



# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



## Summary

Matthew wrote the story of Jesus from a Jewish perspective, largely for a Jewish audience with questions about how and why they should trust the authority of Jesus.

How was Jesus related to them and their hopes for Israel to be saved and restored to closeness with God? Could Jesus be the Messiah God promised? What would life under his influence look like?

Matthew answers all these questions and more, showing that God's plan went further than Israel had expected. Jesus was not just a person chosen by God from a royal family line, but the Son of God himself. His authority would not only outmatch human adversaries but defeat every opposition to the life God wants for all people, including death.

**Bern Leckie**

# **Wednesday February 26: Matthew 1-2**

## **Introducing someone special**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

Jesus gets quite the introduction at the start of this gospel account, aimed at Israelites who would get the many Jewish cultural references and share in Jesus' family tree. While the whole nation descended from Abraham, God worked with different people in different ways. Jesus' royal family line was one of the most famous in history, including kings from David to Jeconiah.

This list tells a three-part story of a kingdom: its promise, rule and fall. The way Matthew sets this up, two things are clear: it is time for the next chapter, and Jesus will have a role in turning things around.

Life was difficult for Israel. Romans had invaded, taxes were imposed, kings, governors and religious leaders jostled for power while ordinary people struggled to get by.

Imagine living there as traditions and new ideas vied for people's attention. How would you know who to trust? Lots of people claimed authority, but who deserved it? Matthew is going to tell the story of how we can know that Jesus is the ultimate authority, the long-promised saviour of Israel, king of the Jews, and more – a leader for us too.

But for a new leader to take authority, old authorities must move aside. Matthew's story shows from the beginning that they did not want to do this. Herod's opposition was deadly, but he could not defeat death himself. Move over, it's time for someone who can!

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God's plan to bring people from all over the world back to him had deep roots in history, and the significance of Jesus as "king of the Jews" was huge, even visible to wise people from other countries.

But while God advertised Jesus' arrival in the sky, he chose to work down to earth with a family, young, vulnerable and relatable in every human way. He does not work as a remote authority, broadcasting instructions to us, but as a Father who loves us from the cradle to the grave and beyond...

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

As I am awestruck by God's massive power focused into family relationships here, I want to look afresh at how God wants to work through our family too.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family! Especially with our five-year-old son who is currently gripped by Bible stories, sometimes scared, occasionally confused but often amazed. Most of all, I want him to know through them how much he is loved and empowered by God to love so many others too.

## **Saturday February 29: Matthew 3-4**

**Authority recognised, challenged and practised**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

I love that God had been preparing his people for centuries to meet Jesus, but that it fell to one weird-sounding man to recognise both God's prophetic guidance and his provision of Jesus in the flesh.

John's baptism ministry showed that people wanted a new purity that they were not finding through their religious observances. I love that John's clear understanding of God stopped him from thinking that his water baptisms were God's ultimate answer to this. He knew that they were only a sign of something much greater to come, and I love that he got to see heaven opened as he recognised and (after a bit of persuasion) baptised Jesus.

But how can anyone else that isn't already Spirit-inspired recognise Jesus and his authority? This is what Matthew's stories show us – lots of examples of Jesus' authority in action so that we might come to trust and accept his authority too. John's recognition of Jesus' authority is just the beginning. I love how Jesus quoted scripture with authority to overcome opposition from the devil himself. Useful for believers to know, but Jesus reached further.

Can you see how recognition of Jesus started to go viral? It wasn't just talk about God, it was action to right wrongs, restore health to the sick and make life worth living. It took incredible authority for Jesus to pronounce kingdom victory over disease, and who would not tell their friends about that? From small beginnings with a few believing followers, I love how God's power backed up Jesus' claims of authority so that large crowds came to him.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God's kingdom, announced as good news by Jesus, brings huge changes to our world. It requires a change of authority because there has been no other power capable of ridding the world of suffering.

God knows that we don't just need clever ideas or a charismatic leader to bring about the changes we feel and know that we need. What will work instead? We need closeness to God to be restored, so he offers himself. This is not just good news, it's huge, breaking news.

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

I don't like to think about "the devil" very much, but he stands out here as a competing authority. I should pay more attention to the influences in my life which may be opposed to God. I often feel tempted to be self-sufficient, but I need to renew my commitment to depend on God and his promises, including those already written in the Bible.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

In "The SHAPE of you" course, we clarify pictures of who we are by seeking how God sees us. I will share here how we need to live under Jesus' authority to know who we really are.

## **Wednesday March 4: Matthew 5-6**

**“You have heard... but I tell you...”**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

I love that with all the authority of an empowered leader, Jesus brought practical teaching which is simple to understand despite being extremely challenging to live out.

The words which resonated most for me were Jesus contrasting what people had heard from other authorities with what he was going to tell them with his authority.

I recognise this kind of clash in our culture. People bring new ideas, studies, evidence, fears, feelings and passion into the arena of public discussion every day. How do we know who to believe?

One thing I love about Jesus' teaching here – it's not compromising. It isn't an attempt to bring every view together. It is radical in the sense that it challenges the roots of our thinking and seeks to rebuild our foundation for life. It's also extreme in the sense that Jesus tells us to pursue a way of life centred on God and his love to its greatest possible extent. Radical extremism can be amazing and bring peace and healing to the world – who knew?

I also love that Jesus is fulfilling the purpose of God's law as he shares famously radical, extreme positions such as “turn the other cheek,” “love your enemy” and “do not worry.” These are not just comforting words. Jesus is about to do what no other leader could – make them possible by purifying people and filling them with his Spirit.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God loves us and wants better life for us than we manage in our own strength. When we go our own way, we naturally try to respond to an unjust push with a stronger push back. So God put into his people's law “an eye for an eye”, a proportionate response. (Historical side note: the Israelites were not the first country to write this down, but God took a special role as the owner of vengeance, helping people to obey this principle and keep a lid on their anger.) But it turns out that this was only an intermediate step. God really wanted us to have the power to overcome evil with radical, extreme love, only possible because of Jesus.

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

I need to remind myself that anger and worry no longer have a natural home in me. Sometimes they bubble up through my thoughts and actions as I forget that Jesus' authority and power over what stresses me is massive and absolute. I need to turn to him more often!

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

Putting Jesus' teaching into practice is vital for me, not just so that I'm obeying him but also because it helps me to see that it actually works! So I will share something specific that I'm going to do with a friend I pray with this week or next.

## **Saturday March 7: Matthew 7-8**

**Trust Jesus' authority to change everything (including us)**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

Jesus could not be any clearer – hear what he says and put it into practice. But what if I can't?

Some of what Jesus says sounds scary. He talks about fire, being cut off and turned away if we don't do God's will. Is this a challenge to people struggling to do impossible sounding things like loving enemies and avoiding worry?

On its own, it would be a threat which might put us off trying. But I love that Jesus' commands are backed up by his promise of provision from God for anyone asking, seeking and knocking. He doesn't want us to try and fail heroically, but to accept and trust his authority.

This makes faith in Jesus an active stretch, not a passive belief. His promises can change the way we treat other people, because confident, empowered, provided-for people behave differently from nervous, insecure, desperate people. Which am I? What about you?

Matthew wants to show us what faith and trust in Jesus' authority look like in practice, and it's amazing. I love the centurion who sets aside his own authority to order soldiers to fight or civilians to carry burdens for a mile. Instead, he submits to Jesus' authority. His faith is not overconfidence in himself, but full confidence in Jesus, and Jesus responded.

I love seeing that Jesus' authority extends over any distance to influence not just believers but also weather, demons... everything. No wonder people asked "What kind of man is this?" No other authority compares with Jesus, so we might as well accept it!

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

Jesus has high expectations of his followers' ability to act in faith. This is not that they should act alone, but with him as God completes his kingdom-building work. Part of that work is transforming unbelievers into believers, which makes Jesus' commands doable for us.

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

I find it easy to shift between confidence in myself and lack of confidence in myself, depending on what is going on. I need to work more out of confidence in God and his promises to respond to requests. To be honest, I need to request more, and stop being limited by what I believe I can do on my own. I can pray and ask more, and believe that God will make his answers, will and guidance clear as I stretch out in faith.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I need to find more people to pray with specifically about work-related faith stretches. I think this will help me to be defined more by faith than fear of failure. Want to join me?

# **Wednesday March 11: Matthew 9-10**

## **Jesus gives authority to us**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

I like that Jesus' authority is now getting so clearly recognised that it is making religious people uncomfortable if they thought they were in charge or had everything worked out. I don't like that this power struggle was starting to result in hardening of leaders' hearts and misunderstanding of Jesus' work, as if it were powered by demons. But we know from how the story must finish that conflict between Jesus and other authorities was inevitable.

But I love what Jesus does with his authority to empower his followers. His commission to them to share about God's kingdom coming was backed up with power for them to do what he did.

I also love how Jesus could reframe a believer's whole sense of purpose and potential if they had received something from him. "Freely you have received, freely give." Do I believe this?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants his kingdom to displace every opposing authority in the world. He makes this happen through the lives of believers who obey Jesus by following his example, relying on him and showing practical love to other people. Jesus tells his disciples how to live on God's mission in practice, in relationship with welcoming people and unafraid of opposition. He can expect big faith stretches from us because he has empowered us under his authority.

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

Sometimes I think of myself spiritually like a barrel that wants to be filled up and keeps needing refills because I'm a bit broken and leaky. But that isn't what Jesus called believers to be. Something that freely receives and gives is more like a pipe. It can keep giving out spiritual blessings because it's plugged into the source and Jesus has made it clean and useful. That's what I want to be, more of a pipe than a barrel, not being filled for my own satisfaction but for God to use me for his kingdom purposes.

But if I'm wanting to give more, am I receiving from him, or trying to operate in my own strength? (Regular readers may spot this as a recurring theme..) I should be more clear with myself and God about what I have received and need more of from God. I will be specific about that over the next few days, writing it down to remind myself of my need for God's provision and being more able to spot answers to prayer when they happen!

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

People on "The SHAPE of you" course as we continue to develop our sense of what God has shaped and empowered us to be and do.

# **Saturday March 14: Matthew 11-12**

**Jesus has authority to redefine what we thought we knew**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

## **What did I like about today's passage?**

I remember an awkward conversation years ago with my entrepreneurial uncle who wanted to tell me how he would have run Jesus' mission better than Jesus did. My uncle had been brought up to believe in God, but never struck me as someone who wanted to accept Jesus' authority.

What reminds me of this now is hearing Jesus' words reflecting on how people didn't respond however they heard and saw God at work directly, either through John the Baptist's ritual purity or Jesus' sharing of life, food, drink, miracles and joy. So why did so many people fail to respond to what God wanted to show them?

I think there is a clue in the way the Pharisees reacted to Jesus on the Sabbath. They were right in that there is a law prohibiting work on this sacred day of rest. But they were missing the point of the law as it pointed towards a need for Jesus. They clung to their own authority to teach the law instead of accepting Jesus' authority to show them its purpose and God's priorities: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." The Pharisees' priorities must have been pretty twisted up for them to see incredible healing and go away plotting the healer's death.

But I love how Matthew makes the link directly between Jesus and prophecy we are reading from Isaiah. Jesus wasn't just redefining what was possible on the Sabbath. He was showing people the realities of promises from God made centuries beforehand.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God may sometimes appear different in the Old and New Testaments, but his purpose is seamless across history. By looking at Jesus we can see how it all joins up.

Jesus even has the authority to call unforeseen meaning out of stories like Jonah's. Who expected Jonah's time in the belly of a fish to have anything to do with Israel's promised saviour? Jesus brings wisdom "greater than Solomon", and yet knows that people aren't all ready to receive it. Some may never accept his authority, but he loves and died for them.

## **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

I admit I've been disappointed by how some family conversations about faith have gone! But I am going to trust that the power to change people's minds about following Jesus does not belong to me. The Spirit does this. So I'm going to renew my prayer for family who don't yet trust and follow Jesus and be more open to sharing faith with them at appropriate times.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

The people in my family who do trust and follow Jesus – he can empower us together!

# **Wednesday March 18: Matthew 13-14**

**God's kingdom is like growing up with Jesus**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

## **What did I like about today's passage?**

Have you ever noticed that only someone who really understands how something works can explain it to an eight-year-old? I think that's about how old I was when I first remember Jesus' pictures of the kingdom of God starting to make sense.

I would not now say that I was fully a Christian at that point. I happily accepted the label "Christian", I went to church, believed in God and generally trusted teachers. What else is there to being Christian? I think I was "ever hearing but never understanding." Looking back, I must have heard the gospel dozens or hundreds of times. I thought it made sense, but it did not define me until I was ready to hand authority over my life from myself to Jesus.

When I did that, in my mid-teens, I remember developing a sudden appetite for Jesus' words and pictures. I still love how many of them are about food. You may have noticed that I like food. I am very glad that Jesus can speak to me about the workings of heaven through pictures of stuff that grows and tastes good, among other things.

Religion can appear to be a man-made, elaborately constructed thing. But God's kingdom as Jesus describes it is organic, full of life and naturally growing. It's the same with our faith. I'm happy to accept that I was always a child of God, ready to accept Jesus' authority at a point in my personal growth that God knew and prepared me for, like others in this story.

Like Peter, I would love to follow Jesus on the water, but my stretches of faith can feel like they end with a splash. Thankfully, I don't think Matthew tells that story to embarrass Peter or tell us that his faith journey ended with failure. It's quite the reverse. Jesus was right – small things like our beginnings of faith grow when we are in the right place, with Jesus.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God's work with people is more like farming than simply teaching. He knows that we can grow, just as his kingdom grows from small beginnings to into something which can support communities. God chooses to change the world through faltering people like Peter and us.

## **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

I want to get better at encouraging other people whose faith may feel small and weak to them but has the potential to grow strong in the presence of Jesus and the willingness to exercise it. I feel that there might be opportunities to do this within my family or school community. Many have different faiths or sources of hope, so Jesus is not always well understood or welcomed, but I want to live in faith that his love will grow on them.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

I need to pray and look out to find good opportunities to do this.

# **Saturday March 21: Matthew 15-16**

## **God works so we can accept Jesus' authority**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

While there are lots of impressive miracles and important exchanges in this passage, what strikes me the most is how Jesus asks Simon Peter to reflect on everything he has seen and heard in his awe inspiring, nerve challenging, faith boosting, life changing (and, in Peter's case, body soaking) journey so far. One simple question. Who is this Jesus they have been with?

I am not surprised that Simon has an answer for this. I would expect Simon to have thought about it a lot, seen stacks of evidence and spent time chatting with so many other eyewitnesses to Jesus that his view would be clearer than anyone else's. Of course he is going to have an opinion, and anyone would be wise to pay attention to it if they want to understand Jesus.

But Simon has more than an opinion. He has a revelation. According to Jesus, by recognising him as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Simon has not used his "flesh and blood" observation and judgement but received inspiration from God.

Why do I find that so amazing? It shows me that accepting Jesus' identity and authority must be such a big deal that no-one can do it without God's help. That rings true with my own experience. Would that be yours too? Did we work out that Jesus was to be our ultimate authority all by ourselves, or did we need God to grow faith in us?

I also love that after Simon expressed his revealed understanding of Jesus, he was given a new identity and purpose. Jesus changed his name to Peter to reflect what he wanted to do with him. Peter's new life was not just inspired by Jesus but defined and powered by him.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God's work to bring us back to him is far more than an exercise in call and response. He works in and around people whose faith is growing, even before they can express it. God knows us, and what we can become, better than we know ourselves, and if we accept Jesus' authority, his word can redefine us, giving us new life. This is his work, not just our belief.

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

When I think about evangelism, I often think about some big, difficult, scary task that I doubt I can do very well. But when I share hope and faith with people in our community, I will remember how it is God's role to reveal his true nature and bring people to the point of life-changing acceptance of Jesus. I'm encouraged that he has been working on this for ages!

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and anyone who wants to pray with and for us and our community.

## **Wednesday March 25: Matthew 17-18**

**“Listen to him!”**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

When I'm looking for a book I can trust, I'll be persuaded about the author's authority by a good endorsement from someone else. What does God say about Jesus? “Listen to him!” Best. Endorsement. Ever.

I'm struck by Matthew's story being about more than Jesus here, though. Peter is grabbing my attention because I want to relate to him. Last time we saw that God gave him a revelation and Jesus gave him a new identity and purpose. Peter must be top of the class!

But he clearly needs to keep listening to Jesus. Right after being made Jesus' rock, at the end of chapter 16 he misunderstood so badly what Jesus had to do that “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan!’” In chapters 17 and 18, Peter seems to lead the disciples in asking a bunch of odd questions that show a need for lots more revelation. As their failed attempts to drive out a demon showed, they had, in Jesus' words, “so little faith.”

Thankfully, Jesus had plenty more to share which is inspiring to listen to and life-changing to believe and do. I love his assurance that God is like a remarkably loving and daring shepherd who will not let one wandering sheep be an acceptable loss out of concern for the rest of his flock. What sheep is he talking about? Not just some poor unfortunate souls that haven't yet joined our flock, but us, when we get stuff as wrong as Peter sometimes did.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God loves and provides for us. He doesn't just call us to try harder - he empowers us to live differently by bringing us closer to him and forgiving us. As a result, he also expects us to listen to Jesus and adopt the same attitude to forgiveness that Jesus talks about – we have freely received forgiveness, so we should freely give it too. In this way, God wants to transform us and our relationships under his kingdom authority.

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

I need to listen to Jesus, particularly about forgiveness. Have I forgotten how much I have needed and received this from God? I hope not, but I am still aware that I can make epic mistakes in his presence and let my heart become misshaped by a lack of forgiveness for others. I want to be defined by Jesus, not by people and situations which have made me feel wronged. So I want to ask God and listen for anything I need to let go or do differently to live out of forgiveness rather than grudges or judgements against others.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I don't know how this will work out in practice exactly – I'll keep listening for guidance and pray with friends about that.

# **Saturday March 28: Matthew 19-20**

## **Who does God say we are?**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

## **What did I like about today's passage?**

Remember Brexit? You might, especially if it seemed like more than a political decision to you. I think many of us felt challenged about our very identities in the arguments about who we felt close to and whose authority we wanted to accept. Does this define who we are?

What strikes me in this passage is how people react to teaching and challenges from Jesus which seem to make people wonder, not just about what they do but who they are. How can God redefine us? And are we expecting too little from God if we don't think he can?

For example, Jesus has a stunning challenge to people who look to traditional gender power roles so that men can assume authority over women to decide when a marriage should end. He invokes God's greater authority to define who married people are – "no longer two, but one flesh." His disciples think that the implications of this are so challenging that it would be better not to marry. Jesus agrees this is hard. Can we accept that marriage is about being redefined under God's authority, and can this reshape our sense of power and worth?

Jesus also has a massive identity challenge for the rich man who wants eternal life. Does he want to be defined by riches or by God? I love the way Jesus slides into the challenge with some obvious commandments (don't murder!) and one of the Big Two (love your neighbour) but misses out "love God." Why? Isn't that the most important? I think Jesus knew the difference between someone saying they love God and someone who loves God enough to accept his authority so they can be redefined and freshly empowered by him.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God is interested in far more than what we do. His authority and love can transform who we are and what we expect from life as a result. God makes it possible for us to leave everything else behind except relationship with him - that's how valuable a relationship with God is. We know that Jesus understands what human relationship with God is about, because he also talks about Father God in relationship terms.

## **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

Jesus' story of the workers in the vineyard feels uncomfortably relatable to me when I think of times I might define myself by my work or worth compared with others. I know Jesus has other purposes too for this story of God's kingdom opening to include freshly repentant sinners and Gentiles, but I know that I need to let God and his love define me and my worth.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

Questions of who I think I am tend to come up, not just with myself as I wonder about work opportunities to pursue but with lots of people I want to work for and with. I want to see how God can help shape these conversations to be less about my stuff and more about him.

## **Wednesday April 1: Matthew 21-22**

### **Why we never hear the story of Jesus turning water into champagne**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

### **What did I like about today's passage?**

Can you feel the tension now? I love how Jesus engaged people enough to be welcomed as a king and recognised as a prophet. God's messiah would be both, and a priest too. But the priests in town were not having any of that. They had the authority to do priest stuff. Where did Jesus get his authority from?

It was hard for them to question the quality of what Jesus was doing. Who wouldn't want healing? Shame about the fig tree, but that was still impressive. Maybe Jesus was at least empowered by God, and could help people to know God and be reconciled with God and all the other stuff priests and teachers do... but how dare he undermine their authority! Jesus can't be a priest because he didn't grow up with the priests. He isn't one of them.

I love that Jesus chose vineyards and banquets to illustrate what was going on, because it reminds me of our wedding where we had the best time, sharing loads of champagne. It's not something we can normally do! But do you know why champagne is so rare and exclusive? It doesn't just need skill and good ingredients to make. It must be made in the right place, under the authority of the *Comité Interprofessionnel du vin de Champagne*, who are quick to sue anyone who uses even the word "champagne" for something they shouldn't. Jesus may have made a great wine, but if he had branched out into champagne, they would have crucified him.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God is serious about getting people to experience the joy of his kingdom and fruitful life under his authority. He is prepared to deal with people messing up his space by not accepting his authority, their role or the fresh, clean, smart clothes he offers to party guests. (It was the custom at Jesus' time for wedding clothes to be provided by the host. We need to know this to realise that God isn't expecting us to impress him or buy an outfit to get into his party. We simply need to accept his grace and change when he asks us to!)

Jesus challenges any other authority, including our own, so that we can be part of something greater than we could run by ourselves.

### **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

Trust Jesus more, not just as the master of smart answers to tough questions but as the master and authority over me. I want more of the fruitful life which is only possible in God's vineyard. I probably need to spend more time sharing the fine things I have from him than the stuff I've tried to brew up with limited success on my own.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

Next time I talk about podcasting with radio people, I want to share my inspiration sources.

# **Saturday April 4: Matthew 23-24**

**Religion is broken and an end is coming**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

## **What did I like about today's passage?**

For anyone who hadn't already got the point, Jesus made it very clear that religious life was broken. This was not a mistake by God, but a result of the trap that leaders had fallen into by swapping God's authority for their own.

These leaders simply did not get the point of what God had given them to administer. So in their attempts to regulate people's behaviour while trying to maintain an appearance that everything was good with themselves, leaders puffed themselves up with pride even as they crashed into hypocrisy and failure.

I wonder how much they knew that before Jesus called it out in the most uncompromising way. How much did Jesus enrage them because they knew he had hit on sensitive truth? They probably wanted the kingdom Jesus promised, but could not bear to face the repentance he called for because they were sure they were the solution, not the problem.

I can't help being struck too by the end of the world. Why does Jesus talk about this? I think this might be the hardest part of the gospel to talk about with friends who don't believe in God. But while they may not recognise him, I think we all recognise raging battles between good and evil, construction and destruction, not just around us but in us.

It reminds me of how angry and conflicted we can become when we consider climate change. How can we be the problem? How dare someone tell us what not to do! Could our trust in God and acceptance of his authority over us, changing what we do, grab the attention of anyone else who knows that the world must change or end?

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God is determined to renew our world and eliminate evil. He will do this decisively and with massive consequence for anyone choosing to oppose him, so he needs us to know that we are in a critical part of history right now. This is the time when we can choose what we want for our future. God gives us this choice because he loves us. The whole point is that those who want to can live fully in good relationship with God.

## **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

I need to be more honest with myself about where I'm sometimes part of a problem instead of faithfully being part of God's solution. That includes more than my carbon footprint; when I emit anger instead of love, that is pollution God needs cleared up too.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

I know some Extinction Rebellion organisers who also follow Jesus – one is studying for ordination! I want to learn how they share about faith, authority and the end of the world.

# **Wednesday April 8: Matthew 25-26**

**Get ready to fulfil your purpose**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

## **What did I like about today's passage?**

Approaching deadlines can focus the mind, but what should we focus on? I love that Matthew finishes his account of Jesus' teaching before his death with the end that Jesus told followers to bear in mind. This is a unique aspect of Jesus' authority – no other teacher had a view of the universe from beginning to end like Jesus! So we should get some good advice here - how does Jesus say to prepare?

I am hearing this as two things – watch out for Jesus and get on with a purposeful life. This reminds me of getting ready for our local school's Ofsted inspection, about which we do not know the day or hour. I heard a horror story about another school which failed instantly because the inspectors arrived unexpectedly and entered the school unchallenged through an insecure door. We don't want to be that school, so people keep watch!

But if the inspectors found that all we were interested in was looking out for them, we wouldn't be doing the job of a school. That would be a fail too. Knowing that there will be a time to account for everything soon is a spur to action, but what matters most is that the school makes the best possible use of the resources it is entrusted with. That is measured by how students benefit from the school's decisions, spending and work: the school's purpose.

I love the clarity Jesus gives us about our purpose too and what he expects us to do. We must have faith and invest what we have been given, even though this is a risk. We don't know everything that will happen. God can seem remote at times. But is he?

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God trusts us to make good use of his stuff. He might be invisible and seem absent, but he is so involved and close to us that he knows what we decide to do and receives every loving act of service to people as a personal service to him. He is involved – he supplied our love!

With an abundance of love, Jesus also submitted to the authorities he had spent his life clashing with. By allowing them to do the worst they could do to him, Jesus willingly obeyed his Father and set up the ultimate test of whose authority had the greater power.

## **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

This reminds me of the importance of keeping the end in mind when I work. At school, where I am a governor, this is already a vital part of my role, but I want to add the encouragement from Jesus that what we do has an even greater purpose from God's point of view and that, as strapped for cash as we feel, we have huge resources from God.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

People at school, perhaps in different terms initially with Christians, but looking for ways to share my hope and faith view consistently with people who have other beliefs too.

# **Saturday April 11: Matthew 27-28**

**Jesus' authority wins – so what next?**

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

## **What did I like about today's passage?**

I can hardly imagine how Jesus' followers were feeling when their leader was crucified along with their hopes. Everything they had grown to believe about themselves and their purpose, all the things Jesus had talked about and demonstrated with power – was that all for nothing? Had Jesus whose authority seemed greater been defeated by other authorities?

It had to come to this. In the gospel story of Jesus, I think God has a point to make. Not only is Jesus a perfect sacrifice for our sin, taking our punishment so we can reconcile with God. This is also a final resolution of the question, "Who has authority?" Even when authorities opposed to Jesus do the worst, most extreme things they can do, Jesus still defeats them. This is how we know that Jesus is king, Lord, the greatest authority.

Did you see the surprise twist coming? Or did you have spoilers already? Jesus rose again, defeating every other authority including the one which had final say in our lives – death.

OK, for us, as incredibly amazing as it will always be, that was not the surprise. But maybe this is. Right at the end of Matthew's account, Jesus declares his purpose, what he wants to do with this ultimate authority. He does not use it to resume his regional tour. He uses it to commission his followers (us!) to save the world.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God reigns supreme. No power can defeat him. But this does not mean that God sits in splendid isolation from us. Instead, God chose to draw close to us, becoming one of us in a boy who shared our experiences and struggles from an unassuming birth to a brutal death.

Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God proved that his authority can defeat the opposing authorities of sin and death in human flesh, not just in the realms of ideas, wishes or spirits. So the work of Jesus was showing more than what he could do. It demonstrated what we can do through faith and life in him.

And has Jesus left us to get on with this alone? No! His closing words in Matthew's gospel are: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

## **What did I going to do differently as a result?**

Celebrate this weekend that Jesus has the ultimate authority over everything. Easter celebrates new life in general, but I particularly want to remember Jesus' life and the new life and purpose he has given to me.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family as we celebrate Easter with stacks of chocolate and time to build happy memories of what means the most to us this holiday time.