

## 7 STREAMS of GRACE



Do you remember the board game, Battleships? Opponents would each place toy ships on their own plastic grid running from A-J and 1-10 hidden behind a screen? One player calls out a coordinate like B6, and the opposing player looks at the toy ships on their hidden board to discover a "hit" or "miss".

Our sermon series *Seven Streams of Grace* (SSoG) divides the whole Bible up into a huge rectangular grid, similar to the old board game. A large poster hangs in the church space or can be found on-line. The rows represent the "streams" or themes of God's saving grace that run through the valley and rivers of the whole Bible, and the columns represent the "eras" (milestones in Biblical history) in which each book of the Bible is set. This Bible study is part of the journey and can be used as a devotional study, but is best suited to group discussion. Join us on this journey along the rivers of grace down the ages for life, for love and for our salvation.

• Steve Webster

## Bible Study Notes for session #4 BLESSING

### 1. Warm Up

Discuss:

- ◆ Some say, "You should count your blessings!" Share some blessings you've received in your life so far?
- ◆ The language of "curses" in the Old Testament seems quite different to the contemporary use of the word. Discuss.
- ◆ How has your church community been a blessing to others?

- ◆ How might these and other sayings in Matthew 5-7 be problematic if Jesus was saying them as lessons of morality in the manner that many rabbis of those times taught?
- ◆ What good news is found in the *Beatitudes*, if instead Jesus was pronouncing blessings; promising a type of inner happiness (what a "blessed" one will be like in His Kingdom)?
- ◆ Why might inner happiness despite one's external circumstances have been good news for his original audience during the Sermon on the Mount? Why might it be good for us?

### b) Church/Apostles—Genesis 15:1-6; Galatians 3:6-18; Romans 4

According to Galatians 3:6-18 (expanded upon in Romans chapter 4) Abraham was considered right with God, and made a recipient of God's blessing, and became the bearer of blessing for everyone—not because of any personal merit, but simply by faith in God (see Gen. 15:1-6).

- ◆ Who today are rightfully the blessed ones of God according to Gal. 3?
- ◆ How has Jesus overturned the Old Testament curse(s)?
- ◆ According to vs. 14 the blessing of God to those justified by Jesus' death on the cross is **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. How is such a gift like/different to the blessing given to Abraham so long ago?
- ◆ How might we be part of the fulfilment of Genesis 12:3 where Israel of old failed?
- ◆ Discuss and pray about what it might mean today for the Church to bring God's Blessing to all people.

The members of St. Michael's Anglican Church acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as the traditional custodians of this land, and pay our respects to their elders past, present and future.

## 2. **BLESSING in the Old Testament**

### α) Creation, Fall, Separation—Genesis 1-11

The creation narratives in Genesis tell of God making the universe, the world, and its inhabitants. They include the stories of Adam and Eve enjoying every blessing of God. Reading through Genesis chapter 1 we see blessing bestowed upon every day of creation. Blessings overflow in the garden where Adam and Eve live before they fall from grace.

But the blessing was forfeit when the Giver was renounced (see Gen. 3). Curses and Suffering ensued. They could do nothing to regain their original state of blessed-ness.

Chapters 4 to 11 of Genesis then tell stories of the ever-expanding circles of destruction caused by sin. In Genesis 11, the story of the *Tower of Babel* is a symbol of the extent to which a seemingly **unbridgeable gap** has grown between sinful humanity and God who is Holy.

At the close of Genesis 11 the reader seems expected to ask:

- ⇒ Could YAHWEH; would God act?
- ⇒ Would God reach past curse and deserved punishment?
- ⇒ Would God bring humanity back into blessing?
- ⇒ Could God and would God bridge the gap caused by human sin?

### b) Ancestors/Patriarchs—Genesis 12:1-4; 12:10-17; 20; 26:1-14

- ◆ What are the seven blessings given to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3?
- ◆ Which direction do blessings flow in the many strange stories of racial exchange in these and other Old Testament encounters between God's people and the nations? Why?
- ◆ Instead of looking for moral lessons in these passages, read again through the lens of "bless those who bless you" and "curse those who curse you", regardless of Abraham's virtue or lack thereof.
- ◆ What definition would you give to the word "blessing" from these passages?
- ◆ What are some implications of specific blessing of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:3?

- ◆ Consider the whole sweep of Old Testament narratives and books and how the people of Israel seem to fail over and over to fulfil Genesis 12:3 ("blessing to all the nations"). What do you make out of the very **last verse of the Old Testament** (see Malachi 4:6 NRSV)? What questions arise after all Old Testament writings comes to a close?

### e) Wisdom – Psalm 1; 32 (see also 21, 67, 112, 115, 128); Job 1:1-5; 42:10ff

- ◆ Who is the one who celebrates God's blessing in Ps. 1?
- ◆ What's the difference with the blessed one in Ps. 32?
- ◆ Job received blessings before and after his period of suffering. How might we regard the period in between?
- ◆ If someone asked you, "Who can be acceptable to God and receive God's blessing?" how limited or how broad would your response be in the light of these readings?

## 3. **BLESSING in the era of Jesus & The New Testament**

### a) Jesus—Matthew 5:1-12; 13:16-17; John 1:14-16; Acts 13:34; Romans 15:29

The *Beatitudes* of Matthew chapter 5 find that title from the Latin *beatitudo/beatus*, a translation of Matthew's ancient Greek word *makarios* (traditionally translated "blessed" in English Bibles). Charles Spurgeon once said: "The Old Testament closes with the word "curse" in Malachi 4:6. The New Testament begins here (in the Sermon on the Mount) with the word "Blessed." (Jesus) has changed the curse into a blessing."

- ◆ It's quite legitimate to begin each line of the *Beatitudes* with "Happy" in place of "Blessed." What opportunities or problems might arise if we use the word "Happy" in Matt. 5:1-12?

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