

MATURE

Evangelistically Active



Welcome to our final set of weekly bible reading notes to accompany our MATURE series—and well done for getting this far.

Our aim with these notes is to encourage one another to read God's word, so you may want to commit with a friend to do these bible readings and to pray each day – and then ask each other how you've got on during the week.

This week we're going to spend most of our time looking together at Acts 2, as we reflect on how Jesus saves us. We're also going to hear the call to share the good news.

These notes should hopefully be useful for individuals and for families with and without children. Each day, there is a bible passage to read – **read that first**, and **pray** - ask God to help you understand it. (If it is your habit to spend some time with the passage and make your own notes, then do that now.)

Once you've read the passage and thought about it – have a look at the accompanying notes. The notes cover some of the context of the passage, an explanation and an application. There are also some accompanying questions or suggestions for action. As God speaks to you through his word, you may wish to write down what he is calling you to do (and share it with someone!) However, don't worry if sometimes you don't receive an obvious answer to prayer or clear instruction – just keep faithfully reading God's word, and He will use it in your life, as the Holy Spirit works in you.

After you've looked at the bible passage is a good time to pray – pray for strength to do what you need to do – thank God for what you have learned about him – and bring your requests before him.

Then, you'll see that there is an activity for families with children; the target age range of these activities is 4-11ish, so you may need to modify them. This activity draws on one or two of the verses you've been reading, and give you some suggestions for sharing them with the family – over the breakfast or tea table perhaps. There's a starter activity to get people thinking, then reading the passage, some questions to answer, and then something to read – and a prayer so you don't forget to pray (just a starting point – do pray for longer if you can). Should take about five minutes – but can easily expand if you want it to.

Don't worry about communicating everything – particularly if you've got small children – communicating something of the good news of Jesus Christ every day is a great place to begin.

Enjoy – and let me know how you get on

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'James'.

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Monday

Acts 1:6-9 The Call

Read: Acts 1:6-9

In this passage we read about Jesus ascension. After a number of resurrection appearances to his disciples and others, Jesus returns permanently to heaven, to return at the end of this age.

Our passage begins with a question from the disciples about when the Kingdom will be restored to Israel (v6). This is not an unreasonable question: Jesus has died and has risen again—will his kingdom now be revealed? Jesus' answers first by telling them he is not going to tell them when the kingdom will come (v7), but then in verse 8, he tells them what their role will be—they will receive power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses.

And this witness will spread—from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Notice that these are Jesus final words to the disciples before he returns to heaven (v9), just as in Matthew 28, which we will look at this weekend, Jesus final call to his disciples is to go and preach the gospel. They are to be witnesses.

This witnessing begins in Acts 2, which we will look at for the next few days. There it is Peter speaking, but as we go through Acts, we see that this witnessing is not only something that the disciples or apostles (the same group) do, but is something that all of Jesus' followers engage in. In Acts we read of how the gospel goes from Jerusalem to Rome; today we participate as that gospel continues to spread around the world, both into new areas, but also to new people in 'old' areas!

Our commission to be evangelistically active is then simple: we are to be witnesses, sharing what we know about Jesus Christ.

So today:

Give thanks that we have received the good news of Jesus Christ, and know Him as saviour and Lord.

Pray that we be faithful witnesses.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about when you see something and need to tell someone else, because it is important or dangerous, or exciting. This is what it means to be a 'witness'.

Read Acts 1:8

Whose witnesses are we supposed to be?

Where do we do our witnessing?

Read: Jesus calls all his followers to be his witnesses, telling other people what they know about Jesus, where they are. We can be part of telling the exciting and important story of Jesus to others.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for being my saviour and Lord. Help me to tell others about you. Amen.



Weekend

Matthew 28:16-20 The Great Commission

Read Matthew 28:16-20

Here we read about Jesus' meeting with his disciples after he has risen again.

Notice that we read of both doubt and worship (v17).

There is doubt here because some of the disciples are having difficulty believing, after all a lot has happened recently. It can take a while to understand an event. We Sympathise with those who were following Jesus. They had just seen a lot of things happening – still trying to process it all.

Doubt is understandable but not a final position. We may go through doubt, but we go through it, to trust. Which brings us to worship. Worship because the disciples recognise who Jesus is.

And so we come to verse 18. notice that we begin with Jesus' authority: Jesus is Lord. This is really important when we think about the truth we share. It can seem as if Christians are just a small minority, not important – we can be seduced into thinking that only big things, only majorities matter.

And then we get to the task: share the good news – help people move from denial and doubt to discipleship (v19-20). The Great commission. It is a call to all nations – near and far. It is a call to baptise and teach – to bring people to faith, to bring people to declare their faith – but also to nurture them and disciple them

Which is why this commission is one that we fulfil together as the church.

Notice the everything, the whole council of God for ourselves, and for everybody else.

And a final promise: Jesus is with us (v20)

Whatever we face—opposition, persecution,

indifference, hardship – however much the truth is disliked – we declare the truth we know, for the sake of all the people everywhere who need to know the truth.

So today

Give thanks for the good news and this great commission

Pray for courage to share the gospel.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about instructions. Why do games need instructions? Why do you need to know the rules?

Read Matthew 28:19-20

What does Jesus tell us we are to do?

What promise does Jesus make to us?

Read: Jesus sends us out to tell other people about Him, and to help them, to help each other, to be his followers. He promises to be with us, always

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that you are always with us. Help us to help each other to know you. Amen.



Friday Acts 2:37-41 The Response

Read Acts 2:37-41

In our final look at Acts 2 this week, we move from Peter's sermon to the response of the crowd who heard it.

We read in verse 37 that they were cut to the heart—they realised the truth of the message. This is an appropriate first response to the good news of Jesus, to realise that we have been living in a way which does not please God. So what are they to do?

Peter tells them—they are to repent, be baptized, and they will receive the Spirit (v38). They are to repent, and receive the sign of repentance and faith—baptism. They will then receive the Spirit. The Spirit here is not a gift upon baptism, but a gift upon repentance and faith.

Notice that this is a promise for them and their children, and for many others—Peter makes it clear that this message is to go beyond Jerusalem (v39).

Clearly not everyone responds in repentance and faith, because Peter continues to exhort the crowd to save themselves (v40), and Luke tells us that about 3000 received the word and were baptized (v41); a large number, but not the whole crowd.

What then is the response to the gospel? Repentance—being cut to the heart—and faith in Jesus which will be seen in baptism, which is a sign of both repentance and faith.

We need to share the gospel in such a way that we make clear the need for both turning away from living in opposition to God, and a turning to Jesus as saviour and Lord.

So today

Give thanks for the free gift of salvation in Jesus, that we can repent and believe.

Pray for the right words to be able to share with others about the need to repent and believe.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: we have talked a lot about good news this week. think about what makes something good news for someone.

Read Acts 2:38-39

What does it mean to repent?

Who receives the Holy Spirit?

Who is the Jesus for?

Read: We are called to repent and believe, and baptism is the outward sign of that. As those who believe we have the Holy Spirit in us. This is good news.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for saving us and for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Tuesday Acts 2:22-24 Jesus of Nazareth

Read: Acts 2:22-24

Today we are beginning to look at Acts 2 together, at the sermon that Peter preached at Pentecost. We are going to focus on what it tells us about who Jesus is, the content of the good news, before thinking about how people respond.

We begin in the middle of the sermon. Peter has just been explained the day of Pentecost in a sign of the last days (v14-21), and now he turns to tell the crowd about Jesus.

This is Jesus of Nazareth, a man who they know—and whose works they have seen (v22). Many of the people present in Jerusalem that day would have seen at least some of the wonderful things Jesus did; they know about him.

They also know that he has been killed (v23), in fact, as Peter reminds them, they are with those in Jerusalem who have crucified Jesus; as those who were there at the feast, they share responsibility. But notice something else in verse 23: this was God's plan. Jesus didn't die accidentally, his death was planned, he died for a reason.

Jesus lived among them, Jesus died, and then Jesus has risen again (v24), because death could not hold him. We will read more about the resurrection through the week, but notice it is the third element in the story of Jesus—he lived among them, died for them, rose again.

This then is the heart of the good news. Jesus lived among us, the perfectly obedient man, God's son revealing God to us.

Jesus died for us on the cross, according to God's plan. Jesus rose again, defeating death.

So today:

Give thanks to Jesus for coming to live among us, for dying for us and for defeating death. Thank God for his plan to save.

Say sorry to God for times when we have forgotten his goodness to us in Jesus.

Pray that we might both know and tell this good news.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: hold a ball in the middle of a table. Ask what will happen if you let go / push the ball a bit. Why will this happen?

Read Acts 2:23-24

Why did Jesus die?

Did Jesus stay dead?

Read: The Bible tells us that Jesus died because 'lawless men' wanted to kill him. He also tells us this was part of God's plan, because Jesus came to die for us. And Jesus didn't stay dead: he rose again.

Prayer: Dear God thank you for sending your son to die for us. Thank you that he rose again. Amen.



Wednesday

Acts 2:25-32 Jesus is the Christ

Read: Acts 2:25-32

As we continue to work through Acts 2 together this week, we move from Peter's summary of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, to a bit of a longer argument about the resurrection.

Peter turns to Psalm 16:8-11, quoting David's words about how God will not let him see decay, and how God will not abandon David to death (v27). He then reminds the crowd of what they know—they can visit David's tomb—he is dead (v29).

This raises the question of what David is talking about here. Peter's answer is in verse 30: David was a prophet, and looked forward to one of his descendants being king after him. Here Peter is reminding the people of the promise made in 2 Samuel 7, that David's son will have an everlasting kingdom and an everlasting throne. This promise is fulfilled in Jesus, who has risen from the dead, whose flesh will not see corruption, and who will live forever (v31).

This Jesus is now alive—and Peter and the other disciples are the witnesses to this (v32).

Notice here that Peter knows that the idea of resurrection will not be easy for his audience to take, so he spends the time arguing that David predicted it, that Jesus' resurrection fulfils Old Testament expectations about the Christ.

We can rejoice that God makes, and keeps, his promises.

So today:

Give thanks to God for promising us and everlasting king in Jesus.

Pray that we would be those who live in the light of the kingdom that Jesus will bring when he returns

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about being witnesses. What does being a witness mean (see Monday's discussion)

Read Acts 2:32

What are Peter and the disciples witnesses to?

Why is this important?

Read: The Resurrection of Jesus is really important. It shows that he has defeated death, and assures us of the promise of eternal life.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus help us to tell others that you died and rose again. Amen.



Thursday

Acts 2:33-36 Jesus is Lord

Read Acts 2:33-36

As we continue to follow Peter's sermon in Acts 2, we see that Jesus' resurrection isn't quite the end of the story.

Peter refers here to Jesus being exalted at the right hand of God (v33), of Him receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit (v33), and of Him pouring out the Spirit on his people (v33). We are reminded here that Jesus is not just a good man who has gone back to be with God; he is God himself, exalted in the heavens, giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to his people.

Again, Peter needs evidence for this, and he goes to Psalm 110:1. He makes the point that David didn't ascend to the heavens, but talks about The Lord and my Lord (v34-35). The Lord is clearly God. Who is my Lord? Who sits at the right hand of God and is David's Lord? It is of course Jesus.

And so in verse 36 Peter can summarise what he has argued so far: Jesus whom they crucified is Lord and Christ. He is the Christ, the chosen one, God's king who will reign for ever. But he is also the Lord, God himself.

We will look at the response of Peter's hearers tomorrow. Here we reflect on the reality that Jesus is Lord. He is the one who lived and died for us, who rose again, but is also the one who is now enthroned in the heavens, seated next to his Father. He is the one who sends the Spirit to equip and enable us to live as his people. This is good news!

So today

Give thanks to Jesus that he is Lord and Christ. Give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Ask God to help you to live in the light of who Jesus is and what he has done, and what he continues to do for us.

Activity for Families with Children

Starter: talk about different people who you know who have titles. Why do people like doctors have titles?

Read Acts 2:36

What are Jesus two titles?

What else are we reminded about here?

Read: Jesus is the Christ means that he is the one who has died for us, and has risen again. Jesus is Lord means that Jesus is God himself. He is powerful and enthroned in heaven, and has sent The Holy Spirit to us.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to know you as Lord and Christ. Amen.