

## Prayer

Praise You, Lord Jesus Christ! You burst into our lives by giving us Your Spirit, healing our bodies, opening our eyes, enlightening our minds, encouraging our hearts and enabling us to respond to Your leading. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the many different ways You reveal Yourself to us and lead us on in the path of faith. Alleluia! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Crime

*Pray today for those who have been criminals since their youth. Pray for youth workers, prison chaplains and probation officers who try to help such people find a better life.*

### On-going prayers

- Thank God for books to read
- Pray for those who design buildings in our cities and towns
- Pray for all those bereaved by the plane crash in Madrid

## Meditation

Jesus, friend and comforter; renew my heart:  
Let the fire of love burn brighter still.

Jesus, healer and deliverer; repair my body:  
Let the joy of wholeness fill my life.

Jesus, master and teacher; refill my mind:  
Let the truth of faith not pass me by.

Jesus, saviour and redeemer; remove my sins:  
Let the beauty of God's peace revive me.

Jesus, encourager and guide; restore my zeal:  
Let the path of faith be opened up for me.

Jesus, counsellor and guide, revive my spirit:  
Let the promise of my future excite me.

Jesus, great and mighty God; rebuild my strength:  
Let the challenge of the Gospel lead me on.

## Bible Study - Matthew 11:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

<sup>2</sup> When John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he enquired through his disciples <sup>3</sup> asking this question, 'Are you the one who is coming, or are we to wait for someone else?' <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed are those who do not regard me as scandalous.'

## Review

The first verse of Matthew 11 marks the end of the first period of Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing around Galilee, and it points forward to Jesus' coming ministry in other Judean towns and cities. However, the time had not yet come for Him to go to Jerusalem and face the climax of His earthly mission. Jesus knew this was coming, and the first readers of Matthew's Gospel in the first century knew it, but few other people, including John the Baptist, realised this at the time. The last time we heard anything about John was when his disciples came objecting that Jesus' disciples did not fast (9:14). Before that, we learned that John had been taken into prison (4:12) which came just after the famous story of the baptism of Jesus by John (3:13-17). With Jesus' disciples having gone away to do their mission work, some of John's disciples spoke to Jesus again. From his prison, the great prophet had sent some of his disciples to find out more about what Jesus was doing.

John clearly recognised that Jesus was 'the Christ'. By using these words, he and his disciples recognised and accepted that Jesus was the 'anointed one', or 'the Messiah'; it was all conveyed by one Greek word (with the article) 'ho Christos'. However, it would not be surprising if John was concerned by what he had heard about Jesus. He had prophesied that the Messiah would 'baptise with the spirit, and with fire' (3:11) and that He would immediately commence God's harvest, gathering with a 'winnowing fork in his hand' (3:12). Moreover, the famous prophecies of the coming Messiah in Isaiah 61:1,2 spoke of 'captives' being 'set free!' But this had not happened to John; he was still in prison! The reports of Jesus' teaching and his miracles would have reached John's ears, but however wonderful this news was, it would be hard to say that so far, it fulfilled what John had prophesied. Unfortunately, John was not in the position of Christians of later years who knew that Jesus had died, risen again, sent the Holy Spirit, and commissioned the Church to reap the harvest of the Kingdom; because from this perspective, John's prophecies were fulfilled. But John could not see this whilst he was still in prison!

Jesus' reply to John was therefore a list of works He had done which fulfilled the prophecies of scripture about the Messiah. He was seeking common ground with John by appealing to Isaiah in particular, and gave roughly this list:

- The blind see (Isaiah 29:18, 42:18, 35:5, Matt 9:27-31)
- The lame walk (Isaiah 35:6, Matt 9:1-8)
- The lepers are cleansed (not specific but generally from Is 53:4, Matt 8:1-4)
- The deaf hear (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, 42:18, Matt 9:32-34 – but note that the mute speaks rather than the deaf hear, although it is the same word in Greek for both)
- The dead are raised (Isaiah 26:19, Matt 9:18-26)
- The poor have Good news preached to them (Isaiah 61:1,2 Matt 9:35)

This list looks comprehensive, but it does not include exorcism (see Matthew 8:16, 28-34, 9:32-34). There may be many reasons for this, but the main one is that the Old Testament does not speak about deliverance from demons. It talks in general of victory over evil (in many psalms for example) and being 'set free', but the language of 'demons' and 'the Devil' is absent from the Old Testament. Satan appears in it only three times, one of them being the famous story of Job in which Satan is an accuser and is not 'cast out'; he is merely made irrelevant by the storyline of Job; he is part of the problem at the beginning but not the solution at the end! It is also true that there were many other exorcists at work in Jesus' day, so although we may be interested in the casting out of demons, it was not significant to Jesus and the crowds, whereas the Gospel of God's 'Good News' was significant, along with the evidence of it in Jesus' healing and other ministry. It may also have been that Jesus did not wish to press this issue with John because it was not part of John's ministry.

It is in this context, and before the disciples of John left, that Jesus said 'blessed are those who do not regard me as scandalous' (11:6). Jesus used the same phrase, 'Blessed ...'

that He used to begin the Beatitudes, to begin this part of his reply to John. He saw John as a great man, and the sentence continues with more of a plea than a warning, essentially asking John to stand back from judgment and not be put off (scandalized – see verse 6) by the mismatch between what he expected and what he had heard about the Messiah. John would need to have faith that God was in control of what was happening, and it was right of Jesus to call him to such faith and trust.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What reasons lead people today to ask of Jesus 'are you the one or are we to seek for another?'
2. In what ways do people regard Jesus as scandalous?
3. Do you think it is necessary for us to understand our past in order to find our way in the future? Why is this so, if it is so?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*One cannot help but feel for John, abandoned in prison, and his work done in God's great scheme of things with little hope for the future. John was a man like any of us who needed reassurance that what he had said and done was bearing fruit, and he went to Jesus looking for approval. Jesus commended him but challenged him not to be scandalised. It would not help him, and it never helps us, to be affronted because things do not appear to be working out as we would expect.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Reflect upon whether the great evidence of the work of the Messiah is something that is effective today. What are the ways that we can use to show that Jesus is the Messiah in our own culture and times?*
- *Fast and pray for all Christians who are in prison for their faith, especially prophets whose voices are not heard because of restrictions placed upon them.*

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for the day You have given us. Help us approach it with the same vigour and enthusiasm needed to live our lives to the full, and may all around us see that we love the life that You have given us. Through Jesus Christ we pray; AMEN