijah.  
The fire that he brings is the good news of the  
reign of God.  
Many come to the warmth,  
but some are just attracted to the sight,  
not drawn into the baptism unto repentance.  
They are warned the dread warning –  
'a mightier judgement is about to break forth  
in a baptism of Holy Spirit.  
And if you think this is hot, wait until you feel  
that fire.  
It will cut you down like an axe '.

Lord, we who claim a long pedigree in the  
church  
are those most like them, watching on,  
with our pride in past glories, our intolerance  
for urgency,  
and our reticence to respond from the heart.  
Make us much more like those with open hearts  
who heard and believed and entered the fire.

### **Matt 3.13-17**                      **Nothing**

Often enough we are calling to you out of our  
need,  
and nothing happens.  
John is telling you he needs to be baptized,  
and you resist him.  
What is it with you, Lord, that our needs are not  
enough of a need for you?  
What is it that makes you choose to be baptized  
instead,  
to enter our world of experience, to identify  
with us in our struggle and sin?  
We want you to take us out of it,  
and you want to walk us through it.  
Is it always true that "in this way we fulfil all  
righteousness"?  
It could sound a bit flaky, a bit too pious,  
a bit too much of the weeping martyr,  
even a bit too fatalistic and unbelieving,  
if it were not for the fact of what happened  
next.  
If this is how heavens open and Spirit falls,  
then these are the steps we will walk with you.

**Matt 4.1-11****Wilderness**

In the wilderness,  
 Only some tracks will take you to water.  
 Find them or perish.  
 So, it is here that his real self, his inner direction  
 is best discerned.  
 What sort of Son of God am I?  
 In the fatigue of fasting,  
 the temptations and distractions rise to face  
 him.  
 Deeply human perversity rises to the surface,  
 Like thirst and other lusts.  
 To bend the Word to my benefit.  
 To twist the Faith to my benefit.  
 To seize Worship to myself.  
 Why is it that, in times of wilderness,  
 Utterly worn on the edge of survival,  
 the devil seems more real than you?  
 How glad we are, even there,  
 that Word, and Faith and Worship  
 are the right tracks to the water of life.

**Matt 4.12-23****Capernaum**

Better than sunrise over the Galilean lake,  
 the light of the Kingdom dawns on human  
 history.  
 As you unpack your bag at Capernaum,  
 the mystery of all ages is being opened to all  
 view.  
 Like the exit from your home country after  
 John's arrest,  
 repentance brings us into an uncertain exile -  
 living as resident aliens in our own world.  
 We too will proclaim the gospel.  
 Master and Lord, today we ask to take our place  
 in history.  
 This is much more than our other wish for  
 security and the home country.

**Matt 5. 1-12****Happiness?**

"As long as you are happy with your choices"  
 we say to our children and grandchildren,  
 to our friends and church friends.  
 But it is not true, is it?  
 What happiness is real,

what happiness evaporates,  
 and what happiness is illusion?  
 The happiness of 'the passionate life'  
 or the happiness of the purposeful presence of  
 God?  
 They do not have to be different,  
 but in our age, they often are.  
 We seem to have to choose between  
 the happiness that has depth of feeling  
 or the happiness that lasts the distance.  
 We seem to have to choose between  
 dispassionate duty bound religion,  
 and the simple happiness of being who we are.  
 But You spoke of real happiness.  
 We can draw them together, you say -  
 if we follow this path of poverty, mourning,  
 meekness,  
 hungering, mercy, purity, peacemaking and so  
 on.  
 OR If we prefer the short cut to power and joy,  
 we lose everything.  
 What's my choice here?

**Matt 5.5****Meekness**

Jesus, gentle and meek in heart,  
 Soften our hearts towards the sinners and the  
 proud, including ourselves,  
 That we may all come back to your love.  
 Harden our minds towards the competing ideas  
 that beat at us in surround-sound,  
 That we may be ready for meekness,  
 May keep some silence,  
 May burn with anger, for the Love of justice,  
 and some time, right time, speak your biting  
 Word.  
 We step up now to take your yoke,  
 To learn Meekness all over again,  
 Just to walk with you,  
 In the name of Jesus, who confronts the self-  
 righteous,  
 Jesus, who stepped up to restore the broken  
 love  
 At his own cost.

### **Matt 5.9**                      **Peacemaking**

Lord, in a world of war, where can we find people  
who give themselves to peace-making?  
Where is the courage and the tools that can  
match the war-makers?  
Master, in these days of great crimes and petty  
betrayals,  
who will give up their sense of justified revenge  
for a life of forgiveness and grace?  
Saviour, among our consumerism and other  
ragging addictions,  
where is the power to change?

Jesus, we seek today to become a people  
who spread the good news about another way,  
a gracious God,  
and the Saviour  
who opens the door in real time and real places.  
But we aren't very good at doing it  
and we are not even sure if we want to.  
Jesus, we have come to you, today,  
questioning and aching for something better.  
Awaken godly desire in us.  
Speak to your servants, comfort those who  
mourn over this,  
and discomfort those who are comfortable.  
Amen

### **Matt 5. 13-20**                      **Salt**

We are tired of being like stale crisps the  
morning after,  
which have gone limp and lost their saltiness.  
We are tired of being gloomy churches,  
fond of dark sobriety and the geography of guilt  
and grief.  
We want to do the deeds of Jesus, and shed  
your light.  
We are tired of the sad refrain  
of those who want to abolish the Bible  
in order to be free of old shackles.  
We want to inhabit the Bible, to fulfil its  
righteousness,  
to teach our children the beauty of holiness.  
It is not righteousness which deadens the  
church.  
It is not the Bible which strangles us.

It is the loss of knowing who we are in Christ –  
that we are the salt, we are the light,  
we are those who have entered the kingdom of  
heaven.

Revive us, Lord Jesus, revive us again.

### **Matt 5.21-37**                      **At the Heart**

At the heart of every heinous murder  
lies the easy insult which I know too well.  
A cutting remark, a dismissive statement,  
a soul-destroying comment is the same at heart  
as wounding, wasting and body-destroying.

**Lord, sift my heart.**

At the heart of every shattering act of adultery  
lies the look which sees just one use for a body,  
and that I know too well.

Compulsive, instinctual,  
twisting the meaning of that which is beautiful  
to that which is bestial,  
a reckless substitute for intimacy.

**Are their some places I go, some people I  
know,**

**some privileges of mine that I must cut off?**

Search our hearts for sin, Lord,  
that it might not grow to destructive power.

Rid our hearts of self congratulation,

**Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.**



*Lake Galilee*

### **Matt 6.1-6,16-21 Ash Wednesday**

There is a reward for secret giving,  
and for secret prayer,  
and for secret fasting.  
You are promising it to those who avoid the  
show of piety,  
and just get down and do it.  
But, Lord Jesus, there is always a "but",  
we are not always sure we want your rewards  
instead of our own.  
We have learned to keep track of this world's  
treasures –  
income, outgo, panic or self congratulation.  
We have a habit of liking our own rewards.  
We like the admiration of others,  
and we even think you will admire our great  
prayer life.  
Our reward is complete –  
this is all the blessing we get, no more, reward  
given in full.  
Moth and rust chewing away at it.  
Or else we play it cool,  
and the thief comes and steals the key to  
intimacy with you.  
Lazy as we are, we tell each other that all that  
devotion stuff  
is a bit over the top, bit pietistic, bit  
'fundamental' you know,  
bit simple, surely it is not really necessary.  
But it is.  
It is with such devotion that our heart is  
opened,  
and your plan can be unfolded.  
Our hearts are for that.

### **Matt 9:35 to 10:8 Choose Leaders**

To our shame, Lord, our church would probably  
not choose the same people as you.  
We would prefer they were all of a certain style  
and education,  
but you picked a motley crew.  
Why is it so?  
Is it because we do not see the harvest?  
Is it because we do not pray about the leaders  
of your choosing?

Is it because we do not see our mission to  
include  
taking authority over evil spirits, healing the  
sick, preaching the Kingdom?  
Please Lord, send forth your choice of labourers  
in the harvest,  
and make us their best friends instead of their  
greatest obstacles.

### **Matt 10:24-33 Giving Up?**

We will try not to be disappointed, Lord,  
when no-one looks up to us as Messiah  
material, when they ignore us the way they  
ignored you.  
We will try not to be bitter when they misuse  
what we say and stereotype us and call us  
names that aren't true anyway.  
We will try not to be afraid when it seems our  
efforts are coming to nought, and all will be lost  
in the darkness.  
But something inside tells us that we will still  
feel these powerful emotions and be tempted  
to give up.  
So we agree today to take this stand against  
that day –  
if you keep counting the hairs of our head,  
then we will not count the cost.

### **Matt 10:34-42 Peace**

Not that one, Lord.  
Do not give us that kind of peace.  
Where you have to be second  
while we obey the family obligations in every  
direction first.  
A peace like that is the peace of the graveyard.  
And not that sort of happiness, either Lord,  
where we add up our achievements,  
possessions and experiences  
and see whether we have had "a good life".  
A gain like that is an investment in a rust bucket  
of a life.  
But, oh, the sweet freedom  
of losing what we cannot keep  
in order to gain what we cannot lose.  
And what a peace,  
even when all other kinds of peace are in  
pieces.

### **Matt 11.2-11      Thinking Blur**

When we are sick or in prison, we feel forgotten,  
 we feel off the edge, we lose our confidence,  
 our thinking blurs, we can barely ask our questions.  
 About to pay the ultimate price for faithfulness,  
 John also feels the doubts rise, the questions form,  
 but they block his mind and his resolve for they can go nowhere.  
 With amazing courage he sends word and asks the question.  
 You, Master, aware of his pain and doubt,  
 give answers that commend his thinking and comfort his soul.  
 He would recall the prophecy of your coming,  
 and he would hear the news that it was happening around you,  
 just as he had suspected.  
 Not placid words of comfort, but a provocative call to courage.  
 Give us the right way to comfort others in doubt,  
 in pain, under difficult pressure.  
 And if that is ourselves,  
 we hear today that you hear and understand.  
 We lift our head towards courage,  
 and we will not lie down in quiet.

### **Matt 11:25-30      Revival**

The ingredients of revival are here for us, Lord Jesus.  
 First we know that we must see what you are doing,  
 with the eyes of a child,  
 not just pursue our own good ideas.  
 Next is to hold to the fact that God is like you,  
 and that you are unique in his plan.  
 We cannot make a holy fog out of that which has been given as clear light.  
 And third that we cannot bring revival by more strenuous work,  
 but by a more rested walk with you,  
 an easier bearing, a lightness of step.  
 For to whom would you give the weight of revival,

who could receive it,  
 except those who look for it, wait for it,  
 those with hands not holding on to something else,  
 those who can recognise you,  
 and those who know how to walk beyond their own strength?

### **Matt 11.29      Dry Times**

There are times we run dry,  
 From doing too much for too long,  
 Too much alone, or too fast.  
 Forgive us that we ran ahead of you.  
 Forgive us that we exceeded our faith and resorted to human strength.  
 Forgive us that we let our independence overpower the love.  
 Forgive us that, even after long dry thirsting,  
 we did not stop at the well of living water.  
 Please, Lord, a cup of cold water for us now?  
 Can you refresh such dried out twigs as us?  
 Can you soften our hearts  
 and ease the tiredness in our soul?  
*pause*  
 We are tired and heavy laden.  
 We come to you, just like you said.  
 We fall back into step with you,  
 Lowly and humbled by our own arrogance,  
 Cherished by your complete acceptance of us,  
 Shoulder to shoulder,  
 yoked to your peace,  
 held in your strength.

### **Matt 13:1-9, 18-23**

#### **Behold our enemies!**

Behold our enemies!  
 The evil one snatches  
 where there is no understanding,  
 Our shallowness in the face of scorching troubles,  
 the tangled cares of the complex world  
 and the choking lure of wealth.  
 Behold our destiny! Our true identity.  
 To sow the Word of God time and time again,  
 and to bear much fruit for the Kingdom.  
 Our "spiritual warfare" has less to do  
 with grand fighting as good farming.  
 Give us a good season, please Lord.

**Matt 13.31          Mustard Seed**

Who'da thought that a Universe could come  
out of nothing but a Word.  
Who'da thought that God would make himself  
known  
through a small tribe in the Middle East.  
Who'da thought that God would choose as  
earthly King  
the smallest youngest of the sons of Jesse.  
Who'da thought that God would come  
as a child in a manger.  
Who'da thought that he would launch his love  
upon the world  
through twelve persons of the likes of us.  
Who'da thought that that little seed of the  
church  
accidentally turned into billions of followers.  
Who'da thought that God would love us  
this much?  
Isn't God great!  
Let us worship God with gladness and joy.

**Matt 13.24          The parable of the  
weeds**

Lord, we do not find it easy to wait.  
So come, Lord Jesus,  
and deliver us from the trials of sin,  
from the hurt of being sinned against,  
the suffering and sorrow of a fallen planet,  
the systems that oppress,  
the satanic spirits that deceive.  
Deliver us  
And as we wait,  
and as we keep watch upon ourselves,  
Be our God,  
not just our object of worship,  
Be our God,  
Not just our religion.  
Be God,  
Not just our friend.  
In the name of Christ,  
the Coming Judge.

**Matt 13:24-43          Look-alike**

For no reason except that they choose to be  
enemies,

the work of the Kingdom is clogged and spoiled  
by look-alikes.  
We cannot tell them at first but as the time for  
fruit-bearing comes,  
you can see that they have none.  
Their days are numbered,  
by your own promise, Lord Jesus.  
All causes of sin will be uprooted and removed.  
There will be no more spoiling,  
no more of the sufferings that have come from  
the enemy.  
Justice will be done, and that fully.  
Meanwhile we have the angry impatience of  
the servants  
who wanted the Master to act sooner.  
Come Lord Jesus, and fill us with your  
compassion  
until the day you come flooding in.

**Matt 13.31-33,44-52  
Hide and seek parables**

Lord Jesus,  
To know you is the greatest pearl.  
To walk with you the greatest treasure.  
We surrender all our encumbrances to your  
discretion,  
So that the world may know you as we do,  
We don't feel ready,  
And our little fears suppress our light.  
But today, let us just be  
And just begin.

**Matt 13:44-52          The wrong field**

The Kingdom of Christ is worth everything,  
but we seldom pass up our security for it.  
The Kingdom will be drastically judged by  
righteousness and evil,  
but we still toy with sophisticated shallow  
materialistic values.  
We say we understand the faith of Christ,  
but where are the new treasures we are  
bringing forth from the word?  
Lord, forgive us, for we have mortgaged the  
Kingdom  
and bought the wrong field!

### **Matt 14:13-21      A most unlikely miracle**

Like you on this dread day, we need some time to ourselves, Lord.

The work of service can raise hurtful things that cry out for a healing space, a restful retreat.

And like you on this day we cannot get the time.

If we get just another one demand, let alone a great crowd,

where is our compassion going to come from?

We feel we have nothing to give.

We have nothing but ... what?

A lunch box with some fish sandwiches? A most unlikely miracle!

But when we give thanks for that, and give it out,

you will satisfy everyone,

even the tired servants, until our rest can be taken.

### **Matt 14:22-33      Fear in its Place**

They got the first bit right, didn't they, Lord.

To give a man time alone to pray.

But the next bit seems strange –

didn't you know they would be terrified at the sight

of anything walking on the water in the middle of the night?

You must have - you know us inside out.

Then Peter got the next bit right.

He knew that as a disciple he is supposed to be learning from you

so he volunteered to try windsurfing without the sailboard.

But didn't you know he would be afraid in the strong wind?

Is this the lesson?

Not that we are too easily afraid, for there are many things to fear.

Yet even when afraid, faith puts fear back in its place.

For you are here, you can reach and save us, you can make the wind cease, you are truly the Son of God.

We do not have to be daughters and sons of fear.

### **Matt 15:21-28      Misunderstand**

We see you were heavily focused on your priority.

First the revelation to Israel, then only later the world mission.

There is only so much time to give before the hostile reaction will come.

But some foreign nuisance has come early.

And she will not go away.

Out of context, we misunderstand your response,

you were probing why she came –

whether she came for a dose of Gentile-style magic,

or as an act of faith in a gracious God.

She answers with the mix of boldness and humility that comes from faith,

not the fear and pleading that goes with magic.

So your grace abounds to her.

In our prayers also, Lord,

we sometimes take your "wait" as though it is a harsh answer

because we do not understand the issues of the time,

or the way of faith.

Help us to learn and remember –

Your grace abounds to us,

and you will not be distracted from your purpose

to establish the Kingdom in all our lives.

So we will not go away either.



*Temple Mount in Jerusalem*

### **Matt 16:13-20**                      **Guess**

All those guesses about who you were, Lord Jesus!

Any one of them was miracle enough, godly enough,  
biblical enough, but all wrong.

Your plan for us is not a matter of general religious guesswork,  
all out of our hands,

"Thy will be done (whatever it is)" sort of thinking.

No, "Thy will be done on earth," that is what you taught us to expect.

It is in this world that your Plan is played out,  
not in some cosmic upper storey.

The angels attend here to us, not to an invisible army of aerial opponents.

It is our good confession of Jesus that establishes the church.

It is our mission that binds the evil.

It is our proclamation that sees the sinner set free.

These are the keys that unlock and unleash your power into the world.

### **Matt 16:21-28**                      **Cruel or Crazy**

The time is shortening, now.

The Cross and Resurrection are just over that hill.

We can understand that Peter did not want his Master to suffer,

so he tries to stop you going on.

But there are two way of thinking here,  
and the milk of human kindness is not the right one.

Hard though it is to grasp in practise, God,  
Your way is often the way that seems cruel or crazy.

Denying self and taking up the cross!?

Losing your life in order to find it?!

But while the mental logic sometimes fails us,  
the spiritual logic remains true.

They are not always different,  
but our mind set (v.23) must be squared along the heavenly line.

That is where we get our life from,

and that is what is weighed in the judgement to come.

### **Matt 17:1-9**

#### **Speaking About The Unspeakable**

Your glory, most holy Friend,  
we glimpse your glory in the night skies,  
and sense your handiwork across coast and inland.

Yet much, much more we see your glory in Christ Jesus,  
transfigured by your light,  
and awesomely glorious in his suffering, death and resurrection.

Please rescue our worship from self-serving sentimentality.

Confront us with the Christ  
who brings disciples trembling to their knees;  
the One who awakens unanswerable questions and uninhibited adoration.

For yours is the true light and the power and the glory, for ever.

### **Matt 17.9**

#### **An Abject Obedience**

Master, you sometimes explain one puzzle with another.

Here the transfiguring brightness is explained in terms of rising from the dead.

Pardon me if I am wrong, Lord, but that would not really help.

Later they understood, but for now, how did they cope?

What mortal fear possessed them at the sound from the Cloud?

What dread remains even after your explanation?

Must some steps in discipleship be only taken with fear and surprise?

We are all highly likely to make "booths" , settle the matter,

remain where we are,

inventing a hundred good reasons why this is the best plan.

Only an abject obedience,  
founded on a personal trust,  
can take us through.

### **Matt 18:15-20**                      **Conflicts**

**Protect the church from gossip, Lord,**  
for fear of getting in close to where the real  
pain can come out.

We promise, Lord, not to get involved in  
conflicts that are not our own.

Not to talk or take sides when we don't know  
the real story.

Only if someone comes for our help,  
Frustrated in their attempt to make peace with  
their brother or sister,  
or unable even to begin, will we come and  
listen.

**Protect us from being judgemental, for fear we  
shall be judged.**

And if we see no justice we will take it to the  
church and insist on justice,  
not to the kangaroo courts in kitchens and  
hallways around the area.

And even then, (how loving you are) if we get  
nowhere

we will give them the same welcome as the  
sinners get in our church –  
acceptance, patience, building up, teaching,  
concerted prayer.

**Protect us from doing nothing, so that hurts  
can fester,  
and the root of bitterness grows  
cracking in time all the foundations of the  
church.**

### **Matt 18:21-35**

#### **Something Unforgiven**

Where there is tiredness, sadness, bursts of  
anger,

lack of prayer, too much busy time,  
grasping at possessions, maybe grasping at  
traditions –

these are signs of something unforgiven.

Or is it once-forgiven but not yet healed?

Let us examine ourselves, and offer this prayer:

Master, we want the freedom that comes from  
your forgiveness.

Show us our hearts.

Uncover any lack of forgiveness

toward some other person, living or dead.

Can you heal our hurt?

Why have we bound ourselves to a sinking evil,  
when we could have had the up-welling spring  
of life?

We let it go now, this habit, this object of our  
security.

We let it sink away now, Lord, come what may.

We ease ourselves and the other person onto  
the stream of your love.

Take us onwards.

### **Matt 20:1-16**                      **The going rate**

If only generosity called forth generosity.

If only kindness caused another kindness in  
return.

Then the world would revolve on its way with  
singing.

But generosity calls forth envy.

Kindness calls forth grumbling.

In the midst of this sort of a world, your  
Kingdom, Lord Jesus,

is like the landowner who is generous and kind  
without naivety.

He chooses to give to the day-labourer's family,  
the money they need for a day's food.

He is not held to the going rate for a full day's  
work

when obviously a lot of these men could not get  
work that day.

Not driven by the market economy, not cowed  
by the reactions of the envious,  
this is the right-side-up-again Kingdom.

You sure like to fool around with our economic  
security, don't you Lord?

You sure want to be first in our life, you really  
mean it?

**Matt 21:28-32 Not too late**

Forgive us for being big on words and disobedient in action.  
 Forgive us for failing to see the way of righteousness.  
 Forgive us for failing to recognise the signs of your kingdom.  
 Forgive us for judging the modern day tax-collectors and prostitutes who are taking hold of your way.  
 Our eyes are so short sighted,  
 our ears so full of predictable preachings,  
 our mouths so full of cliches that have become dull and tasteless,  
 our minds are so slow to change.  
 But it is not too late, we can still be like the second son,  
 having gotten it wrong so often, we can go now and do your will.  
 Thank you, Lord.

**Matt 21:1-11 Palm Sunday**

Two disciples had gone ahead.  
 A prophecy had gone ahead.  
 News of him floods into the city gates.  
 Crowds pour across the valley.  
 Palms and clothes,  
 Cloaks and branches,  
 Dirt and dust and shouts of welcome.  
 David's son,  
 Sent one,  
 A conquest proclaimed from a borrowed donkey's back.  
 "Who is he?"

**Matt 21:33-46 Got the Point**

Lord, you don't think you were being a bit, you know, rude?  
 A bit inappropriate? Maybe pointed?  
 Some of them certainly took enough offence to want to have you arrested.  
 Others heard the ring of deep truth, and saw you as a prophet.  
 But they were both wrong.  
 You were more than a prophet, like the servants in the story,  
 sent to be stoned, beaten and killed.

You were the Son, and you saw the end of their scheming even before they did.  
 Not just that they would, like the story, kill you outside the wall.  
 But also that you would take the vineyard from them and give it to others, the Gentiles, and thence the whole world.  
 Now we are the inheritors of your Word, and we too face the same question – to bear fruit for the Kingdom to your glory and not to our own.  
 Or else lose our birthright.  
 We've got the point, thanks Lord.

**Matt 22:1-14 Puzzled**

You puzzle us here.  
 This is a calculated generosity.  
 It is a new thought to our comfortable culture.  
 A rich welcome is extended to any who will receive the royal invitation, in one story.  
 Beside it,  
 a hard response to someone who must have sneaked in through a back door somehow and missed out on the robe.  
 And a harsh response to those who despised the invitation and hated the messengers.  
 Your generosity knows no bounds, but it is bounded by your purposes for humankind.  
 Like a strong light reaching far, it is a narrow beam of powerful light.  
 Have we been so nice that we closed the blinds on the love of God?  
 Have we been so busily about your business that we cannot receive your invitation?  
 Have we missed bringing the generosity of God to the people of the highways and byways?  
 With whom am I sitting?  
 It will seem hard,  
 but is it time to go elsewhere?

### **Matt 22:15-22 Fake Sincerity**

It is amazing that they did not choke on their hypocrisy.

Fancy talking to you about truth and integrity, when the Pharisees and Herodians are feigning agreement

for the sole purpose of getting rid of you so they can get back to hating each other.

We still do not understand your answer.

Your enemies did not understand it either, and if their hypocrisy did not choke them, your answer did.

We your humble people are often attacked like this in the public media.

Maybe we are criticised by greedy minds for holding property,

then criticised for not investing resources wisely,

maybe questioned by cynical hearts about some problem not of our making,

then scorned for not being able to end the issue safely.

Maybe vilified because we have some bad apples in our barrel,

then ridiculed because we do not try to open all our doors

to every new idea in our society.

Please, Lord, by your Spirit, give us the words to say

that will call hypocrisy by its name

and end their murderous intent.

### **Matt 22:34-46 Big Questions**

**We still get big questions like you did Lord.**

Each generation asks them a different way, and needs a slightly different way of answering.

The old gospel gift

must be wrapped in different things

for different occasions.

We want to be able to answer

with the simple cup of truth with which you spoke. So speak through us, Lord, just like you did back then.

**We still need to ask questions like you did, Lord.**

Not just defend our faith, but provoke and persuade.

Not just holding our ground against doubts,

but engendering doubts in anyone

who holds to another way or no way at all.

Help us to strip down false walls of security so that they can think again,

and be loved into your Kingdom

of truth and eternal security.

### **Matt 23:1-12 Speak Truth**

We are so used to avoiding being judgemental Lord,

that we haven't read what you said.

We look down on "fundamentalism",

like that of the Pharisees',

from such a height of moral indignation

that we fail to see that we are doing exactly what they did.

We must outlive the legalists,

not by creating bigger burdens of law,

but by discovering,

through obedience to your Word,

more and more of your Grace.

We can forever have an appetite to learn more of you,

and never claim to have heard it all before.

We can enjoy the privileges of true greatness

when yet again we take the servant's role and

insist on the humbler place.

So there is nothing judgemental in a particular and careful obedience.

Just a freedom from hypocrisy

and a future in which to be

exalted by you.



*Antonia  
Fortress*

**Matt 24:36-44 New Agenda**

Jesus, we welcome your new agenda.  
 Instead of a church that is easily ignored,  
 make us a supremely-visible house of God.  
 We in the 'house of Jacob'  
 will have to open up our traditions  
 to make them accessible to 'all the  
 nations'. People will come saying 'teach us  
 his ways' and we will have to know better  
 what we believe.  
 They will want to 'walk in his paths',  
 live the life of a disciple, and not just sing  
 along with old songs.  
 They will be looking for the way  
 of justice 'for many peoples',  
 and the ways of peacemaking,  
 not just a friendly morning tea.  
 This is your agenda. This is what you are  
 working in the world for.  
 "Come let us walk in the light of the LORD."

**Matt 24.36-44 Some day some flood will come**

Some day some flood will come.  
 You, Son of Man, will flood the world with  
 righteousness and wash it clean.  
 Not like Noah's flood, but many will be washed  
 away, and many will be kept safe on the Day.  
 Like a sudden thunder or burst of the fire,  
 like a burglar trying entry or a sudden car-crash,  
 there will be no time to make preparations,  
 only the sight and sound that snatches us up  
 into your action.  
 But this we hear from you today,  
 the only preparation is a life of readiness,  
 of watchfulness over the desires and motives of  
 our hearts.  
 Just as we prepare for Christmas,  
 so we now commit the time and energy  
 to this preparation.

**Matt 25.1-13 She'll be right**

Lamb of God, it is a chilling thought  
 that there will be some excluded from the  
 wedding feast of the Lamb.

So chilling in fact that we avoid and disguise the  
 fact.

We blame the bridegroom, accusing you of  
 some lack of love,  
 of some secret nasty business, when the fault  
 was with the foolish maidens.  
 They assumed "she'll be right" and it isn't.  
 We assume we are the wise maidens,  
 who did not make the same foolish  
 assumption.  
 We have not heard you say - watch out,  
 for we have not taken spiritual inventory for  
 some time now.  
 Sometimes we want to be on both sides.  
 And we say to you that we would share the last  
 of our oil with the foolish ones.  
 We proudly think we care more than you about  
 the eternal death of people you love.  
 It merely justifies our chilling lack of faith-  
 sharing,  
 our constant excuses about not knowing how  
 when we do not even try to learn how.  
 We are foolishly thinking "they'll be right"  
 when there is every good reason to believe that  
 they will not be.  
 When you come, will we be seen to be ready,  
 or will we be thinking "she'll be right"?

**Matt 25:14-30 Afraid to Move**

The weeping is far away from the joy of the  
 Master.  
 The fear to move is far away from the  
 faithfulness to act.  
 The well endowed and well resourced worker  
 lost all,  
 while the one who had little, just did what he  
 could,  
 and entered the fullness of his reward.  
 When we are afraid to move, remind us, Lord  
 Jesus, Master,  
 that it is only our little that you require.  
 Remind us of the fearful dread  
 that comes to those who do not act  
 in simple obedience  
 but who act only in fear of failure.  
 Come, Lord Jesus, come soon.

### **Matt 25:31-46 Judgement**

In my chair, in my prayer, I fell to dreaming  
Of the Kingdom coming.

There, on a large TV screen,  
I saw the hungry hordes,  
trapped like collateral damage  
between the dry sky  
and the hard politics of free trade.

**"For I was hungry and thirsty.."**

I switched channels  
and saw the displays of naked flesh  
that are longings of a generation who are  
looking for some loving touch,  
some reassurance that they are alive.

**"I was naked..."**

So I switched to the news on another channel  
and found the crowd yelling  
for the blood of a murderer,  
outside a prison -  
so much hatred in their eyes,  
made them so much like him.  
Didn't they know he was beaten as a child?  
Where were their cries of outrage then?

**"I was in prison..."**

And in current affairs,  
they gave the microphone to a man  
who makes his living by finding  
inflammatory things to say about immigrants.  
Microphone aside, has he ever made friends?

**"I was a stranger..."**

Awake, I tried to recall all the scenes of my  
dream, And now I think I recall,  
In each crowd, in a shadow,  
Unseen, was a person I vaguely recognized.  
"You did it unto me"  
Come. Lord Jesus, judge us now, before we are  
too late. Is it already too late for the broken?

### **Matt 28:1-10 That Power**

Lord, your angels were dressed in lightning that  
knocked out tough men.

The earth spat away the limiting stone so the  
women could see in.

But the words were more powerful than  
anything yet –

"He is not here he is risen."

Your appearance more true than any other  
vision –

"Do not be afraid".

Their worship more solid than a whirlwind of  
emotions –

"Peace be with you".

Risen Lord, renew in us that power, that truth,  
that worship

that belongs to a Resurrection people.

### **Matt 28:16-20 You Believe In Us**

Just like the eleven that used to be twelve,  
not everyone in the church is with us.

Just like their doubting hearts,  
not every thought in any of us is completely in  
line with yours.

But to such discount disciples,  
you entrust the Great Commission.

There is no Plan B.

You believe in us.

You send us into your world.

You give us your name.

And you never stop doing that,  
not until the end of the age.

Thank you, risen Lord Jesus.

## **STORY TIME**

### **HAIRY SCARY JOHN**

John was the kind of boy who scared his mother  
and father. From early on his life, in fact when  
he was still in his mother's tummy, he knew  
what God wanted him to do. He would help  
people to know God. That wasn't what made  
him scary - it pleased his mum and dad.

Sometimes the family would go to visit relatives  
in Nazareth – Jesus, his mother Mary and his  
little brothers and sisters. John and Jesus were  
the oldest and close in age and maybe they  
talked about God after church. John said He  
would help people to know God. What do you  
think Jesus said to that?

Well John grew up and instead of getting a job  
he lived on no money, and he wasn't even an

actor or musician! That was the bit that scared his parents. Because he had no money, he couldn't go to the shops. What he ate was bush tucker (wild fruits) also called *locusts*, and bush potatoes called *melagria* also called wild honey *meli agrion*, and he seemed to do all right even if it was a bit , you know, different.

He lived in the desert, away from the towns and farms. That was a bit different too. The desert was the ideal place to get people to think seriously about their life. He couldn't buy his clothes (no money), so he *made* them. He and his mates wove cloth out of camel's wool (which is as cheap as hessian, maybe scavenged from the stock yards). So he was hairy scary but he was really happy because He was helping people to know God.

But there was something more to his happiness. He used to preach 'I am the One preparing the way for the Lord'. He had read it in the ancient writings how it talked about him doing that. That was awesome. His parents knew it was true. They could tell you stories about John. John felt like a bright star in the sky, and that too is a kind of scary.

People walked a long way down to the desert where he lived. Lots *and lots*, actually went to hear what he said. They came from all over the place. The word got around that John was good news. The word got around because the people had left feeling closer to God and knowing what they could do to live for God more. John was pretty happy about that. Why? That was what he had always wanted.

Before the people left where John was, they did a ceremony to show that they had decided to live their whole life with a clean heart. Do you know what it is? – baptism, they had water poured all over them. Can I have a volunteer? It was done like that because water is a clean thing, and it is absolutely essential to give life to thirsty lips. Baptism showed that they wanted to **live clean in God's sight** - in their minds and eyes and bodies and hearts and hands and

wallets. That is why, before long, he was called 'John the Baptiser' or 'John the Baptist' which makes it sound like he was always talking about water, or that he belonged to a Baptist church, but really he was just focused on **clean hearts** in all the people.

But he was even more scary for certain people in powerful positions. They liked themselves way too much. And they did not like each other either. So, they did **not** like what John was saying because it made them look bad. When people did that to them they usually had the soldiers 'fix them up', in fact, quite often killed, given the chop, put them away, blocked them out, terminated, hunted, smashed, promoted to higher duties. Now I really am scared.

One day, with apologies to *Life of Brian*, if you had been out playing near the River Jordan, you would have seen an official delegation who had been sent out to ask John lots of twicky questions. Shooing everyone else out of the way, they said: 'We are from Jerusalem and we have some questions for you. No pwesha, just wanting you to help us with our enqwiwies. (Ahem.) Are you the Messiah?'

And John said 'no'.

'Are you another Elijah the pwopphet?'

'Nup.'

'Are you the gweat new Moses who is to come?'

'Not really.'

'Well if you are not as good as any of them, how come you do all this pweaching? Who told you you could do that?'

'Well, I can't answer your question.' said John, 'I do know though that the Messiah is coming soon and he will respond to your enquiries, if you like. Would you like that? Would you like to be baptised before you go? While you're here?' And they hurried off before they got very wet.

There are many more wonderful things that happened to hairy scary John the Baptist who was not a Baptist. One of them happened the very next day. You can read about it yourself.