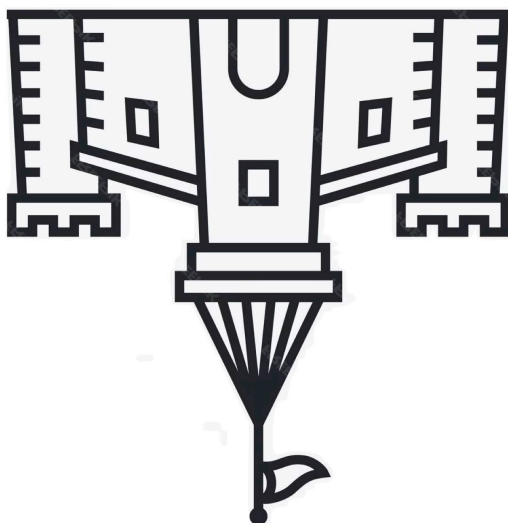




**TRINITY**  
CHURCH

# **THE UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM**



Growth Group Studies in Matthew 18-20  
Term 4, 2023

# TERM OVERVIEW

## Schedule

Date	Series	Title	Passage	Page
Week 1 <i>16–22 Oct.</i>	–	The Supremacy of Christ	Colossians 1:15–29	NA
Week 2 <i>23–29 Oct.</i>	Prayer Meeting at Purtinga, Cornerstone College (Monday 23rd October) Taste & See at Mt Barker High School (Sunday 29th October)			
Week 3 <i>30 Oct.–5 Nov.</i>	The Upside-Down Kingdom (Matthew 18–20)	Upside-Down Relationships	Matthew 18:15–35	5
Week 4 <i>6–12 Nov.</i>		Upside-Down Marriage	Matthew 19:1–12	10
Week 5 <i>13–19 Nov.</i>		Upside-Down Values	Matthew 19:13–30	16
Week 6 <i>20–26 Nov.</i>		Upside-Down Rewards	Matthew 20:1–16	21
Week 7 <i>27 Nov.–3 Dec.</i>		Upside-Down Greatness	Matthew 20:17–28	25
Week 8 <i>4–10 Dec.</i>	Christmas Socials			

# Matthew 18-20 | Background

From his genealogy and childhood (ch.1-2), to John's role (ch.3), Matthew has clearly shown that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies as God's anointed (Gk. 'Christ' Heb. 'Messiah'). God's twin declarations 'This is my Son' (baptism ch.3 & transfiguration ch.17), accompanied by his miracles (eg. 8:14-17, 11:1-6, 12:15-21), leave us in no doubt that Jesus is the one all scripture has been waiting for.

Jesus has shown that the purpose of his ministry is to forgive sinners (9:1-13). The centre of Jesus' message mirrors John's word for word; 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near' (3:2, 4:17, 10:7).

The Pharisees, having their hypocrisy exposed, have accused him of being possessed by Satan (9:34, 12:22-24), and are already plotting to kill him (12:1-14). Twice when pushed for a sign (as if they don't already have enough!) Jesus says that the only sign that generation would get is the sign of Jonah 3 days in the earth (12:38-41, 16:1-4).

After Peter's declaration that Jesus is 'The Christ, the Son of the living God.' (16:16), Jesus began to explain that he 'must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things by the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life' (16:21).

# Matthew 18-20 | Big Picture

This section begins with Jesus continuing his ministry in Galilee and ends with Jesus beginning his journey towards his death in Jerusalem. It is dominated by a number of questions asked and comments made to Jesus<sup>1</sup>, which fall into two categories: What do I have to give, and what do I get. In other words, how much will the Kingdom cost me, and, what's in it for me? These questions and comments from Pharisees, strangers and disciples show that none have truly grasped the nature of the Kingdom.

In this section, Jesus shows that the Kingdom is upside-down to what they are expecting. This is the Kingdom where those who put themselves first, will be last, and those who put themselves last, will be first (19:30, 20:16 & 20:26). Unlike every other kingdom on earth, God's Kingdom isn't about comfortable glory, victory and ruling in this life; but a life of suffering, humility and service. Whatever we seek in this life, we will receive the opposite in the next. As we shall see, this applies to dealing with sin, marriage, singleness, age, wealth, work, suffering and church leadership. These realities of life in the Kingdom are just as confronting and jarring for us today as for Jesus' disciples back then.

As we search these scriptures this term, our goal is to lead ourselves and our groups in letting these scriptures search our hearts and reach into some of the deepest and most firmly lodged values and hardest areas of our lives. Let us do this with much humility, prayer, gentleness and persistent love.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter (18:21 & 19:27), Pharisees (19:3 & 7), the disciples (19:10 & 25), a rich man (19:16, 18 & 20), James' & John's mother (20:21)

# WEEK 3 | UPSIDE-DOWN RELATIONSHIPS

## Connecting

- Find out who in your group has lived in the most houses.
- From this past week, share one thing to thank God for and one thing to ask God for:

*This week we're looking at how the Kingdom turns relationships upside-down, particularly regarding how we relate to each other when someone sins. Jesus calls us to upside-down, costly, sacrificial love towards other Christians when they sin against us. Here we deal with two of the hardest things a human could ever do: firstly, call a brother or sister to repentance, and secondly, forgive a brother or sister after they have repeatedly hurt us. Only God's Spirit can turn our hearts upside-down to do this. We need to ask for his help to transform us.*

## Pray

- Thank God for each other.
- Pray about specific thanks and requests.
- Ask God to transform our minds and hearts as we read his word so that we will think, love and act as Kingdom people when confronted with other Christians' sins.

# Listening & Applying

1. What would you do if you saw a Christian:

- A. tell a half-truth
- B. scan expensive items as cheaper ones at the supermarket self-checkout
- C. hit their spouse
- D. doing 120 on the freeway
- E. staring inappropriately at someone's body
- F. lose their temper with their kids
- G. gossip about a colleague
- H. constantly focused on worldly things (eg. material goods, home improvements, holidays, leisure etc.)?

*Read Matthew 18:15-20*

2. What might hold us back from doing what Jesus instructs here?

*Read Matthew 18:6-9*

3. How does what Jesus says about the seriousness of sin shape how we see v15-18?

4. After Cain killed Abel, God asked him where his brother was. Cain retorted, 'I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?' (Gen. 4:9). The unspoken correct answer is, 'Yes! Of course you are!'. Do Jesus' words in v15-18 expose any Cain-likeness in your attitudes toward your Christian brothers and sisters?
  
5. Why do you think Jesus felt we needed clear instructions on what to do about sin in the church?
  
6. How has the goal of 'winning them over' (v15) shaped each step of the process Jesus gave us for dealing with sin?

*Verses 18-20 echo 16:19 where Jesus told Peter that people would be bound or loosed as a result of the proclamation of the gospel. As we proclaim the gospel and call brothers and sisters to repentance, they are either bound, or loosed, depending on whether or not they repent. But there is no point encouraging people to repent of their sin unless we are prepared to forgive them for it.*

*Read v21-35*

7. What was wrong with Peter's question?

8. Can you testify to a time when remembering what Christ had forgiven you for enabled you to forgive someone else? (But don't dump anyone in it!)
9. Jesus' warning in v35 seems like us being forgiven is conditional on us being able to forgive others. How is this not a 'work' to earn our salvation?

*Forgiveness is incredibly hard, especially when it's to the same person, for the same thing, again, or is a horribly hurtful wrong. It's only truly possible when our hearts have been transformed and softened by God's grace shown to us. We can't just force or will it in our own strength. But it is still a choice. We need to remind ourselves of God's grace to us and choose to let go of our anger, and love the person. This doesn't necessarily mean that everything goes back to how things were before the offence. We may well need to adapt how we relate to them and adjust the boundaries we keep in certain situations, but it does mean that we stop hating the person and keeping the offence as a weapon against them.*



10. What effect does unwillingness to forgive have:

A. on the person who won't forgive?

B. on the person unforgiven?

C. on the church community?

## Responding

- **Share** any situation where you are struggling to forgive, or to help a believer deal with their sin, or with your own sin.
- **Remind** each other how serious sin is and how much Jesus has forgiven you.
- **Gently encourage** each other to be courageous in love.
- **Pray** that God will turn your heart upside-down to love, win-over, and forgive.
- **Commit to pray** for and support each other in this challenging task.

## Optional Reading This Week

- Jude 1:17-24
- Luke 7:36-50

# WEEK 4 | UPSIDE-DOWN MARRIAGE

## Connecting

- Share the best party (your own) you've ever had.
- From this past week, share one thing to thank God for and one thing to ask God for:
  
- How has God been working in your heart and life during the past week regarding forgiveness and lovingly attempting to win others out of deadly sin?

*Last week we saw how the Kingdom turns our thinking on relationships upside-down when it comes to other people's sin. Today, we stay in the nitty-gritty of life as the Kingdom upends our thinking on marriage, divorce, and being single.*



*Read Jesus' response in v4-6*

3. What do each of Jesus' statements tell us about marriage?

<b>Jesus' Statement</b>	<b>Reality Expressed</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Haven't you read?	God's word is Jesus' authority on marriage	
At the beginning the Creator ...	Marriage was invented by God (i.e. not a human invention/convention)	
The Creator made them male and female and said, 'For this reason ...'	Biological sex is intrinsic to marriage	
A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife	Marriage creates a new family unit	
For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh	Sex joins two individuals for the binding of marriage	
...they are no longer two, but one flesh	Marriage joins (1) husband and (1) wife as one entity	
Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate	God solemnised marriage to be permanent	

*Read Ephesians 5:25-33*

4. Why does God care so much about marriage?

*Read Matthew 19:7-10*

5. How does Jesus' Kingdom turn our (and the Pharisees' and disciples') ideas about marriage and divorce upside-down?

6. Why do you think God made an allowance for divorce in the case of adultery?

7. Is Jesus saying we have to divorce our spouse if they commit adultery?

8. As God's people, how do we simultaneously uphold the sanctity of marriage, while caring for people affected by marriage breakdown?

9. The disciples reacted to Jesus' strict stance on marriage. How do you react? What seems hard/uncomfortable/unreasonable about what he says?

*Read Matthew 19:11-12<sup>2</sup>*

10. What does choosing 'to live like eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven' look like? Do you know anyone who made this choice?

*Australian evangelist John Chapman once wrote; 'Everyone starts by being single. Some people remain single, and at least half of the married will end by being single again when their spouses die.'*

11. How can we as God's people love, honour and encourage our single brothers and sisters, no matter what situation we are in?

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<sup>2</sup> *Eunuchs were men who were unable to have sexual relations with women because they did not have functioning genitalia: either due to birth defect ('born that way') or by deliberate castration ('made eunuchs by others'). The latter were usually slaves who were castrated early in life to serve a particular function for a ruler (eg. guard and administrate the king's harem). Jesus introduces a third group of self-made, virtual-eunuchs ('who choose to live like eunuchs') who choose to remain unmarried.*

# Responding

- **Share** where you are struggling to love Jesus' teaching about marriage, divorce and singleness and would like prayer.
- **Remind** each other that God has something better planned for us.
- **Gently encourage** each other to live for the Kingdom in whatever situation we are in.
- **Pray** that God will turn your heart upside-down to think his thoughts on marriage, divorce and singleness and honour him in every situation.
- **Commit to pray** for and support each other.

# Optional Reading This Week

- Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (the law referred to by the Pharisees and Jesus)
- 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- 1 Corinthians 7

# WEEK 5 | UPSIDE-DOWN VALUES

## Connecting

- Can you remember ever being told off by a stranger when you were a child? What was it for?
- From this past week, share one thing to thank God for and one thing to ask God for:
  
- How has God been bringing about change in the past week regarding your thoughts and attitudes about marriage, divorce and singleness?

*Just like the last three weeks, this part of Matthew's gospel centres around questions people asked Jesus. As before, Jesus gets right to the heart of the matter, this time showing how the Kingdom turns values upside-down.*

## Pray

- Thank God for each other.
- Pray about specific thanks and requests.
- Ask God to transform our minds and hearts as we read his word so that we will think and act as Kingdom people regarding our values.



# Listening & Applying

*Read Matthew 19:13-30*

1. Why do you think people wanted Jesus to pray for their children?
2. Why did the disciples send the children away? What did their response show about their values?

*Matthew wants us to know that these things happened together ('just then' - v16). He wants us to see this man and the disciples in light of what Jesus has just said about infants and the Kingdom.*

3. What is the assumption the man has made about the way to eternal life? What hint does Jesus give that he is barking up the wrong tree?
4. What 'good things' have you tried to get eternal life?
5. Compare the commandments in Exodus 20:1-17 to the ones Jesus mentions in v18:

**1** “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. “You shall **have no other gods before me.**

**2** “You shall **not make for yourself an image** in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not **bow down to them or worship them;** for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

**3** “You shall **not misuse the name of the LORD your God,** for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

**4** “**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

**5** “**Honor your father and your mother,** so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

**6** “You shall **not murder.**

**7** “You shall **not commit adultery.**

**8** “You shall **not steal.**

**9** “You shall **not give false testimony** against your neighbor.

**10** “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall **not covet** your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

6. What is the significance of the commands Jesus (deliberately) leaves out?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How would you react if Jesus told you to sell and give everything away and go through life owning nothing (v21)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What did the man's response reveal about his values, his 'goodness' and his belief about Jesus' upside-down Kingdom?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What is Jesus saying in v23-26?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Looking back over this passage, what is the difference between what little children and disciples of Jesus rely on, and what the rich man relied on?

*When Peter pointed out what he and the others had left behind because of their love for Jesus, Jesus reassured him that (unlike the rich man) they would not miss out at the renewal of all things (v28-29).*

11. What do your actions and the way you treat material things reveal about where your values lie and what you are relying on?

## Responding

- **Share** where you struggle to rely on Jesus and put yourself last with your earthly goods and your salvation.
- **Remind** each other that it's possible for God to change our hearts.
- **Gently encourage** each other that the Kingdom is infinitely more valuable than earthly riches and that Jesus cares for our every need.
- **Pray** that God will turn your heart upside-down to be like children who rely on their father for everything.
- **Commit to pray** for and support each other.

## Optional Reading This Week

- Luke 9:23-26
- Acts 4:32-5:10
- Revelation 21:1-8

# WEEK 6 | UPSIDE-DOWN REWARDS

## Connecting

- Can you think of a time you were denied of something you deserved / someone didn't give you what you were rightfully owed?
- From this past week, share one thing to thank God for and one thing to ask God for:
  
- How has God been working in your heart and life in the past week to help you rely not on earthly possessions or personal goodness, but on Jesus?

*Where we finished last week, Peter wanted assurance that he would be rightly rewarded in the Kingdom for everything he sacrificed in this life. Jesus concluded by explaining that in the upside-down Kingdom, no-one who gives up now for Jesus will miss out on their reward when everything is renewed, because, 'many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.' (19:30). But Jesus continues to explain that these rewards probably won't happen in the way that we naturally expect they will.*

## Pray

- Thank God for each other.
- Pray about specific thanks and requests.
- Ask God to transform our minds and hearts as we read his word so that we will think and act as Kingdom people regarding serving Jesus and heavenly rewards.

## Listening & Applying

*Read Matthew 20:1-16*

1. Who could the different character in Jesus' parable represent in real life?
2. Who in the story represents you?
3. How would the last workers have felt when they received their pay?
4. Why did the workers employed earlier feel ripped off? What might they have felt was an appropriate outcome?

5. Does this seem fair? How would this kind of scenario go down in the workplace or schoolyard?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What truth is Jesus revealing about the Kingdom? How is this even more shocking?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How does this parable help us understand the kind of discipleship Jesus has called us to?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Sometimes we can feel bitter and grumble about how much God expects of us. What do we need to recognise to see that God is not being unfair or ungenerous to us, and to gladly bear the burden?

*Read Ephesians 4:1-16 & 28-29*

9. What is the focus and goal of Kingdom work? Who is responsible?

10. How does the significance of our task make the burden easier to bear?

11. Are there any areas of your responsibilities that you are neglecting?

## Responding

- **Share** areas in which you are tempted to think God is not fair in his expectation or reward.
- **Remind** each other that God has been incredibly generous to us and is giving us what we could never earn.
- **Gently encourage** each other that building Christ's church is glorious and eternal.
- **Pray** that God will turn your heart upside-down to be grateful and glad to serve him.
- **Commit to pray** for and support each other.

## Optional Reading This Week

- Luke 17:7-10
- Acts 9:36-43
- Titus 2:1-15



# WEEK 7 | UPSIDE-DOWN GREATNESS

## Connecting

- What was your greatest childhood achievement?
- From this past week, share one thing to thank God for and one thing to ask God for:
  
- How has God been working in your heart and life in the past week to help you value the work Christ has given us and the generosity of God?

*This week, the king is on his way to the capital. The disciples sense something big is about to happen. Finally, the moment for greatness! But in the Kingdom, greatness is turned upside-down.*

## Pray

- Thank God for each other.
- Pray about specific thanks and requests.
- Ask God to transform our minds and hearts as we read his word so that we will have a Kingdom view of greatness.

# Listening & Applying

1. How is 'greatness' judged in our society? What things do we celebrate as 'great'?

*Read Matthew 20:17-24*

2. What was James' and John's mother (and James and John) asking of Jesus? Why do you think they asked this question now?
3. What does it mean that the other disciples were 'indignant'? Why do you think they responded like this?
4. What is ironic about the question and the disciples' indignance, given what Jesus has just told them (v18-19)?

*Read Psalm 23:5 & Psalm 116:13 & Isaiah 51:17*

5. What might James and John have thought Jesus was asking them in v22? What did Jesus really mean? What did he mean when he said that the disciples would also drink that cup?



11. How can we foster and shape a church culture where we value true greatness?

## Responding

- **Share** ways that you still think in terms of worldly greatness, and ways in which you still seek worldly greatness.
- **Remind** each other that Jesus served us.
- **Gently encourage** each other to imitate our King.
- **Pray** that God will enable you to view humility as true greatness.
- **Commit to pray** for and support each other.

## Optional Reading This Week

- Daniel 4:28-37
- Micah 6:6-8
- James 4:1-10