

# **Four Lenten Studies Series A**

## **"The Messiah"**

by  
Rev. Dr Nick Hawkes

### **Leading the four Lenten Studies**

#### **THANK YOU**

Thank you for being a small group leader for this Lenten series.

#### **THE GROUP LEADER**

The leader should be a facilitator. This means that he/she should make it possible for things to be organised and happen. The leader should not necessarily do everything but should delegate responsibility. It is particularly a good idea for the leader not to be personally responsible for the domestic arrangements but to give this responsibility to an assistant.

#### **PROMOTE DISCUSSION**

The leader's main job in the group discussion time is to get people talking. It is not to provide all the answers. A leader's skill is in making people feel at ease, appreciated and in gently drawing people into discussion. Leaders need to treat all questions seriously and with respect so that people will be encouraged to share because no question or opinion is considered too stupid or antagonistic to be appreciated.

*The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out. (Proverbs 20:5)*

#### **PREPARING THE VENUE**

A venue should be comfortable and non-threatening. Chairs should usually be placed in a circle for discussion. Avoid having chairs behind each other if possible as it encourages those sitting in them to be less involved.

Some people also take the phone off the hook or switch them off to avoid distractions.

#### **THE FIRST MEETING**

People will come to the first meeting with some apprehension, particularly if they are unfamiliar with Christianity or church. They will also bring with them all sorts of fears and preconceptions of what Christianity and church are about. The first meeting is the ideal time to shatter people's negative preconceptions and put them at their ease. For this reason, ensure the venue is welcoming and looks good. Consider using soft indirect lighting and having background music as people arrive. Surprise people with excellence and how "normal" things are.

## **BREAKING THE ICE**

Warm up activities at the start of a home group meeting can be anything that will help people relax, smile and get to know each other. It can be as basic as a chat over a cup of coffee.

## **WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE BRING?**

Ask people to bring their Bibles (provide some for those who may not have one).

## **TIMELINESS**

There is no spiritual merit in meetings being long drawn out marathons. People will tire of them if they are. Be disciplined with time and let people go home at a civilised hour.

Before people go home, the meeting should have a definite ending eg. a concluding prayer.

## **PRAYER**

All prayers prayed by leaders before or after a meeting should be simple, sincere, relevant to what has been discussed and short. Such prayers will not intimidate people and will encourage them to believe that they too might soon be able to pray in such a way.

## **DOING THE STUDIES**

Encourage members of the group to take turns in reading the readings out loud to the group (checking with them first privately that they are willing and able to do so).

Be familiar with the teaching sections so that you don't necessarily have to read them verbatim but can paraphrase them easily in your own words.

God bless your ministry  
Nick Hawkes

## Session 1

### The scandal of the Old Testament Messiah

**Welcome people**

**Introduce everyone. Break the ice.**

**Begin with a brief opening prayer.**

**Teach as introduction:**

I wonder if we can really realise the revolutionary nature of Jesus for he was the scandal of his time. He ate with people who were too poor to pay both their Roman tax and the temple tax. The poor chose only to pay the Roman tax. (The Romans had persuasive means of insisting on this). Because the poor could not pay their religious temple dues, the religious leaders considered them "unholy". As such, the Pharisees couldn't eat with them. Jesus, however, did. (Note: the intentions of the Pharisee were good - to be holy ...but in trying to be holy, they became so legalistic that they became unholy.)

There is a note of warning in this for us the church. The church is really only Christ's church when it dares to identify with the poor and the weak. Unfortunately, we can be so busy being exclusive in our denominations, arguing about theological niceties that we cease to be relevant to the real issues in our community.

Yet we can't only be interested in a social gospel that gives little place to the reality of Christ Jesus. The holy week story of Mary wiping Jesus' feet makes this clear (Lk 7:36-50). It was a scandal. A prostitute, uninvited, gate crashes a party thrown by a religious leader at which Jesus was the main guest. She blows 1-2 years worth of wages on a bottle of expensive perfume and pours it onto Jesus' head and feet. Then she wipes them with her hair (very sensuous!), and weeps.

**Ask, share & listen**

Ask people to share how they would feel if they were the host?

**Teach**

There is outrage: "Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor!" A commendable response. Surely this was solidarity with the poor. However, Jesus says that her act of devotion was a very special and good thing. The point Jesus was making was that we can't do any ministry unless we put Jesus FIRST. Unless we have that love affair with Jesus - forget it! Today, the mainline churches are being censored, even by the secular media, for only offering people "social welfare"

*"The church, as an institution, is staggering into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. secularism has become a religion and social welfare has become a ready justification for the churches' survival."*

("Clones verses Christ" by James Murray, p. 15, 18 *The Weekend Australian* December 23-24, 2000)

We also have the irony and scandal of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people thought they were welcoming a military and political messiah. They were actually welcoming a humble suffering servant - who rode on a colt. It would have been outrageous had they known.

I wonder if we can fully realise the scandal of The God of the Universe becoming human and living amongst us. A God who can be sorrowful, who is familiar with suffering. Ours is no distant God watching us white mice run around in a maze.

### **Read**

Isaiah 53:3-12

### **Ask, share & listen**

Ask people:

- to identify aspects of Jesus foretold in this passage written over 500 years before he came.
- their reaction to knowing these things.

### **Read**

John 3:14-17

### **Teach**

Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, equating himself with the bronze serpent Moses put on a pole (Numbers 21:4-9). (Moses had instructed people to put their faith in God by looking at the bronze serpent when they were bitten by snakes in the midst of a snake plague. This would stop them dying.)

### **Ask, share & listen**

Why did Jesus equate himself with a serpent? Snakes are horrible, even being symbolic of the devil.

### **Teach key point**

Because Jesus took our sins on himself, in order to make us holy and acceptable to God, Jesus became the epitome of evil. Just as the evil snake was held up on a pole as a symbol of a defeated enemy, so Jesus is nailed up on a cross and dies in our place for our sins. If we can't appreciate Jesus' sinfulness, we won't see the triumph of his holiness as God the Father raises him back to life at his resurrection.

### **Wrap up**

- 1) Have we allowed God to deal with our sin by allowing his Suffering Servant to take the consequences of them?
- 2) Are we prepared to be scandalous and to follow Jesus? Are we prepared to break out of our holy huddles and be seen to be a friend of the poor, the bullied, the lowly, the weak, the outcast, the homosexual, the aboriginal, the angry antisocial drug taking youth, the despairing housewife.

Dare we hold out our hand of friendship to new people amongst us, even those who are not like us? Will we overcome our fear and distrust and invite them into our homes? Dare we give account to our friends of what it feels like to be a Christian when asked? Dare we give our time and money to God's work?

Australia needs scandalous Christians. In the glitter of consumerism, loneliness is rife. Life is reduced to a meaningless scramble for self-gratification. The casualties of this competitive game are those who are used and abandoned. There

can only be a few winners.

We are the body of Christ. Christ works through us to bring his kingdom to the world. We are called to make a difference, to be a light set on a hill, the salt of the earth. To do so we must be followers and imitators of a scandalous Christ.

### Close in prayer

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### Background information for the leader

Background information on the Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53, from John Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1960) pp.337 – 341.

- This passage was probably written by "second Isaiah" (a prophet who continued to write in prophetic tradition of Isaiah. Some scholars believe that Isaiah 1 wrote chapters 1-39; Isaiah 2 wrote chapters 40-55 and possibly a third "Isaiah" wrote chapters 56-66). Isaiah 2 reminded the people in exile in Babylon that;
  - God would be faithful to his covenant
  - that Yahweh was their true king and the true universal king
  - that the people, enslaved as they were, had a positive destiny
  - God would call his people back and was in absolute control of history.
- The historic identity of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 is perhaps deliberately unknown. Earlier references to a servant show that the servant was sometimes Israel (49:3). At other times, it is an individual calling the people to be faithful, who teaches that sufferings born in obedience to divine calling are a pathway to hope.
- Yahweh's servant appears also in 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-15.
- The servant is one chosen by Yahweh, endowed by his spirit to bring Yahweh's law to the nations.
- In spite of torment, the Suffering Servant is promised eventual victory.
- His suffering takes away the sin of others.
- Although it has concepts slightly similar to:
  - 1) the primitive notion of removing sin of the group by charging it to some animal and then driving away or sacrificing it
  - 2) the myth of the dying and rising god of neighbouring cultures
  - 3) the king as cultic representative who occasionally ritually assumed their sins in neighbouring culturesIsaiah's concept of the Suffering Servant is "*without parallel in the ancient world*" (Bright, p.340).

## Session 2

### The Messiah of Grace

**Welcome people**

**Ask how people are. Break the ice.**

**Begin with a brief opening prayer.**

**Teach as introduction:**

It's okay to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12), but it is not okay to be slaves to fear. If we have an unhealthy fear of God, it means that we do not understand God's love.

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love*

(1 Jn 4:18).

Fear of God makes us try to get back in control. We start to look for ways to please God and then legalise these ways and make rules. We feel better when we can define what we have to do to be right and conversely, what most people don't do that makes them wrong. We get legalistic about our praying, our giving, our theology, our habits, our dress and our worship style.

This is exactly what the Pharisees did. Underlying what the Pharisees were doing was a fear of not pleasing God.

**Ask, share & listen**

- 1) Have you got that fear?
- 2) How do you think God feels about you?

**Teach**

It is all too easy for us to make rules for who is doing it right (or better) and who is not? Very often, we express our judgement of others by judging how they worship. Dr. Rowland Croucher talks of Jesus' many worship styles, all of which have been reflected in today's church, all of which are valid. (Show this table, see attached).

**Where Jesus went    seen in modern church    who see God as:    key architecture**

Where Jesus went	seen in modern church	who see God as:	key architecture
Desert	Quakers/ contemplative communities	purifying fire	nature
Temple	Catholic church	Holy/"wholly other"	altar
Synagogue	Protestant church	teaching/revelation	pulpit
Home group	House groups	friend/God with us	meal table
Festival	Pentecostal church with uninhibited celebration	Father	band platform

We need all of them. Psalm 103:1 says "**all** my inmost being, praise his holy name." If we stay in one mode, we risk imbalance and there is a tendency to be judgemental of other styles. So we need a balance of all forms of expression of spirituality. Let's not separate what God has brought together.

It is interesting that with age, there is a tendency to move upwards in the table in style.

The Bible is not big on creeds. Creeds define who is "in" and who is "out". On their own, they exclude and include people on the basis of rules and propositional statements. We need to balance creeds with covenant. We need both creed and covenant in the same way we need both faith and works. What do we mean by covenant?

### **Covenant**

In the days of Abraham, the strongest bond between two people was not marriage, it was a BLOOD COVENANT.

When God wanted humankind to know how much he wanted to be involved with us, he chose the strongest possible union between two people which would be understood. God chose a blood covenant, ie, God chose to become our "blood brother."

The meaning and obligations of a blood covenant were clearly defined.

- It was the strongest possible union between two people.
- Both were duty bound to share everything.
- Both were duty bound to help each other.
- You were both considered as one.
- It was indissoluble, broken only by death.

### **Act out and teach**

Ask some people to act this out (Be spontaneous and have some fun. Use available props and ask for volunteers to act this out).

When you entered into a blood covenant, an elaborate ritual was involved :

- 1) You exchanged coats = all I have, I share.
- 2) You exchanged sword-belts = share your enemies. (Your enemies become mine)
- 3) An animal is cut down the backbone and you both walk between each half in a figure of eight pattern = unity.
- 4) Both cut their wrists, joined hands and let their blood mingle whilst they raised their other hand and swore the terms of the covenant. These covenant scars were proudly born. It represented unity - at a cost.
- 5) You shared names. (Smith and Jones became Smithjones and Jonesmith).
- 6) You shared a meal.

When one of the two people entering into blood covenant is God, obviously certain modifications to the procedure had to be made. What did God do?

Step 1+2) God made a statement: *I am your exceeding great reward. Don't be afraid. I am your shield.* (Gen 15:1)

Step 3) God ordered animals to be cut in two and for Abram to walk between them. (Gen 15:9-10)

Step 4) This became the act of circumcision. (Gen 17:10-11)

Step 5) God exchanged names. The 'ha' from the unpronounceable word meaning God was given, so Abram (meaning "esteemed father") became Abraham (meaning "father of many"), (Gen 17:15). Sara

became Sarah (Gen 17:5).

Abraham was no longer his own, he belonged entirely to God. And God bound himself to Abraham. This was why God was bound to help Abraham have a son, even though he was so old. Abraham passed his covenant on, by divine permission (Gen 17:7), to his descendants, who became the Children of Israel. Still later, Jesus had a covenant meal (the last supper) with his disciples which continued and made clearer God's commitment to us (Mt 26:28).

Understanding "covenant" should give us some understanding of God's level of commitment to us.

### **Read**

Rom 8:1-4

### **Ask, share & listen**

Ask for people's reaction and insight to what they have read.

### **Teach**

Verse 1) teaches that now there is "no condemnation" for those **in** Christ. (Being "in Christ" is a favourite theme of Paul).

Verse 2) teaches that we are "set free" from anxiety, worry and legalism.

Verse 3a) teaches that the "Law was powerless." The law told you what evil was but did nothing to help you overcome it. The problem of doing wrong things still existed. You try a few extra prayer meetings, give a bit more, sing louder, clap harder - yet still there is the gnawing worry. You feel you don't measure up. The legal requirements of the law are there before you but you are powerless to change your nature.

Verse 3b) But what the law was powerless to do, God did. God came to our rescue. God did so by sending Jesus (coming as one of us to us as a person we could relate to) to die and take the consequences of our sin.

Verse 3c) In this way, God condemned our sin - but not us.

### **Ask, share & listen**

Do you think it is possible for God to separate what we do from who we are?



## **Wrap up**

God separates us from our sin. Our sin is condemned, but we are not.

Fear induces us to make rules by which we judge one another rather than love one another.

Of course the Bible contains a lot of instructions about what is helpful, telling us clearly how life works best. God gives them in love, because he cares for us. But let's not go beyond them and make rules which exclude where none should be. The challenge for us is to be mindful of the Biblical boundaries and to "live in accordance with the Spirit" (v.5).

People living in the spirit don't have gnawing anxieties about God's love. People who allow their spirit to be in love with God don't become unhealthily preoccupied with insular legalism and propound only one style of worship. People who are "in the Spirit of God" have a faith that is in the true spirit of Jesus - a faith full of "grace and truth."

If you struggle to feel holy enough, what is God saying to you today? Be gentle with rules that God never intended - and live in the spirit of Christ. Spirituality is primarily about a relationship with God, rather than obeying religious rules.

God sees our anxiety, our struggling to be holy, our guilt, and says to us, "let me take care of that - and live in my spirit." Will we let him?

## **Close in prayer**

<b>Where Jesus went</b>	<b>Seen in modern church</b>	<b>who see God as:</b>	<b>key architecture</b>
Desert	Quakers, and other contemplative communities	purifying fire	nature
Temple	Catholic church	Holy/"wholly other"	altar
Synagogue	Protestant church	Teaching revelation	pulpit
Home group	House groups	friend/God with us	meal table
Festival	Pentecostal church with uninhibited celebration	Father	band platform

## Session 3

### The Messiah who comes to you

#### Welcome people

Ask how people are. Break the ice.

Begin with a brief opening prayer.

#### Teach as introduction<sup>1</sup>:

We worship Jesus, the living example of God.

In the Old Testament, God was often understood as an unapproachable being whose righteousness we could never attain to and with whom we could not relate. Many Aussies feel like this about God. God is represented by church, and the church represents a morality and authority they can't relate to. The justice and judgement of God makes most Aussies feel beyond God's smile.

Justice is a wonderful word when you are right. However, it is a fearful word if you are not perfect. And none of us are perfect.

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23)*

#### Ask, share & listen

How do you think God thinks of you?

#### Teach

Have you ever seen a new born child? God comes to us weak and vulnerable, as a newborn child. God dwells within and beyond the eternity of time, within and beyond the immensity of the universe, comes as a baby. Why?

God is on a rescue mission, a mission of love. There is only one small part of the universe that God is not sovereign of - and that is our will. We are the only things God can't control - and so God seeks our love so he can rescue us into his future.

Jesus was God's final word about himself.

- God could not be written about - words didn't say enough and we interpret things imperfectly.
- God could not be theorised and theologicalised - as we understand things incompletely.
- God didn't come as religious laws that exclude and include - leaving us helpless in our imperfection.

God could only come complete and entire in 3D colour - as someone real we could relate to - in whom we saw the image of God.

Needless to say, most didn't recognise him.

I wonder if we would have recognised him and believed him.

#### Read

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this teaching comes from Geoff Bullock who spoke at Para Hills Lutheran Church on 1:8:98

Read: Phil 2:5-11 (Explain that this was probably Paul quoting a very early Christian hymn about Jesus.)

### Ask

Ask why you think the earliest Christians chose to say what they did in this hymn.

### Teach

Jesus wasn't born in a palace. God chose to be born:

- to a teenage peasant girl
- in an uncouth province in northern Palestine (where people were known for their dreadful northern accent and their predisposition for rebellion and insurrection)
- living in an obscure village that is not even mentioned in the Old Testament
- born in a place where animals feed to parents who were alone and neglected even though Joseph was visiting his families' home village.

God came from infinite eternity into a feed trough.

### Ask

- Who was it that God wanted to attend the birth of his son?
- Why do you think God wanted these people to be there?

### Teach

His birth was attended by:

- 1) Zoroastrians (wise people from another culture and religion)
- 2) Shepherds
  - a despised subculture
  - didn't attend temple (because of their job)
  - gipsy-like culture with a somewhat flexible morality when it came to other people's property
  - who were so despised that they were not encouraged even to go to the temple even if their outdoor job would have allowed it.

God reserved the angelic choir (who had probably been practising the latest Hillsong choruses and Handel's Messiah for months) for such an amazing occasion - to sing to despised shepherds who worked outside the city walls, outside the religious institutions, outside polite society. This should be beginning to teach us where God's priorities lie.

God came to us because he couldn't bear the pain of separation any more from immoral tax collectors, prostitutes, socially despised foreigners, the sexually immoral and to those who had consistently failed at establishing healthy meaningful relationships (e.g. Zacchaeus the hated Roman collaborator and immoral tax collector, the foreign woman at the well who had been married 5 times and the bloke she was living with now didn't even want to give her his name.)

Now do you begin to understand what God thinks of you, that he likes you. Do you begin to understand why God asks for your loving friendship - a friendship that only you can give?

When the religious Pharisees saw what Jesus did, they were outraged. They wanted to judge and make rules that disbarred people like you and me. Judgement makes us feel better. It establishes that we are above those who we judge.

How did Jesus deal with people's attempt to reduce religion to judgements against other people?

### **Read**

Read Mt 5:21-30

### **Ask, share & listen**

Ask for people's reaction and insight to what they have read.

### **Wrap up**

He says, in effect, "If you want to insist on legalism and right behaviour so you can be worthy of God, let me tell you how high those standards are." Jesus then lifts the stakes until the Pharisees themselves looked as sinful as those they judged. It was brilliant. Jesus said that if they even look at a woman with lust, they are guilty of adultery. He said that if you say "you fool" to anyone, it is as bad as being a murderer (Mt 5:21-30).

The Pharisees were made to look very ordinary. No wonder they crucified him so they could get him out of the way and return to judging people according to their rules, a game in which they knew they came out on top.

Jesus therefore shows up the disobedience and sinfulness of us all, but mercifully, Jesus doesn't leave us there.

*For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (Rom 11:32)*

Jesus reveals us at our vilest, self-deceiving, self-protecting, God-ignoring worst ...and takes the punishment for this on himself by dying on the cross. There on the cross, Jesus exchanged his holiness for our sinfulness.

Nicky Gumble tells the story on the *Alpha* tape of two good friends who went to University together. After university, they separated and one became a judge the other a criminal. One day the criminal was caught doing something illegal and was brought before the judge. The judge was in a dilemma. He couldn't ignore the crime, that would be unfair; but neither could he ignore his love for his friend. So the judge fined him \$10,000, (the appropriate amount for the offence), then took off his wig and gown, walked over to his friend and wrote him out a cheque for \$10,000.

What will you do with the cheque that God has written for you?

### **Close with prayer.**

## Session 4

### The future coming of the Messiah

Welcome people

Ask how people are. Break the ice.

Begin with a brief opening prayer.

Ask

How do you feel when you learn that another religious fundamentalist sect has predicted the end of the age?

Teach as introduction:

People have been predicting similar things for 2,000 years. So what can we believe? Is Jesus going to come back? How are we to understand allusions to this event in scripture? Why is it all so vague and confusing?

Let us begin with the more certain subject of physics - in particular, the physics of our solar-system. The sun around which the earth spins is really a star. This is what the mathematical physicist Paul Davies says about stars:

*"Today, we recognise that no star could keep burning forever anyway. It would run out of fuel." (p.46 "The Mind of God")*

Stars make up galaxies within the universe, about which Davies says:

*"the universe is engaged in a one-way slide toward a state of thermodynamic equilibrium." (p.47)*

*"In some respects it is rather like a clock slowly running down. Just as a clock cannot keep running forever, so the universe cannot have been "running" forever without being "rewound". (p.47)*

In other words, whether we like it or not, there will be an end.

If, like me, you think it reasonable to believe that life is purposed and has meaning, then we need to ask how we will make sense of the end of our solar-system and universe. The Bible teaches that Jesus will return and wrap things up before inaugurating his new everlasting kingdom.

Christians can already experience some aspects of heaven before death because they already have a relationship with God. That's why Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was within us (Luke 17:20-21). However, whilst the Kingdom of God is a present reality, it can only be partially enjoyed whilst we are on earth. That is why Jesus also spoke of it being a future reality, something we can only fully enjoy once we go to be with God.

If you like, the kingdom of God is like a seed that Jesus planted but which does not mature and produce all its fruit until God makes all things new sometime in the future (Lk 13:18-19). We therefore live in a tension between what God **has** already won for us, and what we **will** inherit fully in heaven.

The Kingdom of God exists both in the present and in the future and this must be held in tension.

There is some evidence from early Christian texts in the New Testament that people expected the imminent parousia (meaning "arrival") of Christ (Mk 9:1; 16:28 1 Thess 4). Christian leaders sought to correct this idea in later texts (1 Cor 15; 2 Peter 3). It is probably wise not to exaggerate the early church's possible mistake in expecting the "parousia" too soon as there are few clear passages about it.

*"Passages about 'signs of the times' (e.g. Mk.13) were not intended to enable the calculation of an eschatological timetable but to warn of conflicts to be expected throughout history until the parousia"*

*New Dictionary of Theology s.v. Eschatology (I.V.P., 1988) p.230*

History has proved the warnings of what will happen before Christ comes again to be sadly accurate.

### **Read**

Read Mt 24 4-14, 23-31

### **Ask, share & listen**

Ask for people's reaction and insight to what they have read.

### **Teach**

From Mt 24, we are warned of:

- many people coming who will claim to be Christ (vv.4, 24)
- wars, famines and earthquakes (v.7)
- persecution of Christians (v.9)
- many who will be deceived and will turn away from Christianity. The faith of many will go cold (v.10,12)
- wickedness which will increase (v.12)

We are also told that the gospel will be preached throughout the world (v.14).

All of these things have happened and we should expect them to continue to happen.

### **Ask**

What is yet to happen? (Invite people to look at vv. 29-31)

### **Teach**

What is yet to happen is:

- there will be a cosmic 'wrap up' (v.29) (now predicted by astrophysicists)
- everyone will be confronted with Jesus (v.30), truth will be revealed and we shall be judged and rewarded accordingly (Mt 16:27).

If we move away from speculating about how and when Jesus will come again (about which scripture is vague) and concentrate on the principles behind the New Testament teaching about parousia, (about which scripture is clearer) the subject becomes very reasonable.

### **What, then, does scripture teach us?**

- 1) All of us will again be confronted with Christ at some point (Jn 14:1-3,28; Acts 1:9-11).
- 2) Only God the Father knows when this will be (Mt 24:36).

- 3) The end will come unexpectedly when people will be doing ordinary things and who will be saying that there is no cause for alarm (Mt 24:38-44).
- 4) Whatever it is, we will be in no doubt when it happens (Mt 24:26-28).
- 5) The delay in the parousia gives time for more people to repent and come to know God (Mt 24:14; 2 Pet 3:9).

In fact, there are only three specific instructions given in scripture concerning Christ's coming again.

### **Read**

Ask people to search the passage (Mt 24 4-14, 23-31) for three instructions concerning the coming kingdom.

### **Wrap up**

Summarise the conclusions, i.e.

- 1) We are not to be unduly alarmed by it (Jn 14:1; Mt 24:6)
- 2) We are to be careful we are not deceived by it (Mt 24:4), e.g. deceived into thinking that it won't happen, or deceived that it will happen in a way not described by Scripture.
- 3) Stand firm (Mt 24:13) and be ready (Mt 24:44)

This seems to me to be imminently wise.

If Jesus were to come and wrap things up for you tonight, would you be ready?

**Close with prayer:** Mention everyone by name as you pray God's blessing on them.

**The next step:** Invite your group members to take the next step that is available for them, e.g. being part of a continuing home fellowship group.