



the **GOSPEL** PROJECT.

FROM WONDER TO REJECTION

ADULTS / LEADER GUIDE / SUMMER 2023 / VOL. 8 / CSB



GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. By God's grace in Christ, repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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THE EDITOR

When Jesus came on the scene, He ushered in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was in their midst (Luke 17:21) and Jesus performed signs to demonstrate such. He healed the blind, the deaf, and the lame. And He came to seek and save the lost to bring them into God's kingdom, offering forgiveness to those who would accept it. He came to save us from sin and death through His own sinlessness and sacrificial death that we may spend eternity with Him.

Being God, Jesus has authority over all: the storms and seas, sickness and health, even life and death. Fully trusting this, we have nothing to fear, and we live as disciples to reflect His glory that the world may know Him and find purpose, hope, and eternal life in His kingdom.

The kingdom of God is here, although it is not yet fully fulfilled. In the meantime, then, how will we respond to Jesus's offer of salvation and His anticipated return? Will we reject and scoff at Him like some of the Pharisees? Or will we accept and work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13)? Will we live for the kingdoms of this earth, or will we live for God's spiritual kingdom as children of God?

Joy awaits us when we trust in the only One who can save us, redeem us, and pay the ransom for our sins (1 Timothy 2:6). It is a narrow door but the only way. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Let us continue living for His glory alone.

Y Bonesteele

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THE WORKS THAT I DO

IN MY FATHER'S NAME

TESTIFY ABOUT ME

“Who Then Is This?”

by Matt Capps

+

“Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:13; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). This question posed by Jesus to His disciples is the single most important question that has ever been uttered in human history. No other question has inspired greater devotion or ignited greater disagreement, and rightly so. For a Christian, what one believes about Jesus is the sum and substance of the faith. In the end all people will be judged by their Christology. Therefore, this is a question we must answer ourselves.

Throughout history, disagreements over the person and nature of Jesus Christ have rotated through the same theological issues and questions: “Is Jesus truly God?” And, “If Jesus is truly God, how could He also be truly man?”

Other world religions and philosophical systems have offered their assessments of Jesus, sometimes applauding His words and deeds while disavowing His divinity. Some have proposed that Jesus was a divine being who merely pretended to be human. Others have taught that Jesus was a human who became divine, a type of super-venerated saint. And

some have even argued that Jesus was simply called a “god” out of respect for His wisdom or courtesy for His distinctive humanitarian efforts. However, all of these attempts fall short of the testimony of the New Testament. The description of Jesus’s person and nature in Scripture is unremittably clear: He is fully God and fully man.

WHAT SCRIPTURE AFFIRMS

First, Scripture affirms that Jesus is truly God. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4). Jesus performs works that only God performs, as only God has the authority to forgive sin (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2). Moreover, He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

Yet, Scripture also affirms that Jesus was truly human. Jesus grew and matured; He experienced the full range of non-sinful

emotions. He hungered, He thirsted, He endured pain, and ultimately He suffered death (Matt. 4:2; 26:37; Luke 2:40,52; John 2:15; 4:7; 11:35; 19:28).

Even though there is a certain element of mystery surrounding the nature of Christ, there are several divinely revealed distinct theological categories that should frame our understanding of Jesus Christ.

DISTINCTIVES ABOUT JESUS

First, Jesus was not created, but the eternal begotten Son in the position of the “first-born of all creation” (Col. 1:15-19). The New Testament presents Jesus as being in the beginning with God as a distinct member of the Trinity, thus truly God. Paul affirms that He is “before all things,” and “in him all things hold together” as the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ. Jesus is deity and humanity in one person—God in human flesh (John 1:1-18; Heb. 1:1-14).

Second, Jesus was born of a virgin (Luke 1:34-37). Jesus was born by conception of the Holy Spirit. Christ was conceived without Adam’s original inherited and imputed sin (John 8:29; Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22-24). For this reason, Paul refers to Christ as the second or last Adam (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22).

Third, as the last Adam, Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life. Jesus knew no sin, committed no sin, and in Him was found no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Jesus passed the test that Adam failed, that you and I fail. While perfect, Jesus being fully human enables Him to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15).

Finally, God Himself testifies that Christ is His divine Son. This is affirmed by the Father at Jesus’s baptism and at His transfiguration (Matt. 3:13-17; 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36). This is also asserted in His resurrection and coronating ascension. From creation to the cradle, from the cross to the crown, Jesus is and has always been the divine Son of God.

TESTIMONY OF THE SAINTS

Being part of a great cloud of witnesses, we also have the testimony of Christians throughout centuries who have clarified and articulated essential biblical doctrines. We stand on the shoulders of faithful saints who have gone before us, especially the early church, regarding the nature of Christ.

The Apostles Creed (AD 200) affirms that Jesus Christ is God’s Son and our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, was crucified, died, and buried, to be resurrected and then ascended to heaven, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead. The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) also defends Jesus’s divine nature, namely, that He shares the same essence with the Father. Jesus was not merely similar to God, but is God. Finally, we would agree with the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) that Jesus is truly God and truly man: one person with two natures (human and divine), united without separation or division.

If Jesus were not truly human, He could not have entered our plight as our Redeemer by taking upon Himself our sins as our sinless sacrifice. Moreover, we take great comfort in knowing that Jesus, being fully human, is able to sympathize with us as He is with us in our difficulties and sufferings (Heb. 4:15-16; 7:25). Finally, since Jesus is truly God, we must go beyond acknowledging His deity and personally submit to Him in faith and worship (Rom. 12:1). So, the question before each of us is “Who do you say Christ is?”



JESUS OVER NATURE



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son of God rests in the care of His Father (Mark 4:35-38).
2. The Son of God exerts authority over His creation (Mark 4:39).
3. The Son of God calls for faith from His followers (Mark 4:40-41).

Background Passage: Mark 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In calming a storm, Jesus revealed that He is the Son of God, the One who has all authority over nature.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus showed that He cared for His disciples by calming the storm that threatened their lives and then called on them to have faith in Him. Jesus would later demonstrate God's love in a greater way by laying down His life to provide salvation from sin and death. All who have faith in Him have eternal life.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we are loved by God, who has authority over all creation, we seek to demonstrate bold faith in Him no matter our circumstances so that others might come to trust in Jesus for salvation.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

SETTING: Jesus continued to reveal Himself through His actions. Here in the Gospel of Mark, He was by the Sea of Galilee and began teaching. He eventually had to get on a boat because of the large crowds (Mark 4:1). As we consider today's passage, let this background invade your senses: smell the crowd; taste the salty air; hear the authority of Jesus; see the Sea of Galilee, vast and mighty. The disciples didn't realize it, but this lecture from the teacher would be followed quickly by a pop quiz.

EXPLAIN: Teachers help, educate, and convey truths to others. Jesus was the greatest teacher.

DISCUSS: Who was one of your favorite teachers growing up, and why? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: The crowds congregated around Jesus for various reasons. Some to listen and some to see a spectacle. For the crowds and the disciples, they had heard and observed Jesus, but did they really understand His message? Many people called Jesus a teacher. But He wasn't only Teacher; He is Lord. Jesus could tell that His words alone were not sinking down into the hearts of the crowds and the disciples. Like a high school chemistry student, sometimes we need to see the experiment come to life before our eyes before the head knowledge takes hold.



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POINT 1

THE SON OF GOD RESTS IN THE CARE OF HIS FATHER (MARK 4:35-38).

35 On that day, when evening had come, he told them, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.” **36** So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him. **37** A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. **38** He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to die?”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 4:35-38** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Point out the Sea of Galilee on **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS’S MINISTRY MAP**, and use the **VERSES 35-36** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

Jesus sometimes **invites** His disciples to places of difficulty and challenge so they can experience and **understand** Him more fully.

DISCUSS: When has Jesus led you through times that were difficult, confusing, or overwhelming, and what did He reveal to you through that situation? (examples of difficulties include health, finances, relationships; God may have revealed His faithfulness, love, and truth; challenges may have led to more trust in God’s plan or led to the feet of Jesus for comfort)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 37-38** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Being God and **sovereign** over all, Jesus has no fear and can **rest**; thus, we, His disciples, can do the same.

TRANSITION: There’s nothing like a crisis to reveal our faith. The disciples had left their normal lives to follow a revolutionary teacher from Galilee. They heard His teachings, watched His miracles, and witnessed His life. They professed strong faith and allegiance. That is, until the storms swelled. That’s when they cried out: “Don’t you care that we’re going to die?” These men had an immature faith that needed reassurance in Jesus’s identity. So let us consider Jesus’s position of rest and His ultimate authority.

NOTES



SEA OF GALILEE

The Sea of Galilee is a lake in Israel that is fed by the Jordan River. It is the lowest freshwater lake on earth.¹ Being low and surrounded by hills, violent storms can rapidly occur with the waters swirling when strong winds come.²

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Let not the wave master you in this troubled state of your heart. Yet since we are but men, if the wind should drive us on, and stir up the affections of our souls, let us not despair; let us awake Christ, that we may sail on a tranquil sea.”³

—Augustine (354–430)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 35-36 / Jesus had been teaching all day. He'd been surrounded by "a very large crowd" (Mark 4:1), speaking from inside a boat and using parables to reveal truths about the kingdom of God (v. 11). This parable-type teaching was an effective way of demonstrating spiritual truths to people in an earthly world. When a real-life object was placed beside an invisible truth, its understanding became more clear. On top of that, Jesus "explained everything to his own disciples" privately (v. 34), so they effectively had the teacher's outline and notes to go with the verbal lecture.

At evening, Jesus invited His disciples to "**cross over to the other side of the sea**" (v. 35). Jesus knew that sometimes God's followers must go through tough times in order to live out their obedience to God: Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22), Jacob wrestled with God all night (Gen. 32:24-32), Moses held up his hands through an entire battle (Ex. 17:8-16), Joshua and his men marched all night and fought all day to defend people who had tricked them (Josh. 10), and more. Those give-it-all-you've-got situations reveal who God is, how He works, and that His mighty hand is powerful in the lives of His people. Jesus was going to do the same thing for His disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus was already in the boat, so His disciples joined Him. We can imagine that this was no mighty sea vessel; it was likely a simple fishing boat, fitted for short excursions. Anyone who owned this boat would have watched the sky, ready to head to shore at the first sign of a storm.

In addition, "**other boats were with him**" (Mark 4:36). This was likely a small collection of people who decided to follow after Jesus in their own vessels. They likely thought that they were going to get a front-row seat to a miracle; they had no idea what was about to happen.

VERSES 37-38 / We see that "**a great wind-storm arose**" (v. 37). The Greek word for

great, *megas*, can apply to the mass or weight, extent, stature, or age of a thing. It can also point to an abundance, intensity, violence, rank, importance, or excellence. Some Bibles translate this word "loud." Mark stressed the magnitude of the storm and described its effects: "**waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped**" (v. 37). Imagine the chaos: pelting rain, roaring winds, and tumultuous waves pouring water into the humble fishing boat. We picture the disciples in the boat, wet and overwhelmed with fear as the waters inside and outside of the boat continued to break around them. It's a helpless feeling to find yourself physically overpowered, and these men had no response to such a storm.

Jesus, on the other hand, did not exhibit such panic; in fact, He'd found a cushion in the stern, or rear, of the boat. If you've ever rented a two-man canoe for a float down a local river, the rear of the boat would hold significance for you: that's where the steering happens. Jesus, Lord of all, was resting in the pilot's seat, unconcerned with the raging storm. And He was sleeping on a cushion—probably a comfortable but wet cushion at this point.

The disciples had let Jesus sleep for a while. Perhaps they recognized that He'd had a long day. Perhaps, for a while, they figured they could handle the storm themselves. Or perhaps they considered that He was all-knowing and would wake up when it got bad.

Evidently, He didn't do what they thought He should do. He wasn't helping. He wasn't comforting. He wasn't praying. So, they woke Him with poignant words: "**Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to die?**" Their thoughts went to the worst-case scenario. And they addressed Jesus here as teacher, nothing more. His teaching had been powerful, for sure, but His authority over nature? Not so evident in this situation . . . yet.

POINT 2

THE SON OF GOD EXERTS AUTHORITY OVER HIS CREATION (MARK 4:39).

NOTES

39 He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Silence! Be still!” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 4:39** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 3: HEARING THE OLD IN THE NEW**, and use it as a reference throughout the volume to show that God remains the same; then use the **VERSE 39A** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus **speaks** to our situations and our fears with power and **authority**.

DISCUSS: From Day 4 in the DDG: **What makes you fearful today, and what would God say to you about that fear?** (fears may vary from fears about finances, wayward children, broken marriages or relationships, to sicknesses; God might be saying, “Trust Me,” “Keep waiting,” “I’m here,” “You don’t have to worry,” “I’ll take care of you,” “I love you”)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 39B** commentary to emphasize the key doctrine that God is omnipotent, which is true of Jesus, as He is fully God and fully man (see John 1:14; Col. 2:9) (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #21: God Is Omnipotent. God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has **power** and authority over the universe He **created**, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

DISCUSS: How might you respond differently to a crisis if you truly believe that God is all-powerful? (I would be more likely to leave the situation in His hands rather than try to take charge; I would go to prayer first before trying to do things in my own effort; I would worry less and trust God more)

TRANSITION: Jesus commanded the storm to be still, and it obeyed. He commanded demons to leave a human host, and they did (Matt. 17:18). He ordered a fig tree to wither, and it did (Matt. 21:19). In every sphere of life, Jesus proved His ultimate authority. As His disciples saw Him clearly, the reality of His identity was overwhelming.



COMMENTARY

VERSE 39A / In Mark 4:38, the disciples asked Jesus, “Don’t you care that we’re going to die?” If the question “Don’t you care?” rings a bell in your own memory, that may be because it’s used in another famous passage. In Luke 10:38-42, Jesus is visiting Mary and Martha. Mary is sitting at His feet, while Martha found herself loaded with many tasks. “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” is Martha’s sternly worded question to Jesus (v. 40). The same word for “care” is used in 1 Peter 5:7, “casting all your cares on him, because he cares for you.” We see in 1 Peter the answer to the question Martha and the disciples asked: Yes, without a doubt, Jesus cares.

Jesus cares for you and your struggle, and not with a distant wish of “thoughts and prayers” in a crisis. Jesus wants us to lay our burdens at His feet over and over until the weight no longer crushes us. He wants us to know and believe that He has the power to handle our cares.

In response to the question from the disciples, Jesus didn’t respond with empty words; He acted in power. First, we see that He got up. Can you imagine Jesus, rubbing His eyes, blinking hard? Movies may portray Jesus as always steady and almost emotionless, but He was also human. It probably took Him a second to wake up, just as it does us!

He then **“rebuked the wind”** (v. 39). Though Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this story, none of them tell His exact words of rebuke. But the Greek word translated “rebuke” is the same to describe Jesus’s rebuke of crowds who would blow His cover (Matt. 12:16) and a demon from a boy with seizures (see Matt. 17:18; Mark 9:25). This wasn’t a gentle correction but a strong scolding. After all, “all things were created through him” (John 1:3), and He has authority over creation.

Jesus then spoke to the sea: **“Silence! Be still!”** The verb translated “silence”

is a Greek word that sometimes emphasizes an involuntary stillness or inability to speak. The Greek word for “be still” carries with it the imagery of muzzling (see 1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18). Jesus used that same word when He confined demonic spirits (Mark 1:25; Luke 4:35). Jesus rebukes and speaks, and creation obeys.

VERSE 39B / We see, then, that nature responds to Jesus’s commands. First, the **“wind ceased.”** It obeyed. It did what Jesus told it to do. No other person on earth could do such a thing—speak to the wind or the sun or the earth and make it obey. Only God, the supreme, divine being can do such. Jesus was making a statement: I have power; I have authority; I am God.

And the wind didn’t cease gradually. It didn’t slowly calm itself. This change was immediate. Nature responded immediately to Jesus’s command because Jesus, being God, has authority over all.

Then there was a **“great calm”** (v. 39). Just as there had been a “great” (v. 37) storm, there was now a “great” calm. As great as the storm was, the calm was that great—abundant, excellent calmness. Perhaps you’ve experienced this: perhaps you sometimes invite over a big, loud family to enjoy a meal with yours. After they leave, there is a heavy peace that fills your home. Not just a quietness in the noise level, a peace that envelopes the whole atmosphere. Yet in this situation, the calm and peace was complete, immediate, and even greater than we can imagine, externally and probably internally in the hearts of those present.

After the immediate, obedient response from the wind and storm, Jesus turned to His disciples. He had just revealed Himself to be the ultimate authority over wind and sea, whose words carry the power to still and silence a violent storm. He had allowed His closest friends to glimpse His holy divinity in the midst of His humanity. What would He say next?

POINT 3

THE SON OF GOD CALLS FOR FAITH FROM HIS FOLLOWERS (MARK 4:40-41).

40 Then he said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

41 And they were terrified and asked one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 4:40-41** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 40** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus calls His followers to **faith**, especially in response to **fears** and difficult circumstances, to believe that He is truly Lord of all.

DISCUSS: How might asking ourselves why we are afraid bring us to see our own faith honestly? (pinpointing our fear may help us realize that that fear is not real nor insurmountable; knowing what we fear can help us see where we need more prayers of faith; stating our fears to God may remind us that God is still bigger than that fear)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 41** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Faith sees **Jesus** clearly, as who He says He is—God in flesh—realizing He is more **powerful** than anything else we might have feared.

DISCUSS: How can we intentionally study the Bible to see God more clearly? (seek God’s identity as part of your daily Bible reading; underline or highlight any descriptions of God, writing inferred characteristics in the margin; studying the Bible to see God’s character in the story, realizing it’s not all about us)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 40 / If we see Jesus's teaching as a lecture and the stormy seas as the assessment, it's probably safe to assume that the disciples did not pass their test. They panicked, assumed they would die, and accused the Lord of not caring. That's not what most of us would call "walking by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7).

Yet we as believers sometimes "walk" just like this. We are calm and cool, diligent to pray and faithful to read our Bibles when we're in control and life is clicking along on the rails as we expect. But in times of struggle, heartbreak, and disaster, we do the same as the disciples: we panic, assume we won't make it, and accuse God of not caring. We struggle with the same issue as the disciples: we don't believe God is who He says He is. We may know it intellectually, but we don't live it out. We don't stake our life's calling on it because of a nagging fear: "What if God doesn't come through?" So we make a Plan B of material possessions, people, and situations we'll run to if God doesn't seem to be there for us.

It all boils down to faith: either God is with us, all-powerful, all-seeing, and all-knowing or He isn't. If you believe that He is these things, then your response to your own personal storms looks vastly different from the one who doesn't believe.

This brings us to Jesus's two questions in this verse: First, **"Why are you afraid?"** We might ask ourselves the same question, and find our answers accusing God of things because of our limited knowledge: "God didn't send me on the right path" or "God didn't do what I thought He would do." Though we might be tempted to think that, we must always remember that God's ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8-9). What you might see as the wrong path, God knows it to be a new opportunity for you to practice believing. What you might see as God dropping the ball, God sees as an opportunity for you to yield to His perfect plan.

The second question was more incriminating: **"Do you still have no faith?"** Ouch, "no faith" sounds harsh. Maybe we ourselves would call it wavering faith or frail faith. But to Jesus, we either believe or we don't. Did the disciples believe Jesus was God Almighty and prove it with their lives? At this point, no.

VERSE 41 / It can sometimes seem easy to shake our heads at the disciples and roll our eyes at their young faith or lack thereof. But in this passage, we can see ourselves in the unbelieving, panicking disciples. In the midst of what may have been the greatest chaos of their lives to this point—a boat ride turned nightmare and Jesus's power over nature—we can picture ourselves very much like the disciples when facing danger and struggles: slack-jawed and overwhelmed.

Mark stated it clearly: they were terrified, or filled with great fear. In the Greek, we see the word "great" three times in this story. There was a great storm, then a great calm, then a great fear.

But this fear wasn't for the storm. This new, greater fear was for the One who had silenced it. They saw Jesus clearly in this situation, understanding that He wasn't just a mystical healer or a powerful teacher. This was God Almighty. These Jewish men grew up hearing all the stories from Scripture; now they had seen God's power with their own eyes.

As we picture the bewildered disciples staring blankly at Jesus, they squeak out the words: **"Who then is this?"** Not only did the disciples see the almighty power and authority of Jesus commanding creation, they beheld Jesus, God in flesh. They thought the storm was something to be feared. Now they realized Jesus is stronger than that fear, for He Himself is to be feared.

MY RESPONSE

Because we are loved by God, who has authority over all creation, we seek to demonstrate bold faith in Him no matter our circumstances so that others might come to trust in Jesus for salvation.

NOTES

HEAD:

Isaiah's words from the Lord (Isa. 40:13) teach us that we are called to be God's servants because He chose us. Our call to know and believe Him as the only God is what will make us His witnesses. As we know God through His Word and experience His presence, we are changed from the inside out. The truth of God is earth-shattering and life-changing. When we allow His identity to change our identity, we become His witnesses to the world. Don't be satisfied with head knowledge; it's not belief until we're changed.

What are some ways God reveals His omnipotent power today?

HEART:

Fear can drive us away from faith. When God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22), there were any number of fears that could have kept Abraham from obeying: Was he even sane? What would Sarah and his servants do in response? How would this change his future? But Abraham's obedience prompted God to say, "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12). As we walk in holy fear of God, we don't let the very real fears of the earth dictate our emotions and our obedience.

For what areas of your life can you confess that you are afraid to walk in obedient faith?

HANDS:

Most of us won't find ourselves in a sinking boat as a testament to our faith. But we'll find ourselves in situations in which we know what God would command but find ourselves afraid to do it. God says to love; will you show love to the needy person on the street? God says to forgive; will you choose forgiveness for the person who never said, "I'm sorry"? God says to be a light; can you speak the name of Jesus in a godless area? Our acts of faith of every size reveal what we believe about our Lord.

How can you show God's compassion and mercy by being compassionate and merciful in Jesus's name this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For when he arose, and rebuked the sea, and silenced the storm, he plainly disclosed two things: that the storm of the sea was not simply from winds, but from the fear of the Lord who walked upon it; and that the Lord who rebuked it was not a creature, but rather its creator."⁴

—Athanasius (c. 296–373)

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE SON OF GOD RESTS IN THE CARE OF HIS FATHER (MARK 4:35-38).

+ COMMENTARY

“Both His humanity and His deity are put on display in this story, and it is humanity that appears so clearly when He is in stern of the boat, fast asleep on a cushion. The Bible repeatedly teaches our Lord’s full and true humanity. He got hungry (Matt 4:2). He got angry (Mark 3:5). He cried (John 11:35). He died (the cross). Now we see He slept. He had an exhausting day, and He kept on sleeping right through the storm. This is the only time in the Gospels that we read of Jesus sleeping. Yes, He is human. But there is something else. He has complete trust in the providential care of His Father. The veteran seamen may be terrified, but the Carpenter from Nazareth sleeps soundly.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Share a few interesting facts about sleep: (1) In the days before a full moon, people stay up later and sleep less; (2) If you fall asleep in less than five minutes at night, you’re probably sleep-deprived; (3) Seventy percent of us dream in color. Before color television, just fifteen percent did.⁶

Ask the following questions of your group: “How well would you say you sleep, normally? Why is that?” Explain that grief, stress, physical or mental illness, living or sleeping arrangements, family history, shift work, diet, pets, and exercise habits can all interrupt sleep. Ask, “How well do you sleep now compared to when you were a child?”

If time and technology permits, you may want to show a short compilation video of babies trying to stay awake. View the videos before class to make sure they’re appropriate. Ask, “What does it take for you to get a perfect night of sleep?” Invite a few volunteers to share; they will probably mention they prefer to be at home, but engage them in discussing the lighting, noise level, and other elements that contribute to a good night of sleep.

Say, “In this passage, let’s consider Jesus’s sleeping situation: He was on some sort of first-century cushion in the back of the boat. A storm blew in, His disciples were busy bailing out the boat, and yet, Jesus was still asleep. How is that?” Point learners to the confidence Jesus had in the authority given to Him and the power that He had as God. Ask, “How might we use this passage to help us sleep better as well?”

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE SON OF GOD EXERTS AUTHORITY OVER HIS CREATION (MARK 4:39).

+ COMMENTARY

“A particular emphasis is laid upon the noisiness of [the wind and sea] . . . The noise is threatening and terrifying; let us hear no more of it. This is (1.) A word of command to us; when our wicked hearts are like the troubled sea which cannot rest (Isa. [57:]20); when our passions are up, and are unruly, let us think we hear the law of Christ saying, Be silent, be dumb. Think not confusedly; speak not unadvisedly; but be still. (2.) A word of comfort to us, that, be the storm of trouble ever so loud, ever so strong, Jesus Christ can lay it with a word’s speaking.”⁷

+ COMMENTARY

“4:39 The words translated ‘rebuked’ and ‘be still’ were used in 1:25 with reference to an exorcism. This consideration may imply a demonic element in the storm. In fact the latter word (pephimosō) can be translated ‘be muzzled.’ If there is any allusion to Jonah, the story shows Jesus’ superiority to him. Also the account pictures Jesus as doing what in the Old Testament only God could do (note especially Ps 107:29-30).”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

Briefly explain the four types of authority in teaching: (1) Referent authority: students behave as the teacher desires because they have a relationship with the teacher; (2) Expert authority: students see their teacher as someone knowledgeable and value what the teacher is teaching; (3) Legitimate authority: The teacher expects students to obey simply because he or she is the teacher; (4) Reward/Coercive authority: The teacher uses punishments and rewards to influence behavior.⁹

If there are teachers in your class, invite them to share some of their own experiences with the different types of authority. Ask the entire class, “Which of these might be better suited for a preschool class? Which might work better in a college setting?” Help learners see that different types of authority might work at different times and with different age groups.

Ask, “In what ways have you seen Jesus use these types of authority with His disciples?” Point out that Jesus used both of the first two types in dealing with His disciples. Say, “But Jesus didn’t need to consider a lasting relationship with the storm that was blowing in; He was the legitimate authority there, and the storm simply had to obey.”

POINT 3: THE SON OF GOD CALLS FOR FAITH FROM HIS FOLLOWERS (MARK 4:40-41).

+ COMMENTARY

“The most prominent feature of this account is the question it leaves in the minds of the disciples: ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him?’ (4:41). Mark leaves the question unanswered in the minds of the disciples and his readers, but the answer is clear in light of the

OT emphasis on God’s power over the sea (cf. Job 38:8-11). There is no clearer demonstration of the deity of Jesus in the NT. He has the power of the Creator who can rebuke the sea and wind and bring calm.”¹⁰

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus now turns from addressing the storm to addressing the disciples. He expresses a mild rebuke: ‘Why are you fearful? Do you still have no faith?’ By now they should have a greater comprehension and increased faith in His person. This was a golden teaching moment, but they came up short. In the eye of the storm, rather than trusting Him, the disciples accuse Jesus of forsaking them (v. 38). Unfortunately, this will not be the last time Jesus must point out their lack of faith (7:18; 8:17,21,33; 9:9). Until they see the resurrected Christ and fully understand what He did for them on the cross, they are going to struggle.”¹¹

+ ILLUSTRATION

Before class begins, write the following on index cards, one per card: Mother, Father, Teacher, Coach, Grandmother, Grandfather, Boss, Manager, Best Friend, Son, Daughter, Brother, Sister, Mentor. Read each card aloud and ask volunteers if they have a person who fits that description in their lives. Distribute the cards to different people. Go back to each card holder and ask, “What does/did this person expect from you?” Examples may include, “My mother expected me to be home on time and help with dishes. My manager expects me to help our bottom line.” Some answers might be lighthearted; that’s fine.

Follow up by asking, “Do you feel obliged to meet that person’s expectations? Why or why not?” Point out that we might feel compelled to meet expectations for someone who is an authority but not for a sibling or child. Say, “We can tell from Jesus’s words here that Jesus expected His followers to have faith. Just as we strive to live up to the expectations of others, we have the challenge to believe Jesus.”

Enlist a volunteer to read some other examples of Jesus calling people to faith: Matthew 9:28; Mark 5:36; Mark 9:23-24. Using the last passage, point out that we can even ask Jesus for help in our unbelief.

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UNIT 22 / SESSION 2

JESUS OVER SIN

+ **SESSION OUTLINE**

1. The Son of Man brings forgiveness to the faithful (Luke 5:17-20).
2. The Son of Man brings healing to the needy (Luke 5:21-25).
3. The Son of Man brings glory to the Father (Luke 5:26).

Background Passage: Luke 5

+ **WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?**

Jesus alone is able to go beyond physical healing and forgive sins as well.

+ **HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?**

Jesus's claim to have the authority to forgive sins was supported by His miraculous healings. Jesus would later suffer and die to provide forgiveness of sin and would miraculously be raised from the dead on the third day.

+ **HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?**

Because we have experienced the great miracle of our salvation through Jesus, we seek to glorify God and make much of Him in all that we do.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: Jesus had been stirring up trouble in the religious world. Though His early life had little significance on Jerusalem's religious elite, the uproar began just after His temptation in the desert (Luke 4:1-13). He began a ministry in His hometown but was run out of the synagogue with His seemingly blasphemous teaching (vv. 14-30). Then He continued to perform miracles, casting out demons and healing the sick. But for the religious zealots, it was the last straw when He started forgiving sin.

EXPLAIN: The word "sin" means different things to different people. Some may think it just refers to "big" sins, such as murder or rape or theft. Others may have a hierarchy of sins that they rate good or bad, better or worse.

DISCUSS: Why do we need forgiveness of sin? (to maintain our fellowship with the Lord; to maintain fellowship with each other; to be able to stand before the Father in His holiness; to continue growing toward Christlikeness)

TRANSITION: Objectively looking at Jesus's early public ministry, we might readily admit that Jesus was doing good things: He spoke clearly and honestly. He helped people who were suffering. He triumphed over demonic forces and helped local fishermen have success. The world likely saw Jesus as a celebrity; they saw what He had done and flocked to Him. But Jesus knew He hadn't come just to be a good person or just to help people in their daily needs. His mission was to save people from sin and death.

POINT 1

THE SON OF MAN BRINGS FORGIVENESS TO THE FAITHFUL (LUKE 5:17-20).

17 On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord's power to heal was in him. **18** Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him. **19** Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus. **20** Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 5:17-20** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 17-19** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the *Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

Jesus's **reputation** as a powerful teacher and healer spread, and those who had **faith** were willing to do whatever it took to see Him.

DISCUSS: From *Day 1 in the DDG*: **How do we know Jesus is who He claimed to be?** (from the Bible, which records the testimony and influence of eyewitnesses; from the spread of Christianity throughout history and the world; from other Christians in our lives who have guided us to follow Jesus; from how we have experienced Him in our own lives, feeling His love and forgiveness)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 20** commentary to explain the significance of Jesus forgiving the man's sin first before healing his paralysis. Emphasize the effect of sin on many elements in our world (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the *DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #42: *Sin's Effect in the World:* Sin does not only impact our **relationship** with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Rom. 8:20-22). Sin has **infected** and redirected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the **gospel** is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.

TRANSITION: Of course, the story doesn't end here. We now turn our attention back to the packed house and the legal experts.

NOTES

ROOF TILES

In the first century, roofs were mostly flat, providing an additional living space for the household. Because of that, there was typically an outdoor staircase that led up to the roof. Roof beams, stretched from one end of the house to the other, would have clay tiles on top of them, covered with another coating of clay to protect the house from rain.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 17-19 / The opening phrase of this narrative, rendered **“On one of those days,”** is often translated “And it came to pass.” This theatrical wording points to a significant moment: a miracle, an appearance, a completion of something, or even the first time something happens. Take note of any passage that follows this phrase.

On this particular day, we see that Pharisees were there **“who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem”** (v. 17). Jesus’s ministry had caused quite a stir, so many had come to observe Him and hear for themselves.

The word “Pharisee” comes from a verb that means “to separate,” pointing out that the Pharisees found distinction in their observance of external holiness and ceremonial acts. They highlighted their own goodness in public displays of good works, but Jesus often criticized them for a lack of genuine compassion and obedience. The “teachers of the law” would have been the professional scholars of that time. They were the ones who had been called by Herod to find out where the Messiah would be born (Matt. 2:5).

The phrase **“and the Lord’s power to heal was in him”** (v. 17) seems to restate the obvious. Jesus had already been healing, so why state it again here? Jesus didn’t heal every time He taught. But on this day, He both taught and healed. This same phrase is used in Luke 8:46, when a woman afflicted with bleeding touched Jesus, and He said, “I know that power has gone out from me.” The potential power to heal flowed through Jesus to those in need.

Word of Jesus’s teaching and miracles had spread, not just to the religious elite but also to the needy townspeople. They heard He was a good teacher; they heard He helped make a large catch of fish; they heard He could heal leprosy. Luke writes that there was a **“crowd”** (Luke 5:19). Mark’s version says that “so many people gathered together that there was no more room, not

even in the doorway” (Mark 2:2). Mark also reveals that Jesus was “at home” (Mark 2:1), likely Capernaum, where Jesus had temporarily taken up residence with Peter and his family.

Then **“some men”**—we know them to be a group of four men from Mark’s Gospel (Mark 2:3)—came, **“carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed”** (Luke 5:18). We can imagine this unwieldy group, uncomfortably bearing all the weight of their paralyzed friend, walking up to the crowded house with a plan: set him down before the healing teacher and all would be well.

Picture the four men attempting to get in. Everyone in the house had a pressing need or could claim the age-old defense “I was here first.” The crowd wasn’t budging. As tough as the crowd was, though, the resolve of the friends was stronger, and they decided to go through the roof.

VERSE 20 / Jesus saw **“their faith,”** not “his faith”—not the faith of the paralytic man. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this phrase: the faith of the friends was visible. It was faith in action. Just imagine the men—sweaty, filthy, and yet thrilled that they had carried their friend to Jesus, the only One who could heal him. Jesus saw the faith of the friends who carried the man to Him.

But then Jesus spoke to the paralyzed man: **“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”** Jesus knew what the man truly needed healing from—his spiritual condition and state. As a paralytic in that society, it was probable that he or his family was accused of being sinners because of his condition (see John 9:2). What the man needed most was to hear that he was forgiven, that his sin didn’t count against him. And because of his friends’ faith, Jesus did just that—forgive the man’s sins and tell him so. And though the paralyzed man saw his sin and knew he needed forgiveness, there were others in the room who didn’t.

POINT 2

THE SON OF MAN BRINGS HEALING TO THE NEEDY (LUKE 5:21-25).

NOTES

21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” **22** But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, “Why are you thinking this in your hearts? **23** Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? **24** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he told the paralyzed man, “I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.” **25** Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 5:21-25** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 21-23** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The scribes and Pharisees doubted Jesus’s authority to **forgive** sins because they didn’t want to believe that He is **God**, despite the continual revealing of His power.

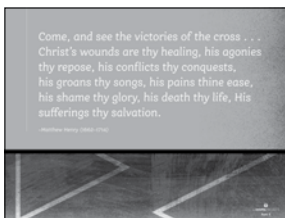
DISCUSS: Even though God has shown up for us in the past, why is it easy to doubt His presence and power when going through tough times? (we easily forget His past works; we forget His promises in Scripture; we are tempted to be cynical and skeptical; we are distracted by many things)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 24-25** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus revealed to the crowd that He certainly is God by **healing** the man’s spiritual and physical needs, resulting in God being **glorified**.

DISCUSS: Read the Matthew Henry quote on **PACK ITEM 4: VICTORIES OF THE CROSS**, and then ask: **How can knowing Jesus cares about all our needs (spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental) help us in our spiritual growth?** (shows us He loves us completely; makes us want to know Him more because of His love for us; helps us pray holistically; reminds us that all our parts are interconnected and God cares for them all)

TRANSITION: If you had been in the house and seen all that transpired with the religious authorities, the paralyzed man, and Jesus, how would you have responded? Let’s see how the people present did so.



VOICES from THE CHURCH

“While Christians are not spared suffering, they are promised deliverance from sin and the inner resources through the indwelling Holy Spirit to live a righteous life in Christ.”¹

—Rhonda H. Kelley

COMMENTARY

VERSES 21-23 / In last week's session, the disciples asked one another, "Who then is this?" (Mark 4:41). The expression pointed to their awe and wonder at the power and majesty of Jesus. In Luke 5, the scribes and Pharisees asked a question that seems similar in wording but was vastly different in meaning: "Who is this . . . ?" (v. 21). They asked this when Jesus forgave the woman who anointed Him (Luke 7:49) and when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath (John 5:12). In all three instances, this wording points to suspicion that Jesus is incorrectly claiming God's authority because He is doing things only God can do.

The scribes and Pharisees actually never verbalized the question in Luke 5:21; Luke tells us that they "**began to think to themselves,**" meaning they all recognized the significance of Jesus's statement and mentally pegged Him as a blasphemer. Their question, "**Who can forgive sins but God alone?**" was legitimate; the answer is "no one." God set the standard for sin; God alone can forgive it.

Jesus was about to blow their minds. Because right up there with "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" belongs "Who can read thoughts?" and "Who can make the lame man walk?" Again, only God. Jesus heard their thoughts as though they had spoken them aloud, and then He answered them: "**Why are you thinking this in your hearts?**" The Greek word translated "thinking" is rich in meaning. It carries the idea of bringing different reasons together or deliberating. The scribes and Pharisees were mentally considering the words of Jesus and holding them up to their own understanding. They were trying to come up with an argument that best suited their thoughts without considering all the facts.

Jesus, speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, asked: "**Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?**" (v. 23). Neither forgiving sins nor healing the lame is easier for a man; both are located only in the realm of

God's prerogative. But forgiving another's sin can't necessarily be verified, and that's precisely the focus of His questioning. No one knew for certain that the man's sins had been forgiven; to some, this could be the trick of a hustler or a charlatan. But to prove Himself, Jesus did the impossible.

VERSES 24-25 / The next words from Jesus's mouth are beautiful: "**So that you may know**" (v. 24). Moses used this phrase three times (Ex. 8:10; 9:29; 11:7) to point out that Pharaoh would know that God was Lord of all. God sent a prophet to tell Ahab he would conquer an army "so that you may know that I am the LORD" (1 Kings 20:13). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all use this exact phrase in this story. Jesus wanted the crowds to "know," not just think or guess, that He is God, the Son of Man, with the authority to do miracles, forgiving sin and healing the lame.

We've almost forgotten about the paralyzed man: carried by his friends, lowered through a roof, and forgiven of sins. But Jesus hadn't forgotten him amidst the debate with the religious lawyers. Just as He did to the storm, Jesus gave instructions to the man: "**Get up, take your stretcher, and go home**" (v. 24). When God commands, you obey. "**Immediately**" the man got up and did what He was told.

Jesus is just as much Lord over tendons, ligaments, and muscles as He is over wind, rain, and waves. And the proper response, of course, is to glorify God—for His power, His authority, His faithfulness, and His goodness. Only Luke mentions the man leaving, praising the Lord. He is intent on making sure we know that, unlike the response of the scribes and Pharisees, when confronted with Christ's works, praise and glory is due.

POINT 3

THE SON OF MAN BRINGS GLORY TO THE FATHER (LUKE 5:26).

NOTES

26 Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, “We have seen incredible things today.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 5:26** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 26A** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Upon seeing the power of Jesus displayed in the **healing** of the paralytic, the entire crowd was **amazed** and glorified God.

DISCUSS: When was the last time you glorified God because of a sense of fear and wonder from something He had done? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 26B** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

It's not enough to see God's **power** and find it incredible; we must respond in **faith** to Jesus.

DISCUSS: How can we respond to Spirit-filled moments so that we are not just merely awed but transformed? (journal or talk to someone about our experience to get us growing more in our discipleship; be intentional about the next step so it's not just a passing moment; continue to dig in to where God is leading to help us move toward His mission; tell someone who has yet to believe as part of your testimony)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 26A / In the previous verse, the formerly paralyzed man, having been healed, went home glorifying God. Yet he wasn't the only one.

What does it look like to see a paralyzed man stand up and walk? Many of us have never seen this with our own eyes. We might have watched the heartwarming videos in which children born deaf receive cochlear implants and hear their mother's voice for the first time. Everyone in the room—and on the other end of a computer screen—experiences the jubilation.

Maybe it was a little like that for the crowd. Jesus moved in a mighty way, and they lost their minds. The Greek word translated **“astounded”** can mean the state of one who, either owing to the importance or the novelty of an event, is thrown into a state of blended fear and wonderment.”² But don't miss exactly who was astounded: **“every-one.”** As in all the people there. Even the disciples, even the four friends, and even the scribes and Pharisees.

They weren't excited only for the healing, though it was wondrous and thrilling. But the large Jewish crowd would have immediately considered also the impact of what they had seen: either this was the greatest show on earth, or this truly was the Son of God. They were astounded, **“and they were giving glory to God”** (v. 26).

If you look up the words “give” and “glory” and “God” in a Bible software program, you'll see that the command to “give glory to God” was often in the face of judgment due to sin or oppression: Joshua told Achan to do it when it was discovered that he had disobeyed the Lord at Jericho (Josh. 7:19). The Philistines were told the same thing when they stole the ark of the Lord and tumors broke out among the people (1 Sam. 6:5). In Revelation, a flying angel announces, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev. 14:7).

The crowd gave glory to God because they saw His power revealed in Jesus. We too should give God glory when we witness His power. When a person comes to Christ, when we walk through a storm, when the colors of a sunset take our breath away, and in ten thousand other ways, we should give Him glory.

VERSE 26B / Luke, the physician author of this Gospel, gives us just the right detail when we most need to see it. In the last sentence of this story, he tells us that the people present **“were filled with awe.”** We don't have an accurate word in the English for phobos, the Greek word translated “awe.” Many Bibles use “fear” or “reverential fear.” It certainly points to a reverent fear of God (Luke 1:12), but it sometimes means pure fear (Matt. 14:26; John 7:13). We saw it last week in Mark 4:41 when the disciples “were terrified” after Jesus calmed the storm.

Maybe the crowd was held in reverential fear of God; maybe they were just afraid of the power of this Man in Capernaum. Either way, that awe or fear filled them. Their statement, **“We have seen incredible things today,”** has the Greek word *paradoxos* for **“incredible,”** which can mean unexpected, uncommon, incredible, wonderful, unthinkable, unimaginable, or extraordinary.

Many were amazed and in awe like crowds sometimes are. They couldn't believe their eyes. Maybe they were amazed at Jesus claiming to forgive sin. Maybe they were amazed Jesus spoke harshly to the Pharisees and knew their thoughts. Maybe they were amazed that Jesus could make a paralyzed man walk. In any case, any encounter with Jesus would surely cause amazement. But Jesus isn't looking for mere amazement. He is looking for true faith. Faith that acts. Faith that brings a friend through a rooftop. Faith that stands up and walks and glorifies God.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced the great miracle of our salvation through Jesus, we seek to glorify God and make much of Him in all that we do.

NOTES

HEAD:

The man was paralyzed, and his friends displayed their compassion for his need. But Jesus saw through the physical hindrance, straight to the heart. Before He even addressed the paralytic's physical need, He forgave the man's sins. He does the same with us: He knows the depths of our heart, and He has an eternal grasp of our deepest eternal needs. We come to Him with prayers for our relationships, physical pain, or terrible job, but He draws us to our deeper need: learning to better yield to Him, listen to His Spirit, or thank Him regularly.

What makes you trust that Jesus knows the most pressing need for your life today?

HEART:

Immediately upon being healed, the former paralytic "went home glorifying God" (Luke 5:25). All the people saw this, and then they gave glory to God as well. Glorifying the Lord is contagious! It's not difficult; we're not required to write a hymn or craft a sermon. Glorifying God means we point others to Him. So here are some prompts for communicating such glory: "I can't wait to tell you what God did in my life yesterday . . .," "You'll never believe what I learned from the Bible yesterday . . .," or "I was changed forever when God . . ." Walking in dependence on God leads directly to glorifying Him.

How will you glorify God this week?

HANDS:

It was the compassion of the four friends that began this notable miracle. Without their willingness to help, show love, and literally carry a brother to the feet of Jesus, the paralytic would never have found healing. We have a similar responsibility to people in our own lives. We are called to be compassionate, to help, to drive, to invite, to call, to send a card, to smile, and more. Most of us have one person in our lives who is perpetually needy. Instead of stepping away because we don't know what to do or say, reach out that hand in love and mercy.

To whom is God directing you to be helpful and to serve this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Pierce the gloom of sin and grief, Jesus, the light of the world! Scatter all my unbelief, Jesus, the light of the world!"³

—Charles Wesley
(1707–1788)

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE SON OF MAN BRINGS FORGIVENESS TO THE FAITHFUL (LUKE 5:17-20).

+ COMMENTARY

“The act of letting their friend down through the roof was an unusual demonstration of faith. We know this because of what Jesus says next. ‘Seeing their faith he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven”’ (v. 20). That stuns me. Jesus says nothing about the man’s legs or paralysis. He focused on the man’s soul. He forgives the man’s sins. Listen, you can be paralyzed, unable to get around without your friends, lying motionless on your sickbed, and yet still be full of sin! See how Jesus thinks. Our main need is not physical healing. . . . Better to limp into heaven than run into hell! Paralysis is nothing compared to God’s punishment. Our main need is spiritual forgiveness. So Jesus forgives the man’s sin.”⁴

+ COMMENTARY

“5:20 When Jesus saw their faith. This included the faith both of the paralytic and his companions. This faith in the original setting would have been a faith in Jesus as one come from God who could heal. For Luke and his readers this would have involved a greater understanding of who Jesus is and would have involved faith in him as the risen Lord. The faith of the paralytic and the men was manifested by their ‘works,’ i.e., their removal of the tiles to lower the paralytic.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Ask learners, “On a scale of one to ten, are you a forgiving person?” Engage a few willing volunteers to give themselves a score. Bonus points if the spouse is there and will also give an honest assessment. Read from the following facts as reported by the Johns Hopkins Medicine website: “Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; and reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression and stress. And research points to an increase in the forgiveness-health connection as you age. There is an enormous physical burden to being hurt and disappointed . . . Chronic anger puts you in a fight-or-flight mode, which results in numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and immune response. Forgiveness, however, calms stress levels, leading to improved health.”⁶

EXTRA

Ask, “If I told you that you’d be healthier if you forgave others, might that change your willingness?” Hopefully a few learners will offer insightful reflection. Then say, “If the act of forgiving can change a life this much, let’s consider how much knowing we’re forgiven by God might change us.” Read aloud Matthew 26:28; Luke 6:37; 7:47-48; and Acts 2:38. Consider how the forgiveness of Jesus affects every aspect of our lives.

POINT 2: THE SON OF MAN BRINGS HEALING TO THE NEEDY (LUKE 5:21-25).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“The Pharisees and teachers of the law understand the implications of Jesus’ statement. They know that only God can forgive sins, and so Jesus’ words to the paralyzed man essentially amount to blasphemy (Luke 5:21). In their thinking, Jesus has claimed to exercise a privilege that belongs to God alone. In a sense, they are correct: God is the only one who can forgive sin. But if, as Luke has already shown us, Jesus is the divine Son of God in human flesh, then he does indeed have ‘authority on earth to forgive sins’ (v. 24). When it comes to who he is, Jesus has, in effect, raised the stakes by closing down the options. He is either God, or a blasphemer; either he is the author and bringer of truth, or he is living and proclaiming a total lie. . . . When the man stood up and went home (v. 25), the truth was inescapable: Jesus has the authority that only God has—the authority to forgive people’s sins.”⁷

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Say, “Now, it’s hard to find any hard-and-fast medical analysis on how long it takes a person to recover from paralysis, but let’s consider another medical condition that might take a person off his or her feet: ACL tear.” If someone you know or a well-known athlete has recently had an ACL tear, briefly share that, explaining that the ACL is a ligament that crosses the middle of the knee, connecting the thigh bone to the shin bone and stabilizing the knee joint.

Briefly read through the following from the Mayo Clinic website about what treatment is required to heal a torn ACL: You’ll likely start with several weeks of physical therapy to reduce pain and swelling. General anesthesia is typically used during ACL reconstruction, so you’ll be unconscious during the procedure. Your surgeon will give two small incisions, one for a camera and the other for surgical tools. During the procedure, the surgeon will remove the damaged ligament and replace it with a segment of tendon grafted either from a deceased donor or another part of your knee. The surgeon will then drill sockets into your bones to position the new tendon, then secure it with screws. That graft will serve as a foundation on which new ligament tissue can grow. After the procedure, you’ll walk with crutches, take pain relievers, and need to keep the knee iced. Physical therapy will follow ACL surgery; recovery generally takes about nine months.⁸

Read aloud Luke 5:24-25. Compare Jesus’s healing and recovery with that of a torn ACL tear: His healing was instantaneous, required no surgery, and no physical therapy. His authority over His creation is ultimate.

POINT 3: THE SON OF MAN BRINGS GLORY TO THE FATHER (LUKE 5:26).

+ COMMENTARY

“The miracles which Christ wrought were amazing to those that saw them, and we ought to glorify God in them, v. 26. They said, ‘We have seen strange things to-day, such as we never saw before, nor our fathers before us; they are altogether new.’ But they glorified God, who had sent into their country such a benefactor to it; and were filled with fear, with a reverence of God, with a jealous persuasion that this was the Messiah and that he was not treated by their nation as he ought to be, which might prove in the end the ruin of their state; perhaps they were some such thoughts as these that filled them with fear, and a concern like-wise for themselves.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

Before class begins, on a board or large piece of paper, write the following: Most Incredible Hotel, Most Incredible Restaurant, Most Incredible Concert, Most Incredible Sports Event. While writing them large enough to read from any seat, keep the phrases spread out because they will become the headings for several lists. Point to the topics on the board and ask, “Has anyone ever been to an incredible hotel? Restaurant? Concert? Sporting Event? Would you like to nominate it for the ‘Most Incredible’ in that category?” Engage a few volunteers to share some examples from their own memory.

Be ready to share one or more from the hotel and restaurant category by entering “Most Incredible _____” in a search engine before class and then browsing through a few websites that have ranked those very things. If possible, show photos or read descriptions from the online source. If you want to save time preparing for this activity, look up Lebua Hotel in Bangkok. Its restaurant is on the sixty-third floor, 820 feet in the air.

Say, “Some might argue that Luke 5:17-26 might be one of Jesus’s most incredible miracles: He revealed that He had the power and authority of God, He outwitted the scribes and Pharisees, He read minds, He instantly healed a paralyzed man, and He blew the minds of the crowd there.” Turn learners’ attentions back to the focal verse and delve back into your study.

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JESUS OVER SICKNESS

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son of David responds to humble faith (Matt. 9:18-19,23-25).
2. The Son of David responds to bold faith (Matt. 9:20-22).
3. The Son of David responds to desperate faith (Matt. 9:27-31).

Background Passage: Matthew 9

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus healed those who acted in faith in Him.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus responded to those who came to Him in faith for physical healing. In a greater way, all who come to Jesus in faith for salvation from sin are forgiven and restored with God.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been saved through faith in Jesus, we strive to live out our faith each day, trusting in God to supply all of our needs.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: Chapters 8 and 9 in Matthew's Gospel are a collection of stories showing the healing power of Jesus. He touched a leper to cleanse him, He healed the servant of a centurion who understood true authority, He cured Peter's mother-in-law, He cast out demons and sent them into pigs, and He commanded a paralytic to get up and walk. Matthew wanted His readers to clearly see that Jesus heals.

EXPLAIN: God still heals today in many ways. But ultimately, He is concerned about our spiritual healing over everything else.

DISCUSS: When have you seen God heal? (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

TRANSITION: Jesus's ministry was rapidly growing a following. Some followed to see a show, a spectacle. Some followed to see when He would mess up or fail terribly. Some followed because others were following. And some followed, wanting to believe. They all wanted something from Jesus. And Jesus just wanted their faith.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: Especially because of unlimited access to media today, why are crowds drawn to spectacles or viral videos? (they want entertainment; they want to follow what everyone else is following; they want to see the next interesting thing; they want to see for themselves if something is true)

POINT 1

THE SON OF DAVID RESPONDS TO HUMBLE FAITH (MATT. 9:18-19,23-25).

NOTES

18 As he was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before him, saying, “My daughter just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” **19** So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him.

.....

23 When Jesus came to the leader’s house, he saw the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly. **24** “Leave,” he said, “because the girl is not dead but asleep.” And they laughed at him. **25** After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 9:18-19,23-25** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 18-19** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

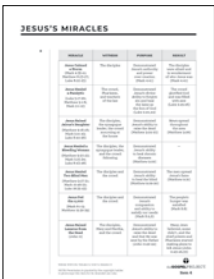
Biblical humility includes putting aside our pride, **position**, and preferences to **posture** ourselves in submission to God, knowing He is Lord of all.

DISCUSS: How can we develop our own humility, particularly in approaching Jesus in prayer? (by admitting we don’t deserve anything; daily listening to the Holy Spirit as He reveals our sin to us; daily confessing and repenting of our sin; approaching the Lord with praise, worship, and awe)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 23-25** commentary to point to Jesus’s miracle of raising the little girl from the dead; then pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 5: JESUS’S MIRACLES** and use this narrative to help explain the definition and purpose of miracles (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #33: Miracles: A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the **natural** order of things, or supersedes natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His **glory** and/or validating His **message**. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God’s message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

TRANSITION: In the midst of raising this little girl from the dead, Jesus had a holy detour with another who needed His help.



FLUTE PLAYERS

When someone died in Jewish tradition, loud noise and crying were part of the mourning ceremony. “Even the poorest people were required to hire at least two flute players and one wailing woman to perform these services.”¹

COMMENTARY

VERSES 18-19 / There was a constant struggle between Jesus and the Jewish powers that be. We saw it in last week's passage about Jesus's healing of the paralytic (Luke 5:17-26), and Matthew is careful to bring it out in his Gospel. Just after Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him, Jesus was degraded by the Pharisees for eating with "tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 9:11). When John the Baptist's disciples had asked why Jesus's disciples didn't fast (vv. 14-17), Jesus responded in a parable, explaining that a new patch doesn't work on old wineskins. This explanation cryptically pointed out that the old covenant of the law and the sacrificial system would no longer work. Jesus was the new covenant and would change the way humanity interacted with God. The synagogue leaders were certainly still holding onto the old covenant of the law.

It is fitting, then, that **"as he was telling them these things"** that one of the synagogue leaders **"came and knelt down before him"** (v. 18). Surely this man knew how most of the ruling members of the synagogue felt about Jesus, and it was probably not in his career's best interest to side with the man who was causing the uproar. But we quickly understand why this synagogue leader was willing to risk his religious position: his daughter was dead.

Some people at this time might have viewed a daughter as a burden, causing the family to consider the cost of a proper dowry and unable to carry on the family name. But no good father would see her only through those eyes—a good father would never count the cost or consider a daughter a burden. He would be heartbroken at the hopeless news of her death.

Luckily, news of Jesus's healing power was spreading rapidly among the synagogues. The synagogue leader by faith came to Jesus and knelt. In front of a crowd, he humbly spoke words of faith: **"Come and lay your hand on her, and she will live"** (Matt. 9:18).

We have seen before that Jesus responds to lived-out faith. When He saw it proclaimed in the man's voice and actions, He and His disciples followed the man to his home.

VERSES 23-25 / We'll address Jesus's side quest between these verses in the next point. But we can imagine the father was mentally counting down the seconds while Jesus responded to and spoke with a woman in need. We can imagine some of his inner thoughts: "Jesus! My daughter is dead! We need to keep moving so you can help her. Can't You talk with this woman later?"

After the pause, Jesus and His disciples continued their journey. As was typical of the time, they arrived at the home to find a crowd of musicians and mourners, family and townspeople. Jesus, always in a position of authority, instructed them to leave because **"the girl is not dead but asleep"** (v. 24). We can all hear the cruel roar of the crowd—This healer is crazy! But to the One who would triumph over it, death was only as permanent as a nap. Jesus's perfect understanding of earthly death and eternal life gives us a glimpse into the power of death itself: it cannot compete with Jesus.

We might have been offended if a crowd laughed at us, but Jesus did not worry about what people thought of Him (John 2:24-25). Instead, He lifted the dead girl's hand. He did the same thing when He healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:15) and a blind man (Mark 8:23). It's the same phrase used to describe Paul's friends guiding him into Damascus (Acts 9:8). The One who has power over death is compassionate and tender to those who need that calm.

At the touch of Jesus, the little girl **"got up"** (Matt. 9:25). The rich Greek verb can mean "to rise or arouse from sleep." It could also point to raising someone from the dead (Matt. 3:9). It's the same word translated "Get up" in last week's lesson about the paralytic (Matt. 5:24). Jesus raises all: the sleeping, the lame, and the dead.

POINT 2

THE SON OF DAVID RESPONDS TO BOLD FAITH (MATT. 9:20-22).

20 Just then, a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years approached from behind and touched the end of his robe, **21** for she said to herself, “If I can just touch his robe, I’ll be made well.” **22** Jesus turned and saw her. “Have courage, daughter,” he said. “Your faith has saved you.” And the woman was made well from that moment.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 9:20-22** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 20-21** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Bold faith moves us **closer** to Jesus, believing in His **character** and work.

DISCUSS: How can bold faith reveal itself in a believer’s life today? (by continually working on our marriages, even in difficult times; through not giving up hope on a lost friend or wayward child; through loving the unlovable in our society; through forgiving when it seems impossible)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 22** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

When we **believe** Jesus to be Savior and Lord, we find **healing** that transcends this world and this life.

DISCUSS: How did the woman’s faith lead to more than physical healing? (she could now worship in the temple or synagogue; she could now feel accepted and loved; she could now see Jesus as who He truly is—Lord)

TRANSITION: Jesus called this woman, burdened with disgrace and uncleanness for twelve years, “daughter.” His compassion was not shaped by her physical limitations. In the next passage, two men were wrapped up in their physical lacking as well, but they too looked to Jesus for help.

NOTES

LAWS ON BODILY DISCHARGE

Leviticus 15 gives laws for God’s people about bodily discharges that include blood, among other things. Whether through disease or normal bodily processes, laws for being unclean served the purpose for hygiene issues as well as to keep the ritual purity of the tabernacle/temple and synagogues as sacred places of worship. Though these were laws to keep ceremonial purity, they reminded God’s people about their need for moral purity.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Though sorrows, heaviness, and faintings of heart ever so much increase; yet, if your faith increases also, it will bear you up in the midst of them.”²

—Isaac Penington
(1616–1679)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 20-21 / These verses chronologically follow the moment when Jesus and His disciples began following the synagogue leader home. Verse 20 opens with **“Just then,”** pointing to a significant event. This was a poignant part of the story, and Matthew uses the opening phrase to draw our attention to it.

As we consider this woman, we must carefully imagine how her physical ailment affected every part of her life. She had suffered from **“bleeding”** for twelve years. Though many have speculated, we’re not exactly sure what the issue of bleeding was. But we know, according to Mark’s Gospel, that she had “spent everything she had and was not helped at all. On the contrary, she became worse” (Mark 5:26). Luke’s and Mark’s versions of this story both point to her desperation of trying everything to find healing, but no physician could help her.

According to the Law of Moses, unchecked bleeding made a person unclean, as well as everything and everyone that person touched (Lev. 15:25-27). For twelve years, this woman couldn’t enter the synagogue, the center of all Jewish cultural and religious life in a city. She couldn’t hug her family and couldn’t even share furniture with them. As people who quarantined during the COVID-19 pandemic learned, this type of life is miserable. We need touch and interaction. She had none for twelve years.

She, like the synagogue leader, had heard of this One who could heal. Her uncleanness, though, caused a problem: she wasn’t technically allowed to be in the crowd for fear of making others unclean. Yet her faith was mightier than her fears. She **“approached from behind and touched the end of his robe”** (Matt. 9:20), likely so no one would realize she’d sullied the famed teacher. She told herself that it would work; after all, He had healed others with a touch.

The end of Jesus’s robe was more than just a simple hem; it was where obedient Jews attached **“tassels for remembrance,”** a blue

cord to remind them to obey the Lord’s commands (see Num. 15:37-40; Deut. 22:12). Perhaps the bleeding woman touched the hem of His robe simply because it was the only thing she could grab, but the significance of that exact point of the garment pointed to Jesus’s complete and total obedience to His heavenly Father.

VERSE 22 / “Jesus turned and saw her” (v. 22). Pause and carefully picture that moment. Jesus, His disciples, the synagogue leader, and the crowd were walking to heal a little girl. Feel the buzz all around. Suddenly, Jesus stopped and turned. We can imagine that several others kept walking a few steps, not realizing He’d pivoted in the middle of the road. He didn’t glance back or look over His shoulder, He turned and saw her: the woman who had been invisible to everyone, the one who felt forgotten, alone, and dirty.

Jesus saw her. The Greek word *eido* is sometimes translated “to know, perceive, notice, pay attention to.” We saw this word last week when Jesus said, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Luke 5:24). The woman’s bold confidence that Jesus could save her without a word or a request got His full attention.

His words to her are significant: **“Have courage, daughter”** (v. 22). Often translated “be of good cheer,” Jesus says this phrase several times throughout Scripture as He healed (Matt. 9:2) or appeared in a mighty way (Matt. 14:27). The woman could have courage or good cheer because she believed Jesus to be exactly who He was.

The woman was **“made well.”** So much more than physical healing, this Greek verb points to keeping safe, rescuing from danger, saving, and delivering. It’s the same verb used in the prophecy, “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Her faith led directly to healing as well as salvation.

POINT 3

THE SON OF DAVID RESPONDS TO DESPERATE FAITH (MATT. 9:27-31).

NOTES

27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” **28** When he entered the house, the blind men approached him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” **29** Then he touched their eyes, saying, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” **30** And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus warned them sternly, “Be sure that no one finds out.” **31** But they went out and spread the news about him throughout that whole area.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 9:27-31** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 27-28** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The blind men in this passage were honest in their self-assessment: they needed **mercy** and healing from the **Messiah**.

DISCUSS: How do we honestly approach God with humility and still present our requests to Him in faith? (we start by knowing we deserve nothing; we come to God with open hands; we present our requests but don't demand that the Lord fulfill them; we don't bribe God or try to trick Him; we remain content in our circumstances, trusting in Him for what He knows is best)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 29-31** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Great faith knows Jesus's **ability** to do the impossible and expectantly **hopes** that He will act on our behalf for God's glory.

DISCUSS: From Day 4 in the DDG: **God can do all things, but how are we to act when He chooses not to do what we are hoping for?** (we continue to trust in God's ultimate plan despite the circumstances; we wait patiently for whatever plan God has; we learn from our circumstances and stay faithful to who we know God to be from His Word; we linger in the unknown of our limited perspective while knowing that God is almighty, all-powerful, and all-good)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 27-28 / “As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him” (Matt. 9:27). News about Jesus was spreading fast, and now two blind men were following Jesus and calling out, **“Have mercy on us, Son of David!”** (v. 27). This was no flippant name for Jesus; it pointed to the fact that God had promised David that his throne would be established forever (see 2 Sam. 7:12-13). The Israelites had been waiting for this “Son of David” to take the throne since the exile, some five hundred years prior. Matthew had even used this exact phrase in the opening verse of his Gospel: “An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). The blind men were calling, “You are the One we’ve been waiting for; the One God promised to David!”

Their plea for mercy also looks back to the Old Testament, for many of the psalms contain a pleading for God to have mercy during affliction (see Pss. 6:2; 9:13; 24:16). These desperate men were desperately clinging to God’s words. They believed Jesus was the promised Son of David, and they were “calling out” to Jesus (Matt. 9:27). The original word means “to croak as a raven or shriek, exclaim, or scream.” Their cries for mercy may have been ear-splitting and annoying but rooted in their faith.

Yet Jesus kept walking and **“entered the house”** (v. 28). Like before, Jesus entered a house in private to perform a miracle (vv. 23-25). He didn’t need to be a spectacle. He was more concerned about the blind men’s faith.

Faith is inward, but it is revealed outwardly. Jesus had heard the faith of these blind men, and He offered them a chance to reveal that their cry for mercy was also a statement of faith. Asking if they believed that He could heal them, they responded affirmatively and called Him Lord. They had already believed and placed their faith in Jesus.

VERSES 29-31 / “Then he touched their eyes” (v. 29). The Greek word translated “touched” comes from a root word that means “to adhere to” or “to kindle a fire.” Jesus had touched the leper (Matt. 8:3) and Peter’s mother-in-law (v. 15), and He had been touched by the bleeding woman (9:20,21). Jesus wasn’t concerned with social distancing around the sick or becoming unclean according to the Law.

Though the healing was from Jesus alone, He drew a parallel to the men’s actions: **“Let it be done for you according to your faith”** (v. 29). There was a strong connection between what they believed and what Jesus did. That doesn’t mean that we can believe our house will double in size and it will do that. When we believe Jesus is who He says He is, entrusting Him with the outcome of our cries, we find confidence in how He chooses to act.

Jesus touched the men and their eyes were opened. It’s the same Greek word used by Jesus when He promised, “Knock, and the door will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7). Jesus had proven His own words true. These men had begged for mercy from the Messiah, their prayers had knocked on the door of heaven, and they received their sight. Heaven was opened when Jesus was baptized (Luke 3:21), the graves when He died (Matt. 27:52), and prison doors were opened by an angel (Acts 5:19). Jesus has the power to open doors that will never close again (Rev. 3:7). He alone is worthy to open the book and the seals (5:2,9).

Jesus then tells them, **“Be sure that no one finds out,”** as Jesus was still trying to help the disciples and crowds truly understand His messiahship, despite the misunderstandings. He was there to do miracles such as healing, but that was not His main purpose: He was there to save the lost.

Though the men had great faith, they couldn’t obey His last instruction to keep it quiet. How could they? They could see and they would never be the same again.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been saved through faith in Jesus, we strive to live out our faith each day, trusting in God to supply all of our needs.

NOTES

HEAD:

Jesus made two distinct statements about faith in this passage: “Your faith has saved you” (Matt. 9:22) and “Let it be done for you according to your faith” (v. 29). Jesus made a point to link faith and His healing in a life over and over. This link should inspire every professing Christian to ask the question: “What do I really believe about Jesus?” Our belief should be grounded in the truth of God’s Word and lived out in word and deed. If you realize you’re lacking in faith about who Jesus is and what He can do, pray the words of Mark 9:24, “I do believe; help my unbelief!”

In what areas do you struggle to believe the truths of the Bible?

HEART:

Most of the religious leaders in the Bible looked down on Jesus. They felt He was causing trouble and disrupting the orderly authority they held over the Jews, so they treated Him with disdain. But when the local synagogue leader was in desperate need and believed Jesus could raise his daughter from the dead, he came and knelt down (Matt. 9:18). Like that man, we must come to Jesus in humility, recognizing who He is and who we are. Jesus is certainly no genie; He is a servant, by His own words (Mark 10:45), but He is also so much more—He is King of kings and Lord of lords. We are called to be in reverent awe of Him.

What are ways you can humble yourself before the Lord during worship or prayer time?

HANDS:

The need for healing was great during the time of Jesus. People were afflicted with all kinds of diseases, ailments, and sicknesses. The need for healing is great in our day as well. We may not be inundated with blindness, leprosy, and demon possession like the people in the first century, but humanity is no less frail. Sickness and disease still cripple, steal hope, and crush spirits all around us. As we reach out a helping hand to those in need, we point others to the One who has power over all sin and its earthly consequences.

How can you help someone hurting or suffering today?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The Way, the Truth,
the Life Thou art, This,
this I know; to this
I cleave; The sweet new
language of my heart,
'Lord, I believe.' I have
no doubts to bring to
Thee; My doubt has
fled; my faith is free.”³

—Harriet McEwen
Kimball (1834–1917)

POINT 1: THE SON OF DAVID RESPONDS TO HUMBLE FAITH (MATT. 9:18-19,23-25).

+ COMMENTARY

“It must have been difficult for Jairus to come to Jesus, since he was a devout Jew and the leader in the synagogue. But Jairus’ love for his dying daughter compelled him to seek Jesus’ help, even if the religious leaders were opposing Him. . . . Jesus quickly reassured the man and went with him. . . . We must learn to trust Christ and His promises no matter how we feel, no matter what others say, and no matter how the circumstances may look. The scene at home might have frightened Jairus, yet Jesus took command and raised the girl from the dead.”⁴

+ ILLUSTRATION

Point to the fact that the leader came and knelt down before Jesus. Ask, “What might you think if someone came into this room today and knelt down before you?”

Engage learners in considering some of the different ways respect is shown in each of the following countries. Read or summarize the information below, inviting any learners who have been to that country to share what they observed:

- In Japan: dress conservatively and be sure to bow deeply. If given a gift, accept it with both hands and don’t open it in front of the giver.
- In Sweden: don’t touch people during a conversation, never discuss politics or religion, and focus on having a quiet dignity. Silence is not uncomfortable for them.
- In Mexico: don’t make too much eye contact, and be sure to avoid burping aloud.
- In Kenya: shake hands by grabbing their right wrist with your left hand; this is a sign of respect. Ask about their health and family before getting to more serious topics.
- In Korea: don’t extend your hand to greet a Korean woman; in fact, don’t touch them while talking, and maintain a respectable distance.
- In Brazil: if eating a sandwich, use a napkin to hold it rather than your bare hands.⁵

Ask, “When was the last time you approached God, whether in prayer or worship, with honor and respect? What might that look like?”

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE SON OF DAVID RESPONDS TO BOLD FAITH

(MATT. 9:20-22).

+ COMMENTARY

“When Jesus was touched, He stopped immediately in the middle of a crowd of people. He looked at the woman and said, ‘Have courage, daughter. . . . Your faith has made you well’ (v. 22). Even in a crowd, Jesus gives hope in the midst of despair. What good news to those who are hurting, to those who are walking through pain or struggling in some area of life. You are not lost in the crowd before Jesus. He is intimately aware of every single detail of your life. He knows your struggle, and His love for you is extremely personal.”⁶

+ COMMENTARY

“9:20-21 This time, however, an obstacle intrudes in their path—another needy person. A woman has been ‘bleeding’ for twelve years, i.e., hemorrhaging in between her normal menstrual flows. To have survived that length of time shows that her life is probably not threatened at this particular moment but also points to the incorrigibility of the illness. Like the girl who is dying, this woman would be viewed as ritually unclean, an even greater stigma than her physical problem (cf. Lev 15:19-33 . . .).”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

Before class, write the following on oversized index cards, one per card: *I once wore a bold fashion statement, I once tried a bold hairstyle, and I once ate something bold at a restaurant.* Hold up the cards one at a time and read them aloud. Enlist a few volunteers to raise their hands if the statement is true of them. Invite them to share briefly about the fashion choice, hairstyle, or food and how it impacted them. You might want to ask if they would do it again. Say, “The word bold takes on a different meaning when we apply it to different situations.” Be prepared to show some bold fashion choices or bold hairstyles by typing those words into an internet search engine and finding images that would most certainly turn heads in your town or city. (Be sure you’ve looked through the images before class; some bold fashion choices are also immodest.)

Say, “Bold fashion turns heads. Bold dishes ignite our senses. But what does bold faith do?” Point out that, like fashion or food, bold faith stands out. Ask, “Have you ever been around anyone who has bold faith? How does he or she stand out?”

POINT 3: THE SON OF DAVID RESPONDS TO DESPERATE FAITH

(MATT. 9:27-31).

+ COMMENTARY

“There is no question that these blind men realize who Jesus is. Isaiah 35:5 had promised that with the coming of the Messiah the ‘eyes of the blind will be opened.’ These men may well have known of such a prophecy and taken from it great hope in the Messiah. Notice that even in their blindness, these two men were able to see what all the Pharisees and scribes and teachers of the law around them could not see. May the Lord give us eyes to see Jesus as well.”⁸

+ COMMENTARY

“[The blind men] call out, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’ They understand Jesus to be the ‘Son of David,’ the first time Jesus is called by this title (cf. 1:1). This expression refers to the promise of the messianic deliverer from the line of David whose kingdom will have no end (2 Sam. 7:12-16 . . .). The messianic age promised to bring healing to the blind (Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7), which Jesus told John the Baptist was one of the signs that he indeed was the expected Coming One (Matt. 11:2-6). The Old Testament records no healing of blindness, and none of Jesus’ followers is ever recorded to have given sight to the blind. But Jesus’ healing of the blind is one of his most frequent miracles (9:27-31; 12:22-23; 15:30-31; 20:30-34; 21:14-15). These men have profoundly connected Jesus with the prophecies of the Son of David who will heal blindness (cf. 12:22-23; 21:14-15), and they ask for that gift of messianic mercy.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

Draw learners’ attention to the word “desperate” in the heading. Say, “We have been in different types of desperate situations: we desperately need a gas station or we may be stranded on a road. We desperately need a drink of water after a hot day. But there was a different element of desperation to these blind men, because there was no one else that could help them.”

Invite learners to consider a time in their lives when they were desperate and didn’t know where to turn. Situations might include a discipline problem with a child, an undiagnosed illness, a problem at work, or something along that line. Ask, “Of course, we know we should turn to Jesus in our desperate times, but where else might we turn?” Help learners see that without eyes of faith, others may seem to have the answers we seek in desperate situations.

Say, “You may not have an incurable ailment as these men did. But there are times when each of us is desperate because no person can help us with our problems. It’s in the midst of this very desperation that we must turn to Jesus.”

Be prepared to play “Breathe” by Michael W. Smith (Worship, 2001) on a listening device. Encourage learners to listen to this song as a reminder that we are, most certainly, desperate for the Lord and lost without Him. Challenge learners to take time this week to journal or pray about their immediate need of Jesus in their desperate situations.

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3. Harriet McEwen Kimball, *Poems* (Sydney, Australia: Wentworth Press, 2016), 15.
4. Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 35.
5. Catherine Winter, “How to Be Polite in 20 Different Countries,” *Lifehack*, August 31, 2022, <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/how-polite-countries.html>.
6. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 124.
7. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary*, 160.
8. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*, 125-26.
9. Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 372-73.

JESUS OVER NEEDS



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Lord extends compassion to those in need (Mark 8:1-3).
2. The Lord calls His followers to serve those in need (Mark 8:4-7).
3. The Lord satisfies completely those in need (Mark 8:8-10).

Background Passage: Mark 8

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus's compassion led Him not only to meet but surpass the needs of others.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

When the Israelites were hungry in the wilderness, God provided manna from heaven. Jesus is the greater Moses, the One who not only provides bread from heaven but who also speaks of Himself as the Bread who gives life to the world.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because God has met our greatest need in salvation through Christ, we seek to meet the needs of others—physical, emotional, and spiritual—through Jesus.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: In the past three sessions, we've looked closely at three stories of Jesus's miracles: His power over the storm (Mark 4:35-41), His power to forgive sin (Luke 5:17-26), and His power over sickness (Matt. 9:18-31). Today's passage is another miracle that shows another element over which Jesus is Lord, but the setting is different. The last three weeks, Jesus revealed His power inside the traditional borders of Israel; the audience that watched and listened to Jesus had Jewish lineage and knew the Old Testament laws and prophecies. Today's passage takes place outside those boundaries.

EXPLAIN: Sometimes going to a new environment (new job, neighborhood, school, church) can be worrisome but necessary in our maturity and trust of God.

DISCUSS: What have you learned when you have been in a new and different environment (job, neighborhood, church, country, etc.)?

(God is still at work; there are people that still need to know Jesus; I can serve here; God is still with me)

TRANSITION: Jesus was a people magnet; that's to be expected. When you walk around performing miracles, word is going to spread. But Jesus was on a mission. Not only to minister in the territories of His "own" people, the Jews, but Jesus's desire was to go even toward Gentile territory, those who were considered the "other." Clearly, the Jews weren't the only ones who needed a Savior. The Gentiles did too. Jesus broke tradition in not just keeping with His own and modeled a path for us to take the gospel message to those who are different from us.

POINT 1

THE LORD EXTENDS COMPASSION TO THOSE IN NEED (MARK 8:1-3).

1 In those days there was again a large crowd, and they had nothing to eat. He called the disciples and said to them, **2** “I have compassion on the crowd, because they’ve already stayed with me three days and have nothing to eat. **3** If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a long distance.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 8:1-3** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S MINISTRY MAP** to point out cities and regions as you use the **VERSES 1-2** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]):

Jesus saw the **physical** needs of the crowd and had **compassion** on them.

DISCUSS: How do we grow in compassion for others? (talk to and learn people's stories; have a diverse group of friends with varying life stories; serve in areas that are dissimilar to our lives; go on missions trips)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 3** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus called His disciples to faithful **action** when reflecting on the **needs** of others.

DISCUSS: What should faithful action look like in the church? (answers will vary, but may include ministries that serve the outside neighborhood; families helping with fostering; food drives; small groups helping those in need in their neighborhood)

TRANSITION: Jesus was all-knowing and full of love and mercy. His disciples, on the other hand, needed a gentle nudge. Our Lord does the same thing for us. He guides our attention to the needs of others, even if we don't initially see how we can help. As we picture Jesus directing the eyes of His closest friends toward a great crowd in need, we can see their brains turning: how in the world can we make a difference?

NOTES



COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-2 / Toward the end of chapter 7, Mark reports that Jesus went to Tyre (Mark 7:24). Tyre and Sidon were outside the boundaries of Israel, though the nation itself did not exist at that time. Israel's land during the days of Jesus was made up of the regions of Judah in the south, Samaria in the center, and Galilee in the north. Tyre was northwest of Galilee, on the Mediterranean Sea, in Phoenician territory. From there, Jesus went through Sidon and roundabout to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31), which was the regional name given to ten Greek cities east of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus had gone far away from His home of Nazareth, His ministry in Galilee, and the center of Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. Yet, there was **“again a large crowd”** (Mark 8:1). Jesus tended to draw a crowd wherever He went. This isn't the first time Jesus has been in the midst of a great, hungry crowd. Just a few chapters earlier in Mark's Gospel (6:30-44), we read the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. We see that the crowds who followed Jesus were willing to hang onto His every word without much preparation. If the Teacher came through town, they followed Him.

A group of people with nothing to eat in a desolate place (Mark 8:4) roused Jesus's compassion. Because of their location, it's likely that most of this crowd had little to no Jewish background. Jesus knew they were hungry as they had followed Him for three days (v. 2). Our Lord sees our hunger and is compassionate when our basic human needs are not met. And Jesus used this as a teaching moment. He **“called his disciples”** to explain the situation and see how they would react.

Jesus told them He had **“compassion”** on the crowd. The root word for “compassion” is the word for intestines. Restated, Jesus was moved in His bowels. We use a similar expression: our stomach turns. Jesus's very human body yearned to meet the needs of the humanity He created and

loved. The original Greek word is used twelve times, all in the Gospels and all pointing to Jesus. It's the same compassion He has for us today. He sees us as we struggle, hurt, and yearn. He does not ignore our pain or our suffering.

VERSE 3 / Jesus started to tell the disciples the situation, the very men who would carry His name into the world after His death. Jesus didn't value only their ability to speak truth and proclaim God's kingdom; He also wanted them to churn inwardly for the needs of people.

So, as a masterful and profound teacher, Jesus presented them with the challenge: If He simply told the crowd to go home, they may be genuinely too weary to make it. If you look at a Bible map, you'll see that the region of the Decapolis borders the Eastern Desert to its southeast. Being so close to a desert, we can assume that the countryside wasn't abundant with crops to eat. And many of these people had traveled far from their hometowns just to walk with Jesus and hear Him teach and be with Him.

We must also consider the state of Jesus and His disciples. If the crowds hadn't eaten in three days, it's possible they hadn't either. They likely had growling stomachs and headaches just like the crowds did. And maybe that was the exact reason Jesus hadn't sent everyone home yet. Sometimes He calls us to enter into the suffering of others in order to experience genuine compassion. One who has lived in homelessness is compassionate to the homeless; the same is true for one who has been hungry.

In Mark's account of the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples had come to Jesus at the end of the first night to send the crowd away (Mark 6:36). The situation is different here: it's been three days, and Jesus is the One asking how best to handle the situation. But, as we know, Jesus doesn't ask questions because He needs the answer; He asks them so that we will find it.

POINT 2

THE LORD CALLS HIS FOLLOWERS TO SERVE THOSE IN NEED (MARK 8:4-7).

NOTES

4 His disciples answered him, “Where can anyone get enough bread here in this desolate place to feed these people?” **5** “How many loaves do you have?” he asked them. “Seven,” they said. **6** He commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. Taking the seven loaves, he gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. So they served them to the crowd. **7** They also had a few small fish, and after he had blessed them, he said these were to be served as well.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 8:4-7** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Though the disciples **doubted**, Jesus took the little they had and used it to **serve** others.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-7** commentary to show how Jesus engaged His disciples in social concern (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #94: Social Concern: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human **society**. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the **saving** grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose **racism**, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

DISCUSS: How can you act on one of these social concerns? (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

TRANSITION: We see the humility of the people as they sat and the humility of the disciples as they served. Let's see how the story ends.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“If the vision of Christ be before his eyes, and the love of Christ be in his heart, the man of wealth will give his large offering, the man of learning his dear-bought knowledge, the man of business his hard-earned leisure, for the glory of God.”¹

—John Ellerton
(1826–1893)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 4-5 / Jesus presented the problem of need to His disciples: these people were hungry and hadn't eaten for three days. The challenge wasn't one only of logistics but also of the heart. How could the disciples show compassion as they met this need?

Though the disciples had already experienced a similar situation, they answered Jesus the same way: **“Where can anyone get enough bread here in this desolate place to feed these people?”**

First, the crowd needed to be fed. The Greek word translated **“feed”** in verse 4 actually carries the richer idea of “filling to satisfaction.” More than simply killing the initial hunger, the crowd needed to find satiety in their food. Not surprisingly, this is the same Greek word used when Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6). It's the same word Paul used when he said, “I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need” (Phil. 4:12). Jesus doesn't want His followers to simply find that He keeps them alive; He wants them to find fullness and satisfaction in Him.

Secondly, Jesus was in a **“desolate place”** with His disciples and the crowd. Often translated “wilderness,” this word can point to solitude or it can point to a wasteland. Wastelands come into every life, and they are as real for us today as the barren landscape in which Jesus was talking.

We're not alone in the wastelands. Paul went through them (2 Cor. 11:26), and the great men and women of faith wandered through them too; the world was not worthy of these faithful people (Heb. 11:38). The desolate places are where we come face-to-face with all kinds of needs; only there do we find that Jesus alone can meet them.

Let's circle back to the disciples' question: **“Where can anyone get enough bread here in this desolate place to feed these people?”** But Jesus wasn't just anyone. He

is the Lord, the Creator of all that exists, and the Bread of Life. His disciples brought Him seven loaves and a few small fish (v. 7); it was all He needed.

VERSES 6-7 / These verses clearly show how the body of Christ works together to meet people's needs. First, Jesus **“commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground”** (v. 6). In that day, rabbis sat in order to teach, and their students would have stood around them to listen. Jesus instructed the crowd to take a load off. Imagine standing all day, listening intently. Sitting down would have been a great relief!

Next, Jesus gave thanks. We see this translated as two words, but in the Greek it's only one: *eucharisteo*. It carries the idea of being grateful, feeling thankful, and actively expressing gratitude. Jesus gave thanks when He fed the multitudes, He gave thanks before Lazarus walked out of the tomb (John 11:41), and He gave thanks when He offered His disciples the cup at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:27). Jesus gave thanks to God His Father for everything: for the blessings and the trials, for the broken bread and the broken body. When we realize that everything that comes from the Father's hand is blessing, we can also learn to give thanks as Jesus did.

After Jesus broke the loaves, He **“gave them to his disciples to set before the people. So they served them to the crowd”** (v. 7). Oh, how Jesus uses humility to edify His kingdom. The disciples, all good Jews who would never defile themselves with heathen items or people, were given the opportunity to serve the unclean, and they did. If you've ever humbled yourself to serve someone who could never repay you, you know how their hearts were softened in the act of service.

For a people who had likely not even known to be looking for a Messiah, they were undoubtedly in awe as they heard Jesus speak and watched His compassion.

POINT 3

THE LORD SATISFIES COMPLETELY THOSE IN NEED (MARK 8:8-10).

8 They ate and were satisfied. Then they collected seven large baskets of leftover pieces. **9** About four thousand were there. He dismissed them. **10** And he immediately got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 8:8-10** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Note the “provision” connection on **PACK ITEM 3: HEARING THE OLD IN THE NEW** as you use the **VERSE 8** commentary to highlight how God has always provided for His people (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus **satisfies** all our needs, and He calls us to share in His **abundance** with others.

DISCUSS: *From Day 2 in the DDG: How can you live out compassion, knowing God gives abundantly?* (give of our possessions and finances; give of our time at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter; encourage others to serve with you somewhere; bring food to those who are sick; bring food or provide babysitting to new moms)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 9-10** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus performed a miracle for the **Gentiles**, because His **compassion** extends to all.

DISCUSS: Who might seem foreign to us, but we still need to love and share Jesus with? (the poor or homeless; immigrants and refugees; those in the “other” political party; certain races; those dealing with gender issues; prisoners or gang members)



COMMENTARY

VERSE 8 / In verse 4, the disciples identified that the crowd needed to be “filled,” or “satisfied.” In verse 8, we see that the crowd was, indeed, filled to satisfaction. Jesus’s miracle gave the large crowd what they needed—food—but also gave the disciples what they needed: a reminder to believe Jesus. Perhaps we, like the disciples, struggle to really believe that Jesus can do what He says He can do. The disciples had watched Him bless loaves and fishes to feed 5,000 people, yet when they were looking at a hungry crowd of 4,000, they doubted.

Maybe the disciples had been intimidated with the crowd’s makeup: these weren’t Jews, remember. Maybe the disciples didn’t know how this bunch of Gentiles would behave after three days of hunger. They could have come up with any number of excuses, but the fact remained: Jesus saw a need and met it. He allowed His disciples to help in meeting that need, regardless of whether or not they showed faith.

The meal is reported succinctly: **“They ate and were satisfied.”** The idea of “filling” the Gentiles was already a broached subject. In Mark 7:26, a Gentile, Syrophenician woman came to Jesus. Her daughter was demon-possessed, and she asked Jesus to cast it out. He responded: “Let the children be fed first, because it isn’t right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs” (Mark 7:27). That sounds harsh. Did He really mean that? Well, He helped the Gentile daughter in response to the mother’s faith, and one chapter later, Jesus has here offered the Bread of life to the Gentiles. His first commitment was to the children of Abraham, but His compassion is for the whole world. It still is.

Just as in Mark 6:35-44, the disciples again gathered the leftovers. Yes, it was part of their service, but it was also to remind them that there is always plenty in Christ. One fun element in this passage is that the word used for **“basket”** is different. In Mark 6, the word *kophinos* refers to a small wicker basket. In Mark 8, he uses a different word:

spyris, a larger basket made of reeds. It’s the same word used in Acts 9:25 when the disciples lowered Paul down in a basket so he could escape death. When seven loaves and a few fish yield enough leftovers to fill seven baskets that can hold a man, you’ve been in the presence of God Almighty.

VERSES 9-10 / Mark’s Gospel is always like a harried news reporter: he’s rushing about, getting a few words here and there, but never lingering long. His sentences are brief; he summarizes rather than giving details, and he doesn’t waste words. We see these elements in these closing sentences: **“About four thousand were there. He dismissed them”** (Mark 8:9).

Four thousand was likely the count of the men, not the entire crowd. If we assume that each of those men brought their family to see a great miracle-worker, the number would be much higher. The multiplied bread and fish was a miracle, but so was the gathering. Only Jesus could attract that crowd, keep their attention, and meet their needs. Many that day heard the truth of Jesus’s teaching and saw the truth of His character, power, and authority. The 4000 plus in this Gentile territory were blessed with Jesus’s message and compassion.

At this point, Jesus and His disciples got into a boat and headed back across the Sea of Galilee to Dalmanutha. This town is a mystery to us, as it’s not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. Most Bible scholars place it near Capernaum and Magdala in Galilee.

Jesus had filled the stomachs and the ears of the Gentiles, and now He was going back to the Jews. He knew they would eventually kill Him, but He also knew He had much work to do in the short time He had left with them.

MY RESPONSE

Because God has met our greatest need in salvation through Christ, we seek to meet the needs of others—physical, emotional, and spiritual—through Jesus.

NOTES

HEAD:

For the second time in Mark's short narrative of Jesus's earthly ministry, Jesus has held the attention of thousands. For us, it would be easy to get caught up in the fame or the glory, but not Jesus. Instead, He saw the people and had compassion on them. He saw their wretched spiritual condition but also their physical condition. He loved them all, Jew and Gentile, law-followers and heathens. He still sees us today in our need, in our sin, in our hopelessness, and in our hunger.

How does Jesus's compassion for all people encourage and comfort you?

HEART:

Obedience and allegiance to God is not only in the following of actions and rituals; it must flow from the heart. Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them; it wrenched His gut! We are called to feel this same compassion toward people who are hurting, lost, lonely, and in need of a Savior. Just as the heart of the Lord broke for the Gentiles in that desolate place, we must open our own hearts to allow that same compassion to fill us deeply. David was "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), and we're called to pursue God's heart as well.

Where can you confess that you've had a hard time having compassion for others?

HANDS:

We don't know the message Jesus preached to the crowd of 4,000 men, and we don't know what miracles He performed, but we know that He saw their hunger and gave them food. When you find yourself with someone in need, don't wonder about what Scripture applies perfectly or how to make everything right. Simply start by meeting the need of that person and praying that God in Christ would be evident to them. Help hand out water, socks, blankets, or food in your community. Give of your time, talents, and money to help a group or family who could really use them right now.

What need can you meet in Jesus's name in someone's life this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us come to Holy Communion in charity with each other and with all; determined henceforth to feel for each other, and with each other . . . so much so that God shall give us that great grace; . . . to give and forgive, even as God gives and forgives, for ever, that so we may be indeed the children of our Father in heaven, whose name is Love."²

—Charles Kingsley
(1819–1875)

POINT 1: THE LORD EXTENDS COMPASSION TO THOSE IN NEED (MARK 8:1-3).

+ COMMENTARY

“Those who try to find contradictions in the Bible often confuse this miracle with the feeding of the 5,000 which is recorded in all four Gospels. Only Matthew and Mark record this event, and it is not difficult to distinguish it from the other miracle of the multiplying of bread and fish. The first miracle took place in Galilee, near Bethsaida, and involved predominantly Jews. This miracle took place near Decapolis and involved mostly Gentiles. In the first miracle, Jesus started with five loaves and two fish, while here He had seven loaves ‘and a few fish.’ The 5,000 had been with Him one day, but the 4,000 had been with him three days. Twelve baskets of fragments were left over after the 5,000 were fed, but only seven baskets after the 4,000 were fed. There were even two different kinds of baskets used: for the 5,000, small wicker lunch baskets (kophinos); for the 4,000, large hampers, big enough to hold a man (spuris, see Acts 9:25).”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

Say, “You probably aren’t surprised to see that Jesus is compassionate. For anyone who has studied the Bible, you’ve witnessed His compassion in other situations. Can anyone think of what it looks like when Jesus has compassion on someone or a group?” You may want to help remind learners that Jesus felt compassion for crowds, for they were like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36), He was moved with compassion for blind men (Matt. 20:34), He had compassion on a widow whose son had died (Luke 7:13), and many other times.

We, like Jesus, are called to show compassion. Ask, “Do you consider yourself to be a compassionate person? Why or why not?” Point out that feeling compassion is one thing; acting on that compassion is what reveals our heart. Ask, “Have you ever felt compassion for someone or a group but didn’t act on it? Why not?” As a group, try to come up with a list of different ways to practice compassion. Some examples can be speaking with kindness, listening carefully, offering to help with finances or material possessions, offering to help with babysitting or errands, etc. Say, “What does practice accomplish in sports, skills, and other disciplines? We all agree that we should be compassionate, but how often do we actually practice showing compassion?” As a group, consider how you might practice compassion this week.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE LORD CALLS HIS FOLLOWERS TO SERVE THOSE IN NEED (MARK 8:4-7).

+ COMMENTARY

“The feeding of a multitude has reappeared, only now there are a few differences: the number of people, the amount of food, and other miscellaneous details. Notice that it wasn’t the disciples who were concerned about the people’s hunger; it was Jesus. You can almost picture the disciples asking, ‘Would Jesus perform the same miracle among a Gentile crowd that He performed among the Jewish people?’ . . . Jesus made clear . . . that He came to serve, satisfy, and save people from all nations. Part of the point of the feeding of the 5,000 . . . was to depict Jesus as the messianic host. That was a foretaste of the day when all of God’s people, Jews and Gentiles, would gather around Christ for a banquet in the kingdom to come.”⁴

+ ILLUSTRATION

Though the disciples had witnessed and participated in the feeding of the 5,000, they struggled here to see a path through the desolate circumstance to a crowd full of full bellies. But as before, Jesus didn’t ask His disciples to meet the people’s needs without His involvement. Rather, He wanted to meet their needs through His disciples. They couldn’t do this massive work on their own, but with the Lord all things are possible, and herein lies the means of His glory.

In 1 Peter 4:10-11, Peter tells his readers to serve others with gifts from the Lord. We know these as spiritual gifts. But while these gifts are given to us, they are not for us. Rather, these are a means of service in the words and strength of God so He receives glory through Jesus in us.

+ ILLUSTRATION

Bring the following items to class: a beloved children’s book, a board game, a CD or record, a cell phone, and a coffee mug. Point out that Jesus used everyday items—bread, fish, and baskets—to serve people around Him. Say, “I’ve brought some items that I bet most of us have stashed somewhere around our houses. If you don’t have all of these, I bet you have most of them. What we’re going to do today is consider how you might use each of these to serve someone in your family or community.”

Hold up each item, one at a time, and ask, “How can we use this to serve?” Use the examples below to get learners thinking creatively about items they own:

- Children’s book: you could volunteer to help an overwhelmed mother of young children by reading to them for an hour or so. You could volunteer at a library and read with some children who need extra attention. You could even read at a local nursing home.
- Board game: you could take the game to a youth group gathering, inviting a few kids who might want to play to join you. You could invite some neighbors over for dessert and hot chocolate and play a game.
- CD or record: you could take some great music to any number of places and bless people with it: nursing homes, assisted living facilities, etc.
- Coffee mug: you could host a group of widows or single moms, providing coffee, snacks, and conversation.

POINT 3: THE LORD SATISFIES COMPLETELY THOSE IN NEED (MARK 8:8-10).

+ COMMENTARY

“Repetition is a wonderful and effective teacher. Sometimes on the first, second, and even third attempt, we just don’t get it. If you are a slow learner like me, it may be on the eleventh try that a valuable lesson finally sinks in. Take heart. We are in good company! The apostles were just like us. . . . Remembering what we have seen our Lord do in the past should help us trust Him in the present. Unfortunately, we are sometimes forgetful and even hard-hearted (8:17). In spite of seeing the Lord work in our past, we are not sure He can handle our present.”⁵

+ COMMENTARY

“The present account brings into bold relief the arrested development of the disciples. They were in on the first miracle feeding of five thousand in a deserted place, but this does not stop them from asking Jesus, ‘But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?’ (8:4). The answer to their question is obvious: from Jesus. The disciples are slow on the uptake and grope for answers in the dark, expecting nothing miraculous from Jesus. Again, Jesus patiently has the disciples go through their inventory of provisions. They do not yet realize that even with their scanty supplies, they have in Jesus enough to feed the entire world.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Before class, write the following on eight index cards, one per card: *When you’re sick, When you’ve had a busy season at work, When you have young children, When you’re taking care of others, When you’ve lost your job, When you’re having car trouble, When money is tight, and When you’ve had a death in the family.* Point out that different needs require different kinds of help. Pass out the eight cards to volunteers and say, “The hungry crowd needed food, but that’s not the solution to every problem. Let’s see if we can consider different ways we could help others in these situations.”

Instruct each volunteer to read the card aloud and, as a group, share aloud a few things you personally could do to help someone in that situation. Challenge learners to consider a specific family they know well and a challenge they’re facing; how might you help meet a need for them? Remind learners that they need not solve every problem for every family, but they can be of immense help by showing compassion, serving, giving of time, taking over everyday tasks, helping with transportation, and more. Challenge learners to ask themselves, “What is the compassionate thing to do in this situation? How can I serve these people in this situation?”

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4. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 208-209.
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JESUS OVER ALL



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son's works reveal His deity (John 10:22-28).
2. The Son's claims reveal His deity (John 10:30-39).
3. The Son's radiance reveals His deity (Heb. 1:1-3).

Background Passages: John 10; Hebrews 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus's divinity is revealed in His works, His claims, and in His very nature.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The Son of God took on flesh and became fully human without compromise of His deity. As the God-Man, Jesus lived a sinless life and paid the sin debt owed by people. Jesus has fully revealed God's glory to humanity, being God Himself.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus is God, we live in full submission to Him, not only turning to Him in faith as our Savior but following Him in obedience as our Lord.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: John 10 may not be chronological with this unit, but it is certainly thematic. Not surprisingly, Jesus is in the midst of a tense debate with Jewish authorities over His healing of a blind man (John 9). The crowd had confirmed that this man was born blind, and Jesus had revealed that those who didn't believe His miracles were spiritually blind (vv. 39-41). He went on to point out a distinct divide between those standing around Him: those who followed Him and those who didn't. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but not all Jews were His sheep.

EXPLAIN: Share a time in your life when you lightheartedly were a "follower" of someone: it may have been a great high school or college teacher, a coach, an author, or even a filmmaker.

DISCUSS: Who do you follow, and what does it mean to follow someone? (we "follow" people on social media and through intentionally learning about them; we listen to what they say or watch what they do; we heed their words and sometimes try to look like and act like them)

TRANSITION: Jesus didn't mince words when it came to His role among the Jews: He is the Good Shepherd. This wasn't revolutionary teaching or heretical verbiage; He taught and others followed. He'd made a name for Himself across the Galilean and Judean lands as one who taught with authority and healed. The Pharisees didn't like that He operated outside of their realm of expertise, and few even attempted to listen to His words with sincerity. In today's passage, Jesus made a claim that drew enough attention to lead to His death: He wasn't only a shepherd; He is actually God.

POINT 1

THE SON'S WORKS REVEAL HIS DEITY (JOHN 10:22-28).

22 Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem, and it was winter. **23** Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's Colonnade. **24** The Jews surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." **25** "I did tell you and you don't believe," Jesus answered them. "The works that I do in my Father's name testify about me. **26** But you don't believe because you are not of my sheep. **27** My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. **28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 10:22-28** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Pass out copies of and use **PACK ITEM 6: THE GREAT "I AM"** along with the **VERSES 22-24** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

The Jews **confronted** Jesus about His identity, but they were not seeking understanding but rather a way to convict Him of **blasphemy**.

DISCUSS: How can we be prepared for situations in which others are hostile toward us because of our faith? (we must daily find hope, joy, peace, and wisdom through God's Word so that the Holy Spirit can bring to mind what we should say; our goal is not to win arguments but to point others to Christ; we use the armor of God [see Eph. 6:10-18] and the gospel to speak with confidence)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 25-28** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

True believers obey and **follow** Jesus as Lord, and with that comes **eternal** life and security.

DISCUSS: From Day 1 in the DDG: How can someone humble himself/herself to become a sheep of Jesus, a true believer? (by submitting their life to Him; by trusting Him with everything; by spending time with Him in prayer and in His Word; by living a life of love and service, not because I have to but because I want to; by knowing Jesus died for my sins; by trying to be more like Christ)

TRANSITION: The Jews had sought one specific identity from Jesus: Are You the Messiah or not? It might seem that He had evaded their question, but that's not the case. He answered plainly, just as they asked.

NOTES



THE FESTIVAL OF DEDICATION

During the 2nd century BC, around 170 years earlier from this passage, Syrian leader Antiochus Epiphanes had conquered Jerusalem, desecrated the temple, and set up an altar to a pagan god in it. A faithful priest, Mattathias, and his son Judas Maccabeus fought against the Syrian leader and his army. The Jews celebrated this victory every year, also known as the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 22-24 / John sets the stage for this discussion: in winter, in Jerusalem, at the Festival of Dedication, also known as Hanukkah. We can picture a large Jewish crowd gathered for such an event.

Wintertime may have led to Jesus's choice to walk along Solomon's Colonnade, a long, covered pavilion that would have provided shelter from the cold. This passage does not immediately follow John 7:1–10:21, as those events happened during the Feast of Shelters, which occurs in mid-October (see John 7:2). But the religious elite had not forgotten their disdain for Jesus.

“The Jews surrounded him” (v. 24). The original Greek verb is used only four other times in the Bible, and three of them deal with a military maneuver (Luke 21:20; Heb. 11:30; Rev. 20:9). These were people who did not follow Jesus or desire to know Him, and they came in a threatening manner.

Listen to their question with that understanding: **“How long are you going to keep us in suspense?”** (v. 24). On the surface, it might seem like Jesus hadn't clearly revealed Himself, but nothing could be further from the truth. In John's Gospel alone, Jesus had already identified Himself as the Bread of life (6:35), the Light of the world (8:12), the I AM (8:58), the Gate for the sheep (10:7), and the Good Shepherd (10:11). Jesus hadn't hidden His identity from them; rather, their unbelief led them to seek the final nail in the coffin for their claim of His blasphemy.

The hostile Jews even led Jesus to what they wanted Him to say: **“If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly”** (v. 24). This Greek word for “plainly” (*parresia*) appears nine times in John but only once in all the other Gospels. It refers to being bold, unreserved, confident, and assured in speech, both in its publicity and its fearlessness. Though Jesus was never afraid of the Jews' opinions, He often spoke in parables, which He sometimes explained to His disciples (Mark 4:34), often saying that those who

have ears to hear will hear, but those who don't, won't. Again, this is a case of belief or unbelief. No matter how Jesus answered, the Jews present would still live in unbelief. They were merely waiting for something to judge Him for.

VERSES 25-28 / Though Jesus knew their intentions, He answered them boldly: **“I did tell you and you don't believe”** (v. 25). These Jews had heard Jesus's teachings to the crowds as well as in the temple. The problem wasn't that they hadn't heard Him speak; the problem again was that they didn't believe what He said.

Even if He hadn't told them who He was, His works had shown it. The word for **“works”** (v. 25) is the same one Jesus used when He told His believers to let their light shine so that others may see their “good works” and give glory to their Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). A person's works reveal intent (John 3:20). Jesus had invited all to inspect His works—His miracles, healings, blessings, and more—and hold them up to the heart of God.

In verse 26, Jesus brought the topic back to sheep: these Jews didn't believe because they were not His sheep. His sheep heard (and understood) His voice, He knew them, and they obeyed. The Jews crowding around Him did none of those things. And because of that, they would never know the promises given to the sheep: eternal life and eternal security—**“They will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand”** (v. 28).

Just as Jesus's works revealed who He is, our works reveal who we are: Jesus's sheep or not. Believers cannot see into another person's heart, but we can see signs of genuine faith in their thoughts, words, and actions.

POINT 2

THE SON'S CLAIMS REVEAL HIS DEITY (JOHN 10:30-39).

NOTES

BLASPHEMY

Means to insult God, slander Him, or make a mockery of Him. Jesus was accused of blasphemy because He claimed to be God. And since many did not believe Him, despite the evidence, Jesus, then, was accused of mocking God Himself and belittling Him to the state of humanity, which was blasphemous except for its truth in Jesus, the Son of God.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable.”¹

—John Duncan
(1786–1879)

30 I and the Father are one.” **31** Again the Jews picked up rocks to stone him. **32** Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these works are you stoning me?” **33** “We aren’t stoning you for a good work,” the Jews answered, “but for blasphemy, because you—being a man—make yourself God.” **34** Jesus answered them, “Isn’t it written in your law, I said, you are gods? **35** If he called those to whom the word of God came ‘gods’—and the Scripture cannot be broken— **36** do you say, ‘You are blaspheming’ to the one the Father set apart and sent into the world, because I said: I am the Son of God? **37** If I am not doing my Father’s works, don’t believe me. **38** But if I am doing them and you don’t believe me, believe the works. This way you will know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father.” **39** Then they were trying again to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 10:30-39** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Recall **PACK ITEM 5: JESUS’S MIRACLES** and use it along with the **VERSES 30-33** commentary to highlight Jesus’s deity (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #48: Jesus’s Deity: Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the **divine** nature and the **human** nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 34-39** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus knew His **identity** as God and **claimed** such, even at a risk to His life.

DISCUSS: When trials come because of your conviction as a child of God, how do you stand firm? (pray; rely on God’s strength; stay firm in Scripture; follow in the ways of Jesus; rely on the body of Christ, the church, for support)

TRANSITION: Next, we’ll look at Jesus from outside the Gospels. Turn to the book of Hebrews to see what this book reveals about the fact that Jesus is divine.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 30-33 / “I and the Father are one.”

This Jesus, who seemingly had been born normally of human parents, grown up in Galilee, and inspired a band of loyal followers, was claiming to be God Himself. This didn't mean that God the Father and God the Son were the same person; in fact, they are not. They have different roles in our world today as well as in its past and future. They are two of the three Persons comprising the one nature of our one triune God.

That was all the Jews needed to try to pinpoint Jesus as a blasphemer; so they **“picked up rocks to stone him”** (v. 31). Where did they get those rocks? Did the Jews bring these stones? We don't know. But the venom in their hearts makes it possible. These sons of Abraham were ready to kill the promised “seed” of Abraham for His words (see Gal. 3:16), without a trial and without the permission of the Roman government.

Jesus wasn't afraid, though. He calmly asked which of His works was worthy of the death penalty. Which teaching? Which healing? Which exorcism? Which provision? The Jews revealed their thinking: they weren't stoning Him for a miracle but for blasphemy. The idea of blasphemy can be applied to virtually any religion in our world today, particularly in speaking disrespectfully or irreverently against a god or sacred thing. The biblical definition points to cursing or insulting God, and the penalty was stoning. These Jews could imagine nothing more blasphemous than claiming that a human was God.

In one sense, can you imagine someone today claiming to be God? We would think they were crazy too. But what if that person did miracles and loved people beyond normal and their words and actions were consistent? We'd be a fool not to listen and test the evidence, unless our hearts were completely hardened.

Ironically, the Jews here judged Jesus for His claims, despite seeing His good

works. In contrast, their lack of good works revealed that their claims to be people of God were inconsistent.

VERSES 34-39 / Jesus responded to their accusation with a verse from Psalm 82. In that setting, God is standing “in the divine assembly” and He is pronouncing “judgment among the gods” (v. 1). But here, the idea of “gods” can mean either heavenly beings or earthly rulers. Jesus drew out the second definition: anyone with authority over another is a “son of the Most High.” Jesus said that God set up the idea that earthly rulers can enact judgment as a son of God, and God's Word cannot be broken.

Jesus isn't often listed with the famous philosophers, but His line of reasoning here is brilliant. He connected the dots between God, the Old Testament, and Himself to clearly reveal that He is One with the Father. Also, He invited His opponents to inspect His works and hold them up to a heavenly standard: **“if I am not doing my Father's works, don't believe me”** (v. 37). This significant challenge revealed just how clearly Jesus is the Light and walked in the light; He offered up His entire life to scrutiny.

Jesus revealed God in everything He did. In His words, attitude, relationships, miracles, teaching, compassion, and literally everything that could be observed, Jesus revealed that He is God. His life backed up His claims.

Though accusations of blasphemy would eventually lead Jesus to the cross, this was not the appointed time. The Jews attempted to seize Him, but He escaped. The word translated **“escaped”** (v. 39) is actually a verb that means “to come from” or “to come out of.” It's used to describe demons coming out of people (Matt. 8:32), crowds coming out of a city (v. 34), and Jesus's fame coming out into the land. Jesus simply walked past them and went on His way.

POINT 3

THE SON'S RADIANCE REVEALS HIS DEITY

(HEB. 1:1-3).

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. **2** In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. **3** The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 1:1-3** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-2** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God the Father has given all **authority** to God the **Son**.

DISCUSS: How should the truth of these verses shape your personal worship time? (with understanding that God speaks to us; with awe at the relationship of the triune God: Father, Son, Spirit; praising God for His works and glory; knowing Jesus sits with the Father, controlling all; in humble submission to the Father, Son, and Spirit)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 3** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus, being in very nature God, controls all things, and only through Him and His saving work can we be **purified** from sin.

DISCUSS: Why do you think some people don't believe that Jesus is God? (they don't believe in God in general; they want to live their lives the way they want to; they want to live in sin; they don't want to think about it as life is already busy; they think it's illogical or foolish to think God became a man)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-2 / There's no consensus on who wrote the book of Hebrews. Some Bible scholars think it was Paul, but others disagree. We can just accept that it's not something God felt we particularly needed to know and worry about (Deut. 29:29). But scholars all agree that this writer is an expert in Jewish law and history and that he ties it in perfectly with the gospel.

He begins by linking the Old Testament to the New: long ago, God spoke through His prophets; now, He speaks through His Son. The prophets of the Old Testament were the men who spoke God's messages to people. Many associate prophecy with the telling of the future, and sometimes prophets did just that. But they also spoke of judgment, instruction, conviction, or any other word that God needed His people to hear. We can flip through both the major and the minor prophets in the Bible, but the list also includes Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and more.

God spoke **"at different times and in different ways"** (v. 1). He used nature, dreams, symbolism, and all kinds of messages straight from the mouths of the prophets. God was not confined to any particular type of delivery; He could do what He wanted. For that reason, He had every right to send His greatest message in the form of a human: Jesus, His only begotten Son. We can learn all we really need to know about God's character and nature in observing Jesus. Studying the Gospels gives us the clearest answer to the question "Who is God really?"

Since God is the Sovereign Lord and King of everything, He has the divine right to use His authority. And so, He appointed Jesus as the **"heir of all things"** (v. 2), the only One who has authority over that creation. We also see in these verses that God's creation came through His Son. We see His fingerprints on all that was made. This passage, with Genesis 1:1-2 and John 1:1-2, gives us a beautiful image of Father, Son, and Spirit all together as they called the universe into existence.

VERSE 3 / In John 10:30, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." In John 14:9, He said, "The one who has seen me has seen the Father." The author of Hebrews confirms these two statements here: **"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature"** (Heb. 1:3). The concept of radiance holds in it an idea of brightness, effulgence (radiant splendor), and glory. We see this truth from John's Gospel, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of the Son from the Father (John 1:14). Jesus perfectly reflected God.

Our Hebrews author next explains that Jesus is **"the exact expression of his nature."** The Greek word for "expression" points to an instrument used for engraving, carving, or stamping a figure. God has an identity, and that very character is etched, stamped, or engraved in Jesus.

Not only did Jesus create all things, but He sustains **"all things by his powerful word"** (Heb. 1:3). The stars keep burning, the planets keep spinning, the cells keep multiplying, and the universe keeps moving through the power, plan, and purpose of God the Son. Dust on your furniture reminds you that your skin cells are still sloughing off and being replaced. An atmosphere that turns oxygen into carbon dioxide and back again points to the involved, hands-on work of God the Son.

As if all that weren't enough, Jesus Himself stepped into our skin, took our sin upon Himself, and allowed His own body to become our perfect sacrifice once and for all, purifying us before the Father. He perfectly revealed that God so loved the world, dying so that we might live forever with Him. When that was finished and He was raised from the dead, He took His seat in the heavens at the **"right hand of the Majesty on high."** As King of kings and Lord of all, Jesus sits upon His throne. Glory.

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus is God, we live in full submission to Him, not only turning to Him in faith as our Savior but following Him in obedience as our Lord.

NOTES

HEAD:

Some people think of God the Father and picture a cloud, judgment, lightning, and power. They think of God the Son and see love, compassion, and meekness. But the Bible reveals that the Father and Son are one, proven throughout the narrative of God's interaction with humanity. Our knowledge of God through the Bible is the only way we can believe Jesus's words that He and the Father are one. As you read through your Bible, mark each name, character, or description of God and Jesus. Ask the Lord to help you know and believe who He really is.

What attributes of Jesus's deity comfort you the most, and why?

HEART:

There's much to love about Jesus, and for good reason. He perfectly revealed the love of the Father as He touched, healed, provided, and taught. But sometimes we see only the love of Jesus and miss the fact that He is also Lord, the ultimate authority. When we focus on the love of Jesus and miss His authority, we don't live in willful obedience. As you consider the truths of this week's passages, consider how your feelings toward Jesus affect your obedience to Him. Are you following Him as Shepherd?

How can you praise Jesus for His divine work in your life?

HANDS:

In every single aspect of His life, Jesus pointed to the Father. His radiance, His perfect reflection, allowed everyone to see who God is and how much He loves. We can't perfectly imitate God as Jesus did; His perfection is unmatched and we would fall horribly flat on our faces if we tried. But we're still called to reflect God! We "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). Consider your spiritual maturity and ability to reveal God in your own words, actions, attitudes, faith, and hope. We want our lives to be a mirror to God so all the world can see Him.

How is your life pointing others to Jesus, and thus to the Father?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Looking at Christ is the way we see most fully the glory of God. . . . No human son is the exact representation of his father. There is a close relation, but not an exact representation. Christ, however, is an 'exact representation.' He and God are of the same divine essence."²

—R. Albert Mohler Jr.

POINT 2: THE SON'S CLAIMS REVEAL HIS DEITY

(JOHN 10:30-39).

+

COMMENTARY

“Our Lord made a statement that He knew would startle His enemies and give them more reason to oppose Him (John 10:30). It was the ‘plain answer’ that the religious leaders had asked for. ‘I and My Father are One’ is as clear a statement of His deity as you will find anywhere in Scripture. This was even stronger than His statement that He had come down from heaven (John 6) or that He existed before Abraham ever lived (John 8:58). The word One does not suggest that the Father and the Son are identical persons. Rather, it means that they are one in essence: the Father is God and the Son is God, but the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. He is speaking about unity, not identity.”³

POINT 3: THE SON'S RADIANCE REVEALS HIS DEITY

(HEB. 1:1-3).

+

ILLUSTRATION

Say, “Let’s consider some radiant things: Consider the night sky. The best time to see the brightest stars in most of the lower forty-eight states is the last week of February or the first few days of March.” Look up “sky and telescope astronomy see 6 or 7 brightest night objects” and be prepared to show the three simple maps on that website.⁴ Point out that the moon is obviously the brightest object in the sky on most nights. But looking west/southwest, one can see (from north to south) Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury. Turning to look east, one can see Reglus, Mars, and Denebola. And when looking south/southeast, Sirius and possibly Canopus (in the south) are visible. Say, “We love to see and identify the stars. But we can’t forget something else that is extraordinarily radiant: Jesus. Let’s consider what we learn about His radiance in Hebrews 1.”

References

1. John Duncan, *Colloquia Peripatetica* (Sydney, Australia: Wentworth Press, 2016) 109, quoted online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/is-c-s-lewiss-liar-lord-or-lunatic-argument-unsound>.
2. R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), Heb 1:3, (Logos).
3. Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 332-33.
4. Tony Flanders, “Don’t Miss the Brightest Objects in the Night Sky,” *Sky and Telescope*, February 22, 2012, <https://skyandtelescope.org/astronomy-news/observing-news/see-the-6-or-7-brightest-night-objects>.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST

“Let Your Light Shine”

by Jonathan Hayashi

+

I was born into a broken home. By age fifteen, I became very embittered and depressed. Somewhere deep inside, a part of me longed to know that there was more to life than the hard, angry world that surrounded me.

At age sixteen, I received Christ and began a lifelong process of learning how Jesus is the source of life and the answer to my quest for purpose. The change in my life was so radical, things haven't been the same since. From a point of despair, I was drawn to the rich promise Jesus makes of a life of fulfillment and complete satisfaction in Him.

Even as a teenage convert, I knew the mission. I did not want to waste even a day, hour, minute, or second of my life; instead, I wanted to minister to those who had not heard the good news. Why? Once Christ came into my life, all my desires and dreams changed. Jesus became not only Savior over my life but Lord over every part of my life. That is the very reason why I am so passionate about the local church, for it is the heartbeat of God.

DISTRACTED CHURCHES DRIFT FROM THE MISSION

However, as I invited people at church to have a gospel conversation with others,

it seemed like all I heard were crickets chirping. Soon, I was frustrated with the system that seemed disconnected from the mission of Jesus. I felt like I was rejected by many of my old friends like Jesus had been rejected as a prophet in His own hometown. What I struggled with most was what I saw within the church concerning the kingdom opportunity outside. It seemed like Christians often became customers of religious goods and services distributed in their church rather than co-laborers in the ministry and message of Jesus.

If Jesus is king, then He has a kingdom. His kingdom has citizens. The question is “Are you a faithful citizen of God’s kingdom or are you in defiance of your King?” As Robby Gallaty said, “The gospel has come to us because it is heading to someone else. We are just another link in the chain, and each of us is either fumbling the handoff or passing the baton.”¹

DILIGENT STEWARDS SERVE FAITHFULLY

“Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21). I long to hear those words from the King at His return! Those words consume me and drive me in everything I do here on earth. These words are similar to Jesus’s message to

His disciple in Matthew 24:45-51, asking them, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant?”

Note that Jesus reminded the disciples that God’s kingdom is present today and will be established in full when He returns. As Christians, we all are called to the sweet stewardship of His kingdom in whatever God has entrusted unto us. Unfortunately, not every servant proves to be wise and faithful. We can easily become a bunch of lackadaisical servants just “enjoying fellowship” until the Master returns.

Wherever and whatever the Lord has given you, may you be faithful and wise servants as kingdom workers! Whatever age or stage of life, you are on a mission. Jesus asks us today as servant leaders, “Are you faithfully stewarding what I have asked you to do here on earth?”

DEVOTED DISCIPLES EXPAND THE KINGDOM

There are a lot of people who do not know how much God loves them, and a lot of them live right around us. They have no idea whatsoever that God sent His Son. And thus, His Son has sent you to make the gospel known!

Let us spend our lives making His love known amongst those around us. You may be thinking, “That is for the mature, not for me,” but this is a basic element of discipleship for Christians. This is Luke 9:23. You and I don’t have to start a large ministry, a new organization, a new initiative, or an incredible book. You don’t even have to start a blog. You have the authority of the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed in you to share about Jesus with whomever you meet, wherever you are.

Kingdom people have a clear vision of the future; they point toward eternity, not just toward tomorrow. Kingdom people are single-minded people. Kingdom living is living Christ’s way. Are you living the kingdom way today? Do you and I reflect on God as the sovereign, supreme King of the universe?

As kingdom workers, to live in obedience is the key to being a faithful and wise servant. As Jason Allen said: “I believe faithful leadership is remarkably simple. Not easy but simple.”² The key to leadership is stewardship of faithfulness. Despite all the hardships, we must endure faithfully to the end.

By God’s gracious guidance, we find the kingdom, and we realize that it is what we have been searching for all along.

Let us be careful about placing confidence in past successes or religious monuments rather than in continued faithfulness to the Lord. The world will laugh at the church, yet the kingdom is well worth the investment, even if it costs our lives. By God’s gracious guidance, we find the kingdom, and we realize that it is what we have been searching for all along. Because of God’s power and the work of His Spirit, each of us serving faithfully can make a significant impact on God’s kingdom.

Are you living as faithful and wise servants of Christ? Are you working diligently and faithfully as kingdom workers to expand His kingdom? Are you prepared for Christ’s return at this moment? That answer is ultimately only between you and God. But ask that very fundamental question right now: “Am I ready?” We as faithful stewards must always be alert and ready for the return of Christ.

1. Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus’ Final Words Our First Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 84.

2. Jason K. Allen, *Turnaround* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2022), 2.



DISCIPLES ARE BLESSED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples are blessed (Matt. 5:3-12).
2. Jesus's disciples are the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13).
3. Jesus's disciples are the light of this world (Matt. 5:14-16).

Background Passage: Matthew 5

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus has called His disciples to live in such a way as to reveal God's glory to the world.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God promised Abraham that one of his descendants would bring blessing to all the peoples on earth (Gen. 12:3). Jesus was the promised Messiah who blessed the world by laying down His life to provide forgiveness of sin. All who trust in Him are called out from the darkness into the light.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been blessed by God with salvation through Jesus, we live as salt and light in the world so that others might come to trust in Jesus.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

SETTING: As people waited for the Messiah, they expected Him to bring the promised blessings of the covenant—wholeness, a restored land, health, and prosperity. When Jesus came and brought healing over sickness and cared for people's needs, many associated His actions with being blessed. What Jesus brings in His blessing, however, is greater than physical wellness and material prosperity. When Jesus blesses His followers, He brings the saving rule and reign of the kingdom of God to them while they wait for the consummation and restoration of all things.

PACK ITEM 7: FOLLOW ME: Call attention to the Scripture on this poster, which was part of the previous session's study. Say, "We've seen Jesus perform miracles, which demonstrated His divine authority and power over all things. Since Jesus is God and the Good Shepherd, we should follow Him. In this unit, we'll see what it means and looks like to be disciples of Jesus who follow in His steps."

INSTRUCT: Guide group members to draw a picture or describe an image of the word "blessing" in the "Notes" section of their DDG (p. 66).

DISCUSS: When you hear the word "blessed," what image comes to mind? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: We often struggle to understand the word "blessing" apart from material wealth and prosperity. But Jesus's understanding of blessing concerns the spiritual nature of the kingdom of heaven and how it impacts all of life. Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount begins with a radical reorientation of the heart. Since Jesus's teaching begins with the spiritual life, our understanding of blessing needs to be reoriented to the values of the kingdom of heaven.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE BLESSED (MATT. 5:3-12).

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. **5** Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth. **6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. **7** Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. **8** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. **9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. **10** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. **11** You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. **12** Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 5:3-12** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Note on **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S MINISTRY MAP** the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount, and use the **VERSES 3,10-12** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

The first and last Beatitudes point out the nature of **humility** before God and the blessing of **suffering** for doing right.

DISCUSS: Why is it difficult to see suffering as a blessing? (we don't like pain; we associate bad things happening to bad people; we like comfort; our world and Satan tell us suffering is bad)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-9** commentary to emphasize how the Beatitudes teach us how to grow in our edification (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #89: Edification: Edification refers to the progressive growth and **maturity** of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of **Scripture** (Eph. 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the **body** of Christ, equipping people to live on **mission** for the kingdom of God.

DISCUSS: From Day 1 in the DDG: What values seen in the Beatitudes do you need to display more of in your life? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: As disciples who live out these values of the kingdom and are transformed by the good news, Jesus says that we will be the salt of the earth.

NOTES



THE BEATITUDES

The word “beatitude” comes from the Latin for “happy” or “blessed.” As part of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes describe the characteristics of a child of God, any disciple or follower of Jesus, as they should live in the kingdom of God. Jesus describes how true joy and blessing are found when a Christian lives out true humility through these characteristics.

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Matthew used this term 32 times, and it is not used elsewhere in the New Testament. Matthew used it to refer to God's rule, as seen through the person and ministry and works of Jesus Christ in this life, as well as to His rule in the future kingdom, coming at His return in its completeness. It is equivalent to the term “kingdom of God” used by the other Gospel authors.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 3,10-12 / When Jesus began His ministry in Matthew 4:23, He went through Galilee “preaching the good news of the kingdom.” This message of the kingdom dominates the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught about the blessings of the kingdom and the way of death by rejecting God’s ways, showing that He brings a new and better kingdom.

The kingdom that Jesus brings fulfills the promise God had made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. Through Abraham would come a descendant who would bless the world. Now Jesus brought the blessing of God. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus secured the blessed life by forgiving our sins so that we would be transformed to live according to the kingdom of heaven.

The first and last Beatitudes—Jesus’s statements of blessing—promise the same reward. **“Blessed are the poor in spirit”** and **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness”** both promise the kingdom of God. This promise for the first and last Beatitudes points out that everything in between is included in the blessings of the kingdom.

Every kingdom has standards and norms. The kingdom of God’s norms are spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount. The kingdom of God in these verses, then, refers to God’s rule through the salvation that has come because of Jesus Christ. What God’s saving rule looks like is described by Jesus in the following verses.

First, those who belong to the kingdom are described as being **“poor in spirit.”** The word “poor” here does not indicate material poverty but describes a spirit that is poor, desperate, and needy (cf. Isa. 66:2). This is the posture of humility: confessing sin, acknowledging the need for God’s redeeming mercy and grace, and depending upon God’s gracious work of salvation.

The last Beatitude describes those who are persecuted because of **“righteousness”** (see Isa. 45:8; 46:13; 51:5-6,8; 56:1).

Righteousness and salvation are parallel realities. Those who have been saved and brought into the kingdom are persecuted because they no longer operate under the principles of this present age. But Jesus reminded His followers that this is evidence that they belong to the kingdom and have a great reward because they are living consistently with God’s redeeming grace that resulted in persecution of the prophets long ago.

VERSES 4-9 / Jesus also laid out six other descriptions of kingdom norms:

- **“Those who mourn”** are comforted (v. 4). Christians are not to be melancholy all the time. Rather, those who have repented and grieved over their sin are promised comfort. God removes their sin forever (Ps. 103:8-12).
- Jesus teaches that the humble will **“inherit the earth”** (v. 5). Meekness considers another’s needs and wants before one’s own (Phil. 2:3). The blessing is a great inheritance—the earth! The hope of the new creation is the gift for all who walk humbly with God and others.
- The fourth Beatitude promises satisfaction for those who **“hunger and thirst for righteousness”** (v. 6). For the Christian, the mark of the blessed life is a longing for God’s rule to affect every aspect of their day. The result is a satisfaction in God that cannot be compared to anything this world offers.
- The fifth Beatitude says that a Christian’s life should be marked by **“mercy”** (v. 7). Because Christians have received mercy, we show mercy. We forgive as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32).
- The sixth Beatitude says that the **“pure in heart”** will see God (v. 8). The goal of the blessed life is fellowship with God—the very thing that Adam and Eve lost because of sin.
- Those who are peacemakers will be called **“sons of God”** (v. 9). In Christ, God is reconciling the world to Himself, bringing peace by the blood of His cross (2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:20).

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH (MATT. 5:13).

NOTES

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 5:13** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 13A** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The salt of believers **spreads** out over this world, preserving it and offering it as an **acceptable** offering to God.

DISCUSS: In what ways can we be salt in the world? (by our words and our actions, we show that we live by the values of the kingdom of heaven; when we live out our faith and engage with our neighbors, our coworkers, and our unbelieving family members, we display to them that we operate with the values of the kingdom of heaven)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 13B** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

To cease to be salt is to become **ineffective** disciples whose role of displaying the values of the kingdom is worthless, resulting in **judgment**.

TRANSITION: Not only are we to be distinct from the world in order to preserve and flavor it, but we are called to be a light that shines for the glory of Christ in our world. In the face of suffering, insults, and persecution, Jesus calls us “the light of the world.”

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Salt of the earth! ye
virtuous few, Who
season human kind;
Light of the world!
whose cheering ray
illumes the realms
of mind.”¹

—Anna Laetitia Barbauld
(1743–1825)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 13A / Jesus shifted voices from the general blessings of the kingdom to the specific ways His disciples will be a blessing. He told His disciples that they are the salt of the earth in the midst of persecution, slander, and insult. Specifically, Jesus addressed His disciples in the collective voice “you all” (or “you” plural). As Jesus spoke to the community of His redeemed disciples, Jesus told them that as they live together as disciples, they will be salt.

In a world where there was no refrigeration, salt was used to preserve food. In the sacrificial system, salt was a required addition to every offering brought before the Lord (Lev. 2:13). Offerings were presented as a food rite, a presentation to God (see Lev. 21–22). On the grain offering, salt symbolized the ongoing nature of the covenant (Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5), God’s promised preservation of the forever relationship with His people.

Even a little bit of salt can permeate a food offering to preserve and to flavor it. We no longer offer sacrificial animals, but we offer ourselves. In this way, believers, living together as the church in the face of trials, insults, and persecution, offer a very distinct flavor. Together, our lives offer a preserving, acceptable flavor that functions as an offering acceptable to the Lord.

Jesus is teaching His followers that their endurance through trials, suffering, and persecution throughout the world seasons this world with a flavor that preserves a decaying world. As sacrificial people offering themselves to God for the sake of His kingdom, the salt of believers spreads out over this world, preserving it and offering it as an acceptable offering to God.

VERSE 13B / Jesus’s focus is not primarily about the chemistry of salt but about the nature of disciples in the kingdom. Jesus warns His disciples that if they fail to follow His teaching, they will be tossed out and trampled upon in an act of judgment.

In Jesus’s day, salt was not pure. Instead, it had a mixture of other substances. Therefore, for salt to lose its saltiness would mean that it had become contaminated by other substances. The result of contaminated salt was that it was worthless. For salt to be effective, it must retain its distinctiveness. But when contaminated by other minerals, salt would neither add flavor nor preserve food.

The word that Jesus uses to describe the ineffectiveness of salt is not merely “tasteless” but “foolish.” To attempt to flavor or preserve food with a substance that was contaminated would not only be ineffective but foolish. Disciples who fail to live up to the norms of the kingdom are not only ineffective but foolish.

What would unsalty salt be used for? Jesus says that contaminated, unsalty salt is no longer useful. Instead, it is thrown out. **“To be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet”** is akin to being thrown into a garbage bin as trash—an act of judgment. Salt is not intended to be kept aside but to be sprinkled out and on various foods. When kept to itself, salt does not add flavor or preserve anything.

Jesus is not calling His disciples to avoid the world to keep themselves from being affected by it. Rather, He is sending His disciples out into the world to be distinct from it. By living out the kingdom values described in verses 3–12, Jesus is telling Christians that our collective witness to the world makes a marked difference by preserving and adding flavor.

Christians dare not lose their uniqueness from the world around them. To cease to be salt is to become ineffective disciples whose role of displaying the values of the kingdom is not helpful but worthless, resulting in the judgment of being cast out.

POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE THE LIGHT OF THIS WORLD (MATT. 5:14-16).

NOTES

14 “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 5:14-16** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 14-15** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Being the light of the world, **disciples** cannot hide; they must **shine**.

DISCUSS: In what ways do people hide the light of Christ? (people may be ashamed to speak about Christ; people may be afraid of what others might think of them if they identify as a Christian; others might hide their light because they feel inadequate to explain the gospel and the realities of saving faith)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 16** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The main reason we are to shine in good works is not for our own **pride** but for the **glory** of God.

DISCUSS: How do we make sure we are shining our light for God's glory and not our own? (we have people hold us accountable; we come to God daily in confession and thanksgiving; we ask ourselves the hard questions and check our motives; we listen to feedback from close friends and family)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 14-15 / Jesus described His disciples as **“the light of the world.”** Light is a common description of God throughout Scripture (see Ps. 18:12; 1 John 1:5). By virtue of belonging to God, His people are called a light (Eph. 5:8). Israel was to function as a light to the people around them (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). Now Jesus says that His followers are the light to the nations. The function of light is to illuminate, and Jesus describes the role of His disciples as bringing illumination to the world. While living as salt, the disciples would give the taste of God’s glory and goodness. Now described as light, believers show the goodness of God to the unbelieving world.

The metaphor of light is expanded in the second half of verse 14. The reason a city **“cannot be hidden”** is due to its visibility by day and more importantly its illuminating presence in the darkness of night. Just as a flashlight can be seen for miles in a dark, remote place, so a city on a hill will shine and be visible for miles in the darkest night.

While it is not clear if Jerusalem was intended, perhaps Isaiah 2:2-5 was on Jesus’s mind at this point in His sermon, as it describes how Jerusalem would be **“established at the top of the mountains”** (v. 2), like a city on a hill that the nations would stream toward during the last days. In Isaiah 2:5, Isaiah admonishes his listeners, then, to come and **“walk in the LORD’s light,”** in His teachings and His ways, like the nations would do.

Expanding the metaphor about being light, Jesus said that no one lights a lamp with the intention of hiding it. This would defeat the purpose of a lamp. Instead, it is put **“on a lampstand”** so that everyone in a darkened household has the ability to see.

In the face of persecution, insults, and slander (Matt. 5:10-12), Jesus told His followers that they should not shrink back from shining as lights in a world of moral darkness and decay. To hide the light of Christ

is inconsistent with being part of the kingdom of light. Rather, Jesus’s disciples are to be a light to the nations, a light in the world, revealing the goodness and glory of God to unbelievers through word and deed.

VERSE 16 / Just as a lamp shines and gives light, Jesus says that disciples who live according to the values of the kingdom act the same way, displaying what is good and true and beautiful.

The light that illuminates the values of the kingdom is now described as **“good works.”** These good deeds are not just any good action but are those that have been described by Jesus in Matthew 5:3-12. What makes these deeds **“good”** is that they glorify and exalt God.

By living consistently with the rule and reign of Jesus Christ, people point to the source of their good deeds—a transformed life that flows out of the forgiveness of sin and the desire for God’s righteousness in every sphere of life. For this reason, Jesus said that the ultimate goal of these good deeds is to **“give glory”** to God.

The light of God must shine through believers. By following the ways of the kingdom, Christians display the love and grace of God to a world that is lost in the confusion of moral and spiritual darkness.

While Jesus will condemn religious acts to be seen by others in Matthew 6:1, the difference is the motivation of the heart. Trying to be noticed for good deeds is condemned by Jesus; it is not the same as living a life of goodness because one desires to honor and glorify God.

It is critical for followers of Jesus to have their words and their actions align. To bear witness to Christ requires the message of the gospel to be spoken. At the same time, those words must be backed with a life that validates and confirms the message through humility, confession, compassion, peacemaking, and purity.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been blessed by God with salvation through Jesus, we live as salt and light in the world so that others might come to trust in Jesus.

HEAD:

Jesus has come into the world to teach us and show us by His words and actions what the kingdom of heaven looks like. Because He has rescued us from sin and death, He has transferred us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (see Col. 1:13). Because He has renewed us, we can follow His teachings and grow more like Him to reveal God's glory to the world.

How does knowing Jesus by faith change your life so that you can live for God's glory?

HEART:

God promised to bring through Abraham's line a Messiah who would bless the world (Gen. 12:3). Now Jesus Christ comes bringing the blessing of the kingdom. Through Jesus's dying and rising again for our forgiveness of sins, we no longer live according to the patterns of our culture and age but according to the kingdom of heaven. As a result, Christians can live with greater joy knowing that all of heaven's blessings have been purchased for us through Christ Jesus.

What are some ways you can express your joy for the blessings Christ has purchased for you?

HANDS:

Now that we belong to a different kingdom with values and practices that reflect heaven, we long for others to see and hear about the good news of Jesus, our Savior. Our actions, from the smallest to the greatest, are the good works that God has prepared for us to do (see Eph. 2:10). Our actions can be used by God to be salt in this world and to reflect the light of His kingdom. As we do good, God will provide us with opportunities to speak about Christ.

Whom can you pray for and talk to this week about the joy of Christ's forgiveness?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first."²

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
(1899–1981)

EXTRA

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE BLESSED (MATT. 5:3-12).

+ COMMENTARY

“Is it not true that when we turn to the Beatitudes we find them to be a portrait of Jesus? Who is the man who was poor in spirit but who possessed the kingdom of heaven? Jesus! . . . Who is the man who mourned and yet was comforted? Certainly, it is Jesus! . . . It is possible to find verses that identify each statement of character in the Beatitudes with Jesus, to show that he is the meek One, the One who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, the One persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and so on.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

Bring a photo of a family member that you resemble or locate a picture of a famous family where there are noticeable similarities between family members. Share the picture with the group and ask them to describe the resemblances they notice. What character traits are similar to other family members? To parents or grandparents? Beyond the physical character traits, ask if anyone has a similar personality or habit or style like their parent or grandparent.

When Jesus taught about the nature of the kingdom of heaven, He was describing what His very own character and heart is like. By bringing heaven to us, Jesus embodies for us the values of heaven. Through His words and actions that are recorded for us in the Gospel accounts, we are able to see in action what each of these Beatitudes looks like. As they are a description of Jesus’s very character and heart, so should they be ours. Do we look like Jesus? Do we have similar character traits? Can others see Jesus in us?

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Break up into smaller groups and have each group write each line of the Beatitudes in an antithetical way. For example, “Blessed are the prideful,” etc. Encourage creativity and uses of modern verbiage. Have each smaller group share their “Anti-Beatitudes” with the rest of the group. Discuss, “What do you think our world would be like (or perhaps already is like) if we lived with these values?”

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS' DISCIPLES ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH (MATT. 5:13).

+ COMMENTARY

“Having described the appropriate lifestyle of disciples, Jesus now explains that a ‘disciple’ who does not live this lifestyle of the kingdom is worth about as much as tasteless salt or invisible light—nothing. Nominal disciples who do not live a life of discipleship will be ‘thrown out and trampled under foot.’”⁴

+ ILLUSTRATION

Marie Kondo came to prominence in 2019 with her show *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*. What made Kondo’s method of organization so intriguing to many was the idea of gathering together one’s belongings as organized by type, then keeping only those things that “sparked joy.” Then one could decide where the item could be placed. By learning more about oneself, Kondo sought to help people minimize the clutter, organize their space, and live a better life.⁵

Thankfully, our place in the kingdom of heaven is not determined by what we own but by the transforming power of the gospel. By knowing who Jesus is, we discover the blessed life. God’s joy creates a happiness (or “blessedness”) in us that enables us to be productive disciples. As we remove the clutter of sin and follow in the ways of Jesus, we will not be ineffective for the sake of the kingdom but will be salt. By removing sinful patterns and habits from our lives that keep us from being effective disciples for Jesus Christ and by embracing the values of the kingdom, we will cease to find our lives filled with clutter and instead be filled with the joy of the kingdom and of effective service in the name of the King.

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Bring a type of food to class that wouldn’t taste as good without salt: slices of cooked potatoes, perhaps, or popcorn, or if you have the time, a pot of vegetable soup. Bring salt as well. Have the group or just one or two people taste the difference between one food item with salt and one without. Ask them to describe the difference in taste. One would be flavorless, unenjoyable, unfulfilling, bland. While the one with salt would be flavorful, delicious, satisfying, desirable.

Jesus used a great everyday example in describing us, His disciples, as salt. Not only does salt preserve, is lasting, and is healing, it also is enjoyable and flavorful. Ask your group, “Are we as Christians enjoyable to the world, bringing flavor to it? Are others drawn to us?” Let the conversation move to why they believe the world is drawn to Christians or not.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE THE LIGHT OF THIS WORLD (MATT. 5:14-16).

+ COMMENTARY

“Let us never forget that light must first be imparted to us, or it can never go forth from us. We are not lights of the world by nature; at best we are but lamps unlit until the Spirit of God comes.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Display an item of clothing with a reflective strip (a safety vest, sports equipment) and shine a flashlight onto the reflective strip. Consider how the item is illuminated. There are two necessary components for the reflective strip to shine. First, it requires a light from outside of itself. The reflective strip on its own is unable to illumine anything unless it first has a light shone upon it. Second, the reflective strip is made of a particular type of material that enables it to radiate the light off of it to its surrounding viewers with a brilliance that cannot be missed.

In the same way, God has made His people to be reflective agents of His glorious light. He shines the light of the gospel of the glory of God into our hearts (see 2 Cor. 4:4,6). As His light shines into our hearts, He re-creates us and makes us to be the kind of people who radiate His glory back to the world through our words and actions. We are not the source of light but reflectors of His goodness and grace.

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Bring a flashlight, a candy bar, and a can of tuna to your group meeting. If possible, make your room as dark as possible. Place the candy bar and can of tuna somewhere in the room. Give the flashlight to someone in your dark room and ask him to try to find the candy bar or tuna. Whatever he shines the light on first, he has to eat or take.

Jesus wants us to shine our light. If we are a flashlight, we are meant to shine, but if we are not turned on, we are useless and ineffective. Also, our lives can shine on things that are good and things that are not so good. Others should see that our lives are shining our light on things that are good, especially the good news of the gospel and the goodness of Christ so that others may turn to Him, repent, believe, and be saved to join in the kingdom of heaven.

Ask your group, “What is your light shining on or revealing to others?” Have an answer from your own life to start the conversation, sharing a good thing or a bad thing or both that your light is shining on.

References

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3. James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 15.
4. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 172.
5. Jade Sandberg Wallis, *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* (Santa Monica, CA: The Jackal Group, 2019).
6. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 19 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publishing, 1971), 242.

DISCIPLES LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples give secretly (Matt. 6:1-4).
2. Jesus's disciples pray sincerely (Matt. 6:5-15).
3. Jesus's disciples fast humbly (Matt. 6:16-18).

Background Passage: Matthew 6

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The actions of those who follow Jesus are done not for their own notoriety but rather so that they might grow in their faith and please the Father.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus warned His disciples not to act for their own glory or seek reward from others. Rather, when they seek God's glory, they will receive reward from Him. Jesus demonstrated this truth when He took on flesh, suffered, and died on the cross. Through Jesus's humble obedience, the Father has been glorified, and He was rewarded for His faithfulness.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have come to recognize the world's rewards as fleeting and unfulfilling, we seek to live each day in view of eternity, joyfully sacrificing what is temporary for that which is eternal.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: As Jesus taught His disciples about the nature of the kingdom, He was pointing them to the reality that His kingdom was a different kind of kingdom than what they were expecting. While many wanted the physical kingdom, the overthrow of Rome and the liberation of the promised land, Jesus's message in the Sermon on the Mount offered a better kingdom—a heavenly kingdom that had come to change the way followers of Jesus live, reorienting their practices and purposes for doing their righteous deeds.

EXPLAIN: Often people are tempted to look spiritual without having the depth of true spirituality in their lives.

DISCUSS: What are some ways people put on the appearances of being spiritual? (people can be tempted to carry a Bible or wear spiritual symbols like a cross; some people dress up to go to church to seem more reverential; some people pray long prayers with sophisticated Christian language; others try to find seats of prominence or seek out leadership positions to be noticed by others)

TRANSITION: Jesus knows that we all are tempted toward exalting ourselves and showing how good we are spiritually. Instead of degrading spiritual acts, Jesus calls us to a reformation of behavior by calling us out of the public eye and drawing us into the secret place where only God our Father sees what we are doing. There, alone before our Father, are our acts of righteousness done for His glory alone.

POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES GIVE SECRETLY (MATT. 6:1-4).

1 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. **2** So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. **3** But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 6:1-4** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 1** commentary to highlight how Jesus gives us instructions on growing in our discipleship (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #86: Discipleship: Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. **Growing** in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal **instruction** from God’s Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

DISCUSS: How does Christ’s example enable us to live for God’s glory alone? (He was despised and rejected for us, so we don’t need to be approved by others; He left the glory of heaven by taking on the frailty of human flesh so we can learn to sacrifice for God’s glory alone; He lived and died to forgive us)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 2-4** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus told His **disciples** not to be hypocrites in giving merely for others to **see**.

DISCUSS: From Day 1 in the DDG: How can you grow in trusting the Lord to be generous to His work? (set a bigger budget for giving; be okay with spontaneous giving, even if it stretches your budget; seek out ways to give to those in need; pray for a more generous heart)

TRANSITION: Just as God sees our secret acts of giving, we can trust Him to act on our behalf when we come before Him in prayer.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 1 / Jesus began by stating the general principle that governs His teaching from 6:1-18: live out true righteousness. By contrasting true righteousness with false righteousness, Jesus showed His disciples what it means to live for self or to live for the glory of God. By having your perspective fixated on the things of this earth and the approval of people, the fewer rewards you will have in heaven. When your perspective is to please God and glorify Him, the rewards of heaven increase.

“Righteousness” must be understood in this context as right action and doing what pleases God (see Matt. 5:6,10,20). When Jesus spoke about doing righteousness, He was speaking about having the right motivation for doing good deeds. The deeds referred to in this passage are giving, fasting, and prayer. Having told His disciples that nothing less than perfection is required (5:48), He now calls them to practice their spirituality carefully. Just as the Beatitudes laid out the blessings of heaven for those who live for God’s glory, so the acts of true righteousness or piety must be performed to please God to receive the blessings of the kingdom of heaven.

What matters is the motivation of the heart (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). If the motive is to glorify self or to gain the approval of people, the deed has no value and will not result in any other reward than the one that was sought. The contrast in the opening verse is between the temporal, earthly reward and the permanent, heavenly reward.

The reason Jesus begins this section with a warning not to act for their own glory and for the reward of others is rooted in His own actions. In Philippians 2:6-11, Paul states that Jesus left the glories of heaven and took the form of a servant. By His humble obedience, Jesus sought the glory of His Father (Phil. 2:6-7), only saying what His Father told Him to speak (John 12:49) and doing everything for His Father’s glory (John 5:19). Jesus is our example on how we can live for God’s glory because He is our

substitute who removes the penalty and power of sin for those who trust in Him.

VERSES 2-4 / Throughout Scripture, God has commanded His people to give generously to those who are poor and needy (Deut. 15:11; Prov. 19:17). What draws Jesus’s attention here is not what is given but how it is given.

Giving, Jesus says, should not be done with loud trumpets announcing the giving of the gift. There is no evidence that trumpets (literally, the “shofar”) were blown when gifts were being given.¹ If not literal trumpets, Jesus may be referring to the act of “blowing your own horn”—drawing attention to yourself in some way to display how generous you are.

This self-attention, Jesus says, is what **“hypocrites do.”** Hypocrisy has to do with being two-faced, play-acting, or lacking in sincerity. Jesus meant that these people give without sincerity, acting as though they are giving for others when the motive is to be praised by other people. Jesus often condemned the Pharisees for hypocrisy (Matt. 15:3-9; 23:13,15,23,25,27,29) because they thought their actions were approved by God when they were self-deceived.

The method and motive of giving that Jesus commends is the kind of giving that is done **“in secret”** so that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing (6:3-4), indicating privacy and discretion in the act of giving so that people’s attention is not drawn to the act.

Acts of righteousness are never completely unnoticed. Jesus says that even a secret act is noticed by our Father in heaven, and the fact that He can see when no one else notices is an indication that these acts have been done genuinely for the glory of God rather than the praise of men. When no one notices or gives praise for having compassion on the poor and needy, then the gift has been truly given to the Lord for His praise and glory rather than the recognition of men.

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES PRAY SINCERELY (MATT. 6:5-15).

5 “Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. **6** But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. **7** When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. **8** Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him. **9** Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. **10** Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **11** Give us today our daily bread. **12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. **14** For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. **15** But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 6:5-15** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-8** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus tells His disciples to pray **sincerely** as the Father already knows their **needs**.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 9-15** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus gives His disciples a **model** of **prayer** to focus their prayers.

DISCUSS: What changes might we experience by beginning with a **focus on God in our prayers?** (we’d be able to see what God wants to accomplish in this world; our worries might seem lighter; our gratefulness might increase; we’d give God His due praise and authority over our lives)

TRANSITION: Just as we are to give and pray privately, Jesus shows us how to fast so that we do not draw attention to ourselves but give glory to God.

NOTES

DEBT

Something owed. Since God is the Creator and owner of all things, we are indebted to Him for everything we have. In prayer, as we ask God to forgive us our debt, we not only ask for forgiveness of sin but we acknowledge that nothing is ours. He is the giver of all things: provision and salvation.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“If only our hidden life with God is in order and there is within us a secret place of prayer and spiritual discipline and struggle! By this secret stillness and by this alone will God calculate the value and consequence of our life when the hour of reckoning and recompense comes.”²

—Helmut Thielicke
(1908–1986)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 5-8 / Jesus shifted His teaching about righteous deeds from giving to praying. Jesus opposed hypocritical prayer. Like those who give to the poor to be seen, Jesus said that praying in the synagogues and on the street corners with a desire to draw attention to oneself yields only the praise of men.

Jesus was not forbidding all public prayer; rather, He was teaching His disciples the primary form of prayer. It should be done **“in secret”** by closing the door and speaking to your Father who sees you. Through the regular habit of praying alone, Jesus’s followers focus on God alone and receive His loving and gracious rewards.

To further cultivate the practice of prayer that pleases and glorifies God, Jesus commended the practice of making our prayers focused and deliberate. The pagans would attempt to cover all of their bases by praying to every god to ensure divine favor. But believers should not use clichéd phrases, repeated words, and prayers that are rote and routine for the sake of gaining God’s ear. Instead, believers should bring their requests before their Father, trusting that He **“knows the things you need before you ask him”** and that He is able to do far more than they could ask for (Eph. 3:21). Like the author of Ecclesiastes wrote, “God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few” (Eccl. 5:2).

The righteous practice before God is to trust that Christ intercedes on behalf of believers and makes even the most stuttering, struggling prayer of few words glorifying to our Father who is in heaven.

VERSES 9-15 / Jesus gave His disciples a model of prayer, saying that they should pray **“like this,”** not necessarily to repeat this prayer word for word but as a model that would form the thoughts we’re bringing before God. The prayer of Jesus has six petitions—three directed to God and three speaking to our needs.

By starting with God rather than our needs, Jesus directed our prayers to glorify God the Father. The three petitions here glorify God’s name, His kingdom, and His will.

First, we are taught to pray to **“our Father in heaven.”** By the use of the word “our,” Jesus clarified that He prays with us and for us, just as we join our hearts together with other Christians. Because Jesus prays with us, what makes this prayer effective is not how eloquently we pray. Rather, what makes prayer effective is that Jesus intercedes for us, bringing our prayers before the Father (Rom. 8:34). As we pray, the focus of prayer is for God to be glorified: **“Your name be honored as holy”** (Matt. 6:9). As this redirects every petition, intercession, and confession, prayer becomes first and foremost about God and His glory.

Second, the request we are to bring is for God’s kingdom to come. Just as the Beatitudes began with a focus on the values of the kingdom, so this prayer begins with a request for God’s saving rule to come.

Third, the desire of prayer is not for our will to be done but for God’s sovereign purposes to be accomplished. To ask for God’s will to be done includes the furtherance of good through our deeds (Matt. 5:16) and also the glory of God in the face of evil, persecution, and insults (Matt. 5:10-12). Where humans intend evil, asking for God’s will to be done is to remind us that He works all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

The final three petitions have to do with our requests: for daily provision, forgiveness of sin, and to resist temptation. **“Daily bread”** is often taken for granted in a world of abundance, but we have nothing without God’s provision. Even as God’s mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23), we need a daily reminder to extend mercy to and forgive others. Finally, we are to pray that we would be guided into godly living—that we may resist temptation and not be led into evil but away from it and away from Satan, who would seek to deceive us.

POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES FAST HUMBLY (MATT. 6:16-18).

16 “Whenever you fast, don’t be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, **18** so that your fasting isn’t obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 6:16-18** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 16** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus tells His disciples not to **fast** in obvious ways to seek their own **glory**.

DISCUSS: What are some ways people seek to draw attention to their righteous deeds today? (through social media, people are often very vocal about cultural practices they oppose without ever having been involved in doing anything to stop the evil; others like to speak about the good things that they do in a way that makes others notice them; others practice certain types of social activism to appear on the “right side of history” so that they are perceived to be doing the right thing)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 17-18** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus continues telling His disciples that fasting, like other spiritual **disciplines**, should be done humbly and not **pridefully**.

DISCUSS: How might you grow in the discipline of fasting? (don’t start with a long fast, but learn how to practice short fasts by missing a meal and replacing it with time with the Lord in song, prayer, and confession; as you practice fasting more, consult a health expert to ensure that you do not act in a way that is dangerous to your health; if you have a health condition that might prohibit you from fasting, consult your doctor)

NOTES

FASTING

In Jewish tradition and New Testament times, fasting meant abstaining from food to focus on God in humility and in prayer, and in repentance and mourning, to emphasize dependence on God as a spiritual discipline, not as self-punishment.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 16 / Like the other practices of righteousness, Jesus assumed that it is not if but when you fast. Jesus instructed His followers first on what they are not to do. Like the previous two examples of giving and prayer, Jesus warned them not to be like the hypocrites, who performed their spiritual disciplines to be seen in an obvious way by people.

First, Jesus told His disciples not to be **“gloomy like the hypocrites,”** who would disfigure their faces to make it obvious they were fasting. With long faces and somber looks, with the look of hunger painted across their faces, the hypocrites appeared to be suffering in their efforts of holiness. Perhaps by avoiding self-care (washing, personal grooming), perhaps sprinkling ashes on one’s head to show penitence over sin, the hypocrites drew attention to themselves so that others noticed their sorrow and contrition.

The second thing that Jesus warned His disciples about was seeking the wrong reward. Hypocrites wanted to be noticed by others. The desire to be open and transparent wasn’t the problem. Their problem was that they coveted the praise of men while hiding behind the religious actions that looked like they were honoring God. While they looked holy on the outside, their flashy fast was similar to the Israelites in the time of Isaiah, who fasted and sought the Lord while practicing injustice (cf. Isa. 58:1-4).

Fasting is a reminder that we need God more than food, and it is living out the principle that Jesus will describe in Matthew 6:33—Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. To turn this act into something to gain the attention of others so that they would notice our piety and spirituality is to do the exact opposite of what it is intended to do—to remind us that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3).

VERSES 17-18 / The type of fasting that Jesus commended was different from that of the hypocrites. The solution to self-promotion is not eliminating righteous deeds but reorienting them properly. Since any deed of righteousness can be degraded into self-promotion, Jesus again encouraged secrecy. Jesus sees the motivation of the heart and knows when we are fasting to connect closely to God’s will. Jesus knows that we are not only physically weak in our fasting but are spiritually weak as well. So He reorients the heart to desire to know Him and love Him above all else, even food.

Instead of making it appear like they were fasting, Jesus instructed His disciples to appear like they were going about their normal day. By washing, putting oil on the face, by practicing self-care, no one should be able to discern what is going on between the believer and God on the inside.

Some have wondered if this passage contradicted Matthew 9:14-17. John the Baptist’s disciples approached Jesus and wondered, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” (9:14). Was John wrong in encouraging his disciples to fast? John called people to repent because the kingdom of God was near (Matt. 3:1-2). John’s fast was similar to the Old Testament fasting to plead for God’s mercy and forgiveness of sin (cf. 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 12:33; Esth. 4:3). Jesus stated that His disciples were not to fast while He was with them because no one mourns at a wedding (Matt. 9:15), and He was the bridegroom. Of course, Jesus knew there would come a time when He would not be with them. At present, they could delight in the Son’s presence, but after His death, resurrection, and ascension, He would not be with them physically, and then they would practice fasting.

Doing the right thing is not sufficient to glorify God. Christians “do the right thing” because our souls delight in God for who He is and for His glory. We do the right thing “for the right reasons.”

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to recognize the world's rewards as fleeting and unfulfilling, we seek to live each day in view of eternity, joyfully sacrificing what is temporary for that which is eternal.

HEAD:

God desires that our actions should be rooted in His glory. Because Christ came to earth, took on flesh, lived in perfect obedience to His Father's commands, and died in our place to forgive us from sin and death, we now have been freed from selfish pursuits and are enabled to live for God's glory. We can glorify God by trusting in the perfect work of His Son and do our acts of righteousness without being seen by others.

How does Christ's sacrificial death free you from living for yourself?

HEART:

Since Christ teaches us to do our acts of righteousness in secret and has been our perfect righteousness by dying for our sins and rising again for our justification, we are freed from having to perform and prove ourselves before others. With this freedom, we can thank God that He is able to take our strongest and our weakest efforts for Him and use them to bring honor and glory to His name and that our reward in heaven is secure.

How can you rejoice in the freedom that Christ brings to your soul?

HANDS:

Since our actions are to glorify God, we can trust that whether people see them or not, God will use our good deeds before others to glorify Him and give us opportunities to speak about the glory of Christ. We can give, pray, and fast and believe that God will use us to be a light that shines for Him and glorify Him. We do not need the praise of people; instead, we can live for eternity and give sacrificially of our time, talents, and resources so that others might come to know Christ.

What sacrifice can you make for someone else this week to point them to Christ for God's glory?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"O, how easy it is to do religious things if other people are watching! Preaching, praying, attending church, reading the Bible, acts of kindness and charity—they all take on a certain pleasantness of the ego if we know that others will find out about them and think well of us. It is a deadly addiction for esteem that we have."³

—John Piper

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES GIVE SECRETLY (MATT. 6:1-4).

+ COMMENTARY

"In this case, the hypocrite has talked himself into believing that at heart, he is conducting himself with the best interests of the needy in mind. He may thus be unaware of his own hypocrisy. Moreover, the needy themselves are not likely to complain; they will be touchingly grateful, and contribute to the giver's self-delusion. And all but the most discerning of onlookers will speak appreciatively of the philanthropist's deed, for all acknowledge that giving is good."⁴

+ COMMENTARY

"There's no denying that disciples of Jesus will continue to struggle with wanting man's approval. At times we desire the applause of men and we seek to win their approval, but there should at least be combat against those sinful desires in a heart changed by God. Our ultimate desire should be for God's recognition, regardless of what man says. We shouldn't give in order to impress others, we shouldn't pray in a way that highlights our spirituality, and we shouldn't fast so that others are aware of our supposed humility. Rather, new desires are part and parcel of the exceeding righteousness Jesus is bringing about in His people."⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

At many playgrounds where upgrades have been done or at concerts where the costs have been great, recognition is given to those who have helped out. Stones are etched with donors' names; plaques are erected listing all of the benefactors; lists of sponsors are printed in the program. In the fine arts, concert series are named after organizations who donate large sums of money as sponsors for the event. And in the world of sports, marketing is closely tied with corporate sponsorship: fields are named after businesses, donors sponsor various aspects of the game. All of this self-promotion is not merely for the good of the game but is seen as a key tool to promote one's business, to drum up further sales, and to gain attention to one's product or service.

This practice of marketing and advertising is so pervasive and normal around us that we fail to see how much it influences us. For the church and for each individual Christian, however, the motivation for giving is not a marketing ploy or an attempt to brand oneself. When Christians or churches seek to market, the confusion between self-promotion and evangelism can become blurred very quickly. Knowing that our hearts can be deceived easily and we can fool ourselves,

EXTRA

Jesus commends the practice of giving so that others are not drawn to our gift and our actions; rather, the aim should be that we do our good deeds so that if people see them, they give glory to our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

POINT 2: JESUS'S DISCIPLES PRAY SINCERELY (MATT. 6:5-15).

+ COMMENTARY

“Who understands in all of its ramifications even the opening words, ‘Our Father who art in heaven’? For if I understood these words in faith—that the God who holds heaven and earth in his hand is my Father—I would conclude that therefore I am lord of heaven and earth, therefore Christ is my brother.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Most people struggle to pray, especially in private prayer. Consider the various things that make it difficult: in the silence, our minds wander from prayer to things we need to do, to items we’ve forgotten. Our prayers feel ineffectual because to stop, to sit silently, to concentrate is so hard in a world of distractions, constant messages, and information overload. We no sooner begin than feel like giving up because prayer is just so hard and feels so ineffectual.

While the distractions are many, it is tempting to think that it would be easier to live and to pray if we knew that Christ was right there with us, talking with us, sitting next to us. Robert Murray McCheyne has been quoted as saying, “If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million of enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference; He is praying for me.”⁷

Here is the great joy of the Christian life: Jesus teaches us that when we pray, we do not pray alone. “Our Father” means that Christ, our brother, prays with us and for us. He stands as our intercessor, making our prayer effectual before the Father.

Therefore, to pray the Lord’s prayer is to begin with the reminder that God, our Father, is the ruler of the universe, and He has given His very own Son, my Savior and brother and friend, to intercede with me and for me. To pray the Lord’s prayer is to join with all of the power of Christ in heaven and have our hearts strengthened even when we offer feeble, stumbling prayers.

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

There are a few acronyms to help us pray in the manner that Jesus models. One is CAST, as reflected in the verse 1 Peter 5:7, telling us to CAST all our care on Christ for He cares for us: **C**onfession, **A**doration, **S**upplication, and **T**hanksgiving. Some use ACTS in a similar way: **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication. Others use PRAY: **P**raise, **R**epent, **A**sk, and **Y**ield.

Share with your group these different acronyms to help them focus their prayers. Consider asking them to come up with their own acronym that might help the group in their prayers.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES FAST HUMBLY (MATT. 6:16-18).

+

COMMENTARY

“It’s important to notice what Jesus teaches His disciples here. Jesus doesn’t tell us to give up these practices. Jesus wants us to perform these actions. He wants us to give alms generously, to pray to our Father, to fast. Also it’s important to see that although Jesus is addressing issues of motivation, His actual instructions are not in the realm of motivation. When He condemns the hypocrites for doing righteousness to be seen by men, He doesn’t command his disciples: Don’t have bad motives . . . Jesus is concerned about the heart—anger and lust, for instance—but that His instructions are always about actions that we perform—reconciliation and plucking out the eye. The same is true here. What he tells us to do is very specific, concrete, active. He doesn’t tell us to stop thinking how we look before others. He tells us a different mode for performing these acts of righteousness. And the accent is on secrecy. We are to change motivations; but motivations are being challenged here by changes in practice.”⁸

+

ILLUSTRATION

When baseball players get into a slump and aren’t hitting the ball, batting coaches begin to analyze what might help them change things up. In order to perform better in the batter’s box and produce hits and runs for the team, something needs to change. By analyzing the data, coaches begin to work on various aspects to increase their players’ effectiveness. By adjusting the position of the hands or changing how far apart a player’s feet are in the box, the motion or speed of the bat’s swing, and different postures or stances, then taking them out of the spotlight of the game, outside the watching eyes of fans, and spending hours and hours in the batter’s box in practice, what was ineffective is replaced with new patterns and behaviors. Hundreds of pitches are sent their way, seeking to make the smallest of adjustments outside the pressure of game time.

In a similar way, Jesus sees that our actions could be analyzed and considered over and over. But what we need is to change our practice. It might be hard at first to get rid of the old ways of doing things, but by taking us into secret places, out of the limelight, and simply into the presence of the Father, as we give without being noticed, pray in secret, and fast without anyone noticing, the motivations of the heart will change. What practices do you need to take into the secret place before the Lord?

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DISCIPLES ARE FOUND

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The lost are sought with urgency (Luke 15:3-7).
2. The lost are sought with diligence (Luke 15:8-10).
3. The lost are sought with compassion (Luke 15:11-24).

Background Passage: Luke 15

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In telling the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son, Jesus expressed God's heart, one that seeks after lost people.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The Pharisees and scribes criticized Jesus for welcoming sinners and dining with them. In response, Jesus told three stories depicting God's heart to search after the lost. Heaven rejoices over all sinners who repent and trust in Jesus, the Savior, who came to seek and save the lost.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been forgiven of our sin through Jesus, we celebrate the Father's goodness in welcoming home any repentant sinner.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: The kingdom of heaven that Jesus brings reorients all of humanity's priorities, understandings, and thoughts. By realigning human hearts to God's ways about what it means to be blessed and how to practice righteous deeds, Jesus turns His disciples' attention to why He has come to bring about this radical reorientation: namely, to seek and save those who are lost (Luke 19:10).

EXPLAIN: Jesus came for the lost, and He will do anything to find them, even give His life.

DISCUSS: Describe a time you lost something of significance to you. What did you do when you discovered it was missing? (search extensively; enlist others to help find it; pray for it to be found; make a big mess just to find it; cry and be desperate)

TRANSITION: Because Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, He faced criticism from the religious leaders of His day. In response to His association with those who were outside of the faith and far from God's promises, Jesus said that this is why the Father sent Him into the world. He did not come for the "righteous" but for those who are sick with sin and needing a Savior.

POINT 1

THE LOST ARE SOUGHT WITH URGENCY (LUKE 15:3-7).

NOTES

3 So he told them this parable: **4** “What man among you, who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open field and go after the lost one until he finds it? **5** When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, **6** and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’ **7** I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don’t need repentance.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 15:3-7** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Pass out copies of and use **PACK ITEM 8: JESUS, THE SHEPHERD** along with the **VERSES 3-4** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus **values** every one of His sheep and will do anything to find one that is **lost**.

DISCUSS: What kind of people do some perceive to be beyond redemption in our day? (those who struggle with mental illness or drug use may seem beyond help because we don’t identify with their struggles; violent offenders are often perceived to be dangerous and too far gone; political people who seem to oppose Christian values may seem beyond the reach of the good news)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-7** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

When the lost are found, God and **heaven rejoice**.

TRANSITION: Just as the lost sheep was sought after with great urgency because of its precarious situation, Jesus reminds us in the next parable that the lost are sought out with great diligence, doing what is necessary to find them.



VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God; he, to rescue me from danger, bought me with his precious blood.”¹

—Robert Robinson
(1735–1790)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 3-4 / In the context of Luke 15, the Pharisees had criticized Jesus for welcoming and receiving sinners. Instead of sending them away, Jesus allowed people of disrepute to listen to His teaching, and He ate with them. For the Pharisees, this was a sign that Jesus could not be trusted. Bad company corrupts good character (1 Cor. 15:33), after all, so they believed that Jesus was a man of low morals and standards.

In reality, the Pharisees misunderstood the entire situation. Jesus turned the entire scenario around by telling the Pharisees a parable about a lost sheep. Beginning with the picture of a shepherd who is caring for one hundred sheep, Jesus recounted how a faithful shepherd goes and searches urgently for one single lost sheep. Knowing that sheep wander away and get themselves into danger, Jesus compared Himself to a good shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in the open field to bring back the one that is lost and in danger.

In the Old Testament, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned Israel about being unfaithful and about having poor leaders who did not care for the people. These leaders did not care for those who were broken, wounded, and hurting. Unlike the bad shepherds of Israel who scattered God's flock (Jer. 23:2) and who purposefully allowed sheep to wander, not bringing them back (Ezek. 34:4-6), Jesus stated that He is the shepherd whom God had promised to send to bring back the scattered sheep (Ezek. 34:11-12). God described Himself through the prophet Ezekiel years before as the One who seeks the lost, brings back the strays, bandages the injured, and strengthens the weak (34:16). "You are my flock, the human flock of my pasture, and I am your God" (34:31a). Knowing that a sheep was lost, Jesus cannot be content to leave it out of the fold like the Pharisees. Rather, He was willing to go immediately and extensively until He found His lost sheep (Luke 15:4).

In Jesus's eyes, the tax collectors and sinners were the very ones that the Pharisees were neglecting as Israel's shepherds. The outcasts, outside of the faith, apart from God, were the very ones that Jesus came for.

VERSES 5-7 / Jesus described the task of the shepherd finding and carrying his sheep back to the flock with joy (Luke 15:5) and celebration with his friends (v. 6). Jesus said that this celebration also occurs **"in heaven over one sinner who repents"** and is brought into God's fold.

First, Jesus said the shepherd carried the sheep **"on his shoulders."** Laying the sheep over his back, the shepherd would endure the burdensome journey of taking the animal out of danger and back to the other sheep. To carry a sheep over rugged terrain would be no small task. A full-grown sheep can weigh 80-100 pounds and would require much effort on the part of the shepherd.

Upon returning home, the shepherd threw a party (v. 6). For the shepherd, the celebration began upon finding the sheep. But upon arriving back home, he calls his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him at the discovery of the lost sheep. Concluding this part of the parable, Jesus stated that there is **"more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people"** who do not stray from the fold.

In truth, we all are like sheep who turn astray and go our own way by rebelling against God (Isa. 53:6). Jesus took the burden of our sin by going to the cross, dying in our place, and carrying us home to God (1 Pet. 3:18).

While the Pharisees neglected those who were lost, wounded, suffering, and outside of the faith, Jesus welcomed them so that they might be brought into the fold of God when they repented from sin and trusted in His saving work.

POINT 2

THE LOST ARE SOUGHT WITH DILIGENCE

(LUKE 15:8-10).

8 “Or what woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? **9** When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the silver coin I lost!’ **10** I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels over one sinner who repents.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 15:8-10** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 8** commentary to highlight the doctrine of election and how God works in saving His people (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #65: Election: Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He **regenerates**, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God’s **sovereign** goodness and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

DISCUSS: How does the doctrine of election humble us and keep us from exalting ourselves? (reminds us that we are dead in our trespasses and sins [cf. Eph. 2:1-3]; instead of giving us any room for us to boast, we delight in God’s gracious work to save us; we don’t boast that we made the first move toward God, but we boast in God first moving toward us by His grace)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 9-10** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Joy is the expected result over even **one** sinner who **repents**.

DISCUSS: How might we rejoice with those who come to faith in Jesus? (consider throwing a party to celebrate someone’s newfound faith; attend a baptism of someone who has made a profession and is publicly declaring that she is following Christ Jesus; share the newfound enthusiasm of new believers by helping them share their faith in an effective way; consider helping them write out their story of salvation so that they can share this with others)

TRANSITION: Just as there was one lost sheep in a flock of one hundred and one lost coin out of ten, Jesus finished His parables about His saving work by talking about a lost son. This progression from a large group down to individuals helps us see why Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 8 / In the second parable of three, Jesus told about a woman who lost one of her ten coins. She lit a lamp, swept the house from corner to corner, and diligently searched until she found it. Like the first parable, Jesus used a common image to explain to the Pharisees why He welcomed sinners. Jesus has come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). When Jesus shared a meal with the tax collectors and sinners, it was to have a relationship with them and invite them into the kingdom of God. He knew they were lost and needed to be found.

The way Jesus described the woman's search for the lost coin is how He searches for sinners—**"carefully."** Jesus came to find all those for whom He would die, for all those who would believe. This is the teaching of the doctrine of election. Election is the work of God in which He saves sinners through His gracious choice to save sinners from sin and death to show His goodness and kindness in reconciling a people to Himself. Like the first parable of the lost sheep, the sheep and the coin were not able to **"find"** themselves. As we will see in the last parable, the lost son would be restored not because he was worthy but because of the gracious choice of the Father.

Another unique aspect of this parable is that it is a woman who diligently searches for the coin. In his analysis on Luke's Gospel, Kenneth Bailey has noted that the traditional approach to this story by other rabbis was to communicate about a man who found the lost coin. Here, Jesus shows the dignity, value, and glory of women by not only teaching about them but by using a female character to illustrate the character of God.² Jesus certainly displayed His love for women, their value in the kingdom, and taught that the heart of God was like a diligent woman searching for a coin. God is not ashamed to associate His saving work with the compassionate heart of a woman (see Isa. 66:13) because women are made in His image and receive the saving message of the gospel without distinction

from men. Jesus's love for the lost is for all people, men and women from all types of backgrounds.

VERSES 9-10 / When the woman finds the coin in the parable, Jesus said that she called her friends and neighbors together so that they could celebrate at the discovery of the lost silver coin.

The story of the coin communicates something about how we are precious to God. The coin was precious to the woman because it represented a day's wage. Think of how you would frantically search the house for a day's paycheck that was misplaced. No wonder she celebrated! The diligence that the woman spent on finding the lost coin communicates the extent to which God goes to rescue sinners. Like a coin stamped with the image of the emperor, we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Sin has marred that image, and we have failed to acknowledge that He alone is God. But because of God's goodness and grace, He loves us and sent His Son to bring us back to Himself.

When the woman found the coin, friends and neighbors joined in her joy and relief. Jesus compared the shared joy of the woman with the joy of angels when a sinner repents. Angels long to look into the joy of the mystery of salvation (1 Pet. 1:12) because they do not experience personal salvation. They rejoice at seeing God mercifully and powerfully accomplish His work of rescuing sinners from sin.

It is also interesting to see that Jesus started out the first parable with one missing sheep out of a hundred. The lost coin was one out of ten. In the next parable, Jesus would tell of a man with two sons, and one of them was clearly lost (the other more subtly so). Jesus showed that He did not just come to save a large, faceless group but individual people whom He loves.

POINT 3

THE LOST ARE SOUGHT WITH COMPASSION (LUKE 15:11-24).

NOTES

11 He also said, “A man had two sons. **12** The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.’ So he distributed the assets to them. **13** Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. **14** After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. **15** Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything. **17** When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! **18** I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. **19** I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.”’ **20** So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. **21** The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’ **22** But the father told his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, **24** because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 15:11-24** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 11-19** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The son was **lost** at his own doing but was **restored** by the father’s doing.

DISCUSS: What are some reasons people seek restoration? (relational difficulties or financial problems; hitting rock bottom in sin; realizing we’re lost)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 20-24** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The Father runs to us and **rejoices** when we **return** to Him.

DISCUSS: From Day 5 in the DDG: How do you respond when someone who seems undeserving of salvation comes to faith? (joyful; skeptical; unnerved; surprised; angry; jealous; relieved)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 11-19 / In Jesus's final "lost" parable, Jesus told the story of a man who had two sons. The younger of the two demanded that he receive his portion of the inheritance, treating his father as though his father were as good as dead to him. The father acquiesced, giving the assets to him, and soon after, the son headed out, away from the land of promise to a faraway, distant land.

While he was living there, he squandered his wealth on wild, reckless living, spending it on sexual pleasures and prostitutes (Luke 15:30). But when the economic circumstances changed due to a severe famine, and without any economic resources to sustain him, the lost son hired himself out to someone, feeding pigs. These unclean animals (Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8) would have been detestable to any good Jew. As bad as it was to care for unclean pigs, the son was so desperate for food that he considered eating the pods the pigs ate since no one would help him (Luke 15:16). Unlike the Israelites who were encouraged to care for the hungry servants and foreigners among them (cf. Deut. 24:14-15), the Gentiles among whom the young man lived felt no burden to see to his basic needs. With his hunger growing, he came to his senses and realized that it would be better to return home to his father, humble himself, and be treated like a slave there (Luke 15:17-20).

Preparing his speech that he would give to his father, the son set off for home, ready to accept that he would not be in a position to acknowledge or even receive the benefits of sonship any longer. With hunger driving him back home and with a desire to survive, the son did not return home to restore the relationship with his father. Perhaps he believed he had fallen so far that the relationship was irreconcilable. Perhaps he hoped he could work off his debt, however long it would take him to do so. The younger son returned home without an expectation to reconcile with his father but to come as a beggar groveling for food.

VERSES 20-24 / While the son was a long way from home, the father saw him. The father was on the lookout for his son's return. Upon seeing his son, the father's heart was filled with compassion (v. 20). The father shows his compassion by running to embrace his son with arms of love and kisses of acceptance. Embraced by his father, the son can only blurt out that he sinned against heaven and against his father; he was unworthy to be called a son. But this was as far as he got. The father would have no more of his son's groveling. Instead, he eagerly restored his younger son to his place in the home.

While every remaining asset now belonged to the older son (v. 12), the father ordered his servants to bring the best robe, sandals, and the fattened calf to celebrate the return of his prodigal son. The feast that the father throws outstrips the other celebrations of the shepherd (v. 6) and the woman (v. 9). The son, as good as dead, had returned and was, in fact, alive!

Just as we who are dead in our trespasses and sins are made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1-9), the father's welcoming the son is a picture of God's exuberant joy in welcoming sinners who repent of their sin and turn to Him. We are lost like the sheep, helpless like the coin, and foolish like the younger son. But human lostness, helplessness, and folly are no match for the saving power of our Lord. He comes to find the lost, rescue the helpless, and bring wisdom to the foolish.

This story highlights Jesus's unrivaled grace. While the son did not deserve to be welcomed home, treated as a member of the family, or celebrated for his return, the father's heart points to God's compassion for anyone who turns from their sins and trusts in the forgiveness that Christ offers by His death.

MY RESPONSE



NOTES

PACK ITEM 9: AMAZING GRACE HYMN: Pass out copies of this hymn and sing it together as a reminder of the amazing grace of God to seek out sinners and rejoice over their salvation.

Because we have been forgiven of our sin through Jesus, we celebrate the Father's goodness in welcoming home any repentant sinner.

HEAD:

God is a gracious God whose plan of salvation meant that He would chose to rescue sinners from sin and death by sending His own Son to die for their sins. God's heart is to redeem and rescue sinners, and it is only because He seeks out the lost that anyone can come to Him in faith. We can be thankful for God's gracious plan of salvation.

What are some ways you can thank God today for how He saved you?

HEART:

While the Pharisees of Jesus's day were critical of His association with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus's parables paint a picture of a God who delights to have sinners come to Him in repentance and faith. Our repentance and confession are a continual part of our journey of faith.

What do you need to confess and repent of in your life this week?

HANDS:

Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Because God is not ashamed to call us His children and to save us from sin and death by the blood of His Son, we ought to resist the temptation to be skeptical of others who place their faith in Christ. Instead, we should be eager to share the joy of salvation by speaking to others about the saving work of Jesus Christ, praying that others would join us in knowing the great pleasure of belonging to Him.

Who has God put in your life who is lost and needs to be found?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch; like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see."³

—John Newton
(1725–1807)

POINT 1: THE LOST ARE SOUGHT WITH URGENCY (LUKE 15:3-7).

+ COMMENTARY

“How different this was from what most of the old Jewish rabbis taught about sin and grace. According to their understanding of salvation, a sinner had to turn back to God first. It was his act of repentance that would restore God’s favor. In other words, if a sheep wanted to come under the care of the shepherd, it had to find its way back to the fold. Many people think the same way today. They know they are lost and hope that God will still accept them, but they imagine that they have to find their way back on their own. God will not come to them; they must go to him. The Bible does tell us to seek after God, of course. But here Jesus bears witness to God’s saving initiative in grace. Like the shepherd in the story, God ‘goes after’ his sheep (Luke 15:4).”⁴

+ COMMENTARY

“God is committed to finding the lost, as this chapter explains. Jesus deals with the contrast between this divine attitude and the temptation among many believers to ignore the lost. Jesus once again chooses the scribes and Pharisees as the foil for his comparison. They cannot believe that he is spending so much time receiving sinners and eating with them. Such table fellowship represents an absence of the separation they think righteousness demands. Jesus argues, however, that the call of God demands time be spent seeking the lost.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

In the 1990s, Rosaria Butterfield was a committed feminist and activist for LGBTQ+ rights at Syracuse University, where she taught from 1992–2002. In 1997, she began to research and write about the religious right, specifically against Promise Keepers, the men’s ministry that was holding a rally in the Syracuse area. Her article caused Ken Smith, a local pastor, to reach out to her. His letter impressed Butterfield due to his gentle and kind nature, posing genuine questions for her to wrestle with. With an upcoming project on the Bible, Butterfield thought it would be helpful to reach out to Smith for further conversations. What she found was a humble man whose door was open and whose table was inviting. Butterfield found that Smith’s home welcomed people who had differing views and treated them with dignity and respect. With a hand that welcomed her as a neighbor, Butterfield found herself on the path toward Christianity, a path that would eventually lead to her profession of faith in Christ.⁶

EXTRA

So often we fear people who are different than us. Yet what Ken Smith did was what Christ did—he welcomed and received sinners around his table. Being willing to dialogue with them, Smith found a woman who was willing to talk openly, and he shared his life and beliefs with her. This is what Jesus came to do in Luke 15. He willingly ate with people who weren't like Him because He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Jesus feasted with sinners. As a group, think of an upcoming holiday or celebration that someone would be willing to host a dinner party for. It could be a potluck that everyone brings a dish to or just a few people who want to can host the dinner. The only “entrance ticket” though is for each person or couple to bring a friend who has yet to believe.

Sometimes it's difficult for us to get out of our Christian friend bubble or make time for those who are lost. As a group, consider being intentional on setting a time and a place for a dinner that welcomes guests from all backgrounds of life.

POINT 2: THE LOST ARE SOUGHT WITH DILIGENCE (LUKE 15:8-10).

+ COMMENTARY

“The coin is lifeless, it cannot move, it can certainly not find its own way back like the son, it cannot even bleat for help like the sheep. Of course in some senses lost mankind is not, like the silver coin, inanimate. But spiritually—from the point of the view of the Spirit—it is lifeless; and the coin is an apt symbol of those who see the requirements of God and know themselves incapable of rising to them. Only the all-powerful Spirit can rescue men who in that sense are lost.”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

When the doctrine of election is presented, people often misunderstand its teaching. They think of God standing at heaven's gate while men and women are running to get into the door, and God says to certain ones, “Yes, come in. No, not you. But you, over there, you can come in!” God is perceived to be unfair and acting in a way that excludes people who might otherwise want to come to Him.

But this is not the picture that Scripture presents. God is standing, arms wide open, inviting all to come. Yet everyone is running away from God, as fast as they can, toward death and destruction in hell. So God, in His gracious act of election, graciously reaches out and stops people from continuing on this path. He changes their hearts so that their will is changed and they want to come to Him. And by His gracious act of regenerating hearts, people believe by faith and embrace God in His goodness and grace, fleeing from sin and death and hell and embracing the promises of Christ.

Election does not keep anyone out of heaven who would want to be there; rather, it says that sinners would never choose God unless God first chose them. To end up in hell is entirely one's choice. But God chooses to save sinners because of His great grace.

POINT 3: THE LOST ARE SOUGHT WITH COMPASSION

(LUKE 15:11-24).

+ COMMENTARY

“Here the younger son asks for his inheritance now, which was a sign of deep disrespect. To ask this while the father still lived was the same as to wish him dead. The younger son was saying, essentially, that he wants his father’s things, but not his father. His relationship to the father has been a means to an end of enjoying wealth, and now he is weary of that relationship. He wants out. Now. ‘Give me what is mine,’ he says.”⁸

+ COMMENTARY

“This is what living apart from Christ looks like from the vantage point of heaven. God the Father watches his rich but rebellious children squander his love and his riches as they run from him to the far country of sin. Sinners want all the goodness of God’s creation and all the enjoyment of God’s blessings, but they do not want God himself. They do not understand his fatherhood. They refuse to return his love. Unless God restrains the sinner, they squander their lives and waste away as they chase every desire of the flesh. ‘Life’ apart from God is really a slow death. Apart from God we are living to die. But repentance is dying to live. It is dying to self that allows us to find life in the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

There is nothing quite as terrible as feeling that you are being used, not wanted for a relationship. When you are wanted just for what you have but not for who you are, the sense of value, connection, and dignity of the relationship is brought into question.

Ask your group if anyone would like to share a time when someone used them for their own benefit. Maybe when they were younger, someone befriended them to cheat off them for a test or merely to get to know another friend of theirs. Maybe a salesman flattered them so they would buy something.

Sometimes we must ask ourselves if we want God for the sake of God or for what He provides—loving Him simply for what He can do for us. Instead of treating Him like the lover of our soul, this action treats God like He is a magic genie, a candy dispenser, or a cheap thrill.

If we want the good life without God as our greatest delight, we are no different than the prodigal, who merely wants his father’s gifts but not his father’s face.

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DISCIPLES LIVE FOR THE KINGDOM

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Growth of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:31-33)
2. The Value of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:44-46)
3. The Purity of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:47-50)

Background Passage: Matthew 13

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In telling the kingdom parables, Jesus taught that His kingdom is unique and of unsurpassed value.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus told parables to describe the nature of God's kingdom on earth. No earthly kingdom is like God's kingdom, a kingdom of exceeding value. When Jesus returns, we will experience the full manifestation of God's kingdom.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have come to know the unmatched value of God's kingdom, we live willing to sacrifice everything so that others may be part of the kingdom through faith in Jesus.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: Having come to seek and to save the lost, Jesus now tells His followers what a life devoted to Him looks like. Those who have been pursued and rescued by God will now in turn pursue His kingdom and His righteousness. Jesus illustrates this discipleship by telling His listeners several parables about the kingdom of heaven. By telling these stories, Jesus is provoking His listeners to think deeply about the growth, value, and purity of His kingdom.

EXPLAIN: The word “kingdom” can mean different things to different people. It’s a word we don’t often use today, unless referring to the United Kingdom in Europe.

DISCUSS: When you hear the word “kingdom,” what comes to mind? (a fairy tale; a princess story; England; adventure movies; something that doesn’t really exist anymore; medieval times, King Arthur; an antiquated form of government)

TRANSITION: As Jesus told stories about the kingdom, He intended His listeners to think deeply about why He had come and what His saving reign produces. Jesus was a masterful storyteller who used parables to both provoke the religious leaders and to woo His disciples into a deeper understanding of who He is and what He came to do. His stories often surprised His listeners, causing them to reflect more deeply upon the nature of the kingdom. In the first set of parables we’ll look at, Jesus surprises us with the way His kingdom grows.

POINT 1

THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM (MATT. 13:31-33)

31 He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. **32** It’s the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it’s taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches.”
33 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and mixed into fifty pounds of flour until all of it was leavened.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 13:31-33** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 31-32** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The **kingdom** of God may have started in meager ways, but it grows **exponentially**.

DISCUSS: From Day 2 in the DDG: **Where have you seen the growth of the kingdom of God?** (personal stories may vary; others may point to the expansion of Christianity in countries such as Korea, China, or across the African continent; the spread of Christianity as one of the main religions in the world)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 33** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The kingdom of God may seem insignificant, but it has the **power** to **transform** the world.

DISCUSS: Call attention to the Scripture passage and highlighted words on **PACK ITEM 10: MUSTARD SEED**, and then ask: **For what reasons might God be pleased to build His kingdom through small and insignificant things?** (beginning with something that seems insignificant and small means that humans cannot take credit for great growth—it is an obvious work of God; the Lord loves to work in surprising ways that reflect a King who brings a kingdom through a cross; as an example of His upside-down kingdom; as an example of strength in weakness)

TRANSITION: Not only is the kingdom of God something that will grow, but Jesus wants us to understand the value of the kingdom. Since this kingdom is of God, we should not be surprised that He calls us to value what He values.

NOTES



VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“His kingdom cannot fail, He rules o’er earth and heav’n; The keys of death and hell Are to our Jesus giv’n: Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!”¹

—Charles Wesley
(1707–1788)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 31-32 / Jesus described the kingdom of God using agricultural imagery that would have been familiar to His disciples. The kingdom is described as “**a mustard seed**” that a person takes and plants in a field. This parable describes the kingdom in terms of its growth and expansion.

The mustard seed was one of the smallest, though not the tiniest, of seeds. While there are other seeds that are smaller, Jesus used exaggeration for effect here; the minute size of the mustard seed does not compare to the great tree that comes up out of the ground. Mustard trees, in our reckoning, are more like a large bush. They grow approximately 9 to 10 feet tall in a season, and this incredible growth is remarkable to any onlooker. From being so small as a seed to its immense growth in a season, Jesus was telling His listeners that the kingdom might not look like it has a dramatic breakthrough in this world, but its growth would be exponential.

As the plant grew, it became large enough for the birds of the air to “**nest in its branches.**” By calling this bush a “tree,” Jesus probably alluded to Old Testament references where the birds of the air came to Israel (Ezek. 17:23; Dan. 4:9-12,20-22). In Ezekiel 17, the picture of a bird taking part of a cedar shoot illustrates the Babylonian exile. But by the end of the passage, birds of every kind come to the cedar that has been planted on the mountain of Israel.

While the mustard bush would hardly look like a great cedar tree, Jesus was making the point about the nature of the kingdom: people would be tempted to despise the meager bush. Yet in spite of the tree’s appearance, the birds would come, referring to the nations who would find refuge in God’s kingdom. One day, the kingdom growth will be fully realized when Jesus returns and gathers people from every nation, tribe, and language to Him (Rev. 14:6-7).

VERSE 33 / Similar to the mustard seed, Jesus told a parable of a woman who mixed a little leaven into fifty pounds of wheat flour until the entire batch had been permeated by the yeast. The amount of flour seems quite excessive—fifty pounds of flour would certainly prepare a great amount of bread for many people. By taking a little bit of an old batch of dough that had already been worked through with yeast, the woman mixed the old with the new, and the little bit of leavened dough imperceptibly worked its way through the entire batch of flour.

Like a little seed that grows into a great bush, Jesus pointed out that a little bit of leaven could work its way through the large batch and prepare bread, not only for the people of the house but for an entire village or community. Both parables allude to how God’s kingdom, though starting out small, will be thoroughly transformative. The growth was quiet and subtle but very real.

While yeast often appears in a negative light in the Bible (cf. Luke 12:1; 1 Cor. 5:6-7), here Jesus uses leaven as an example of how the kingdom of God grows and expands. The Old Testament did not always portray yeast as a bad thing. At the Feast of Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks, Israel was instructed to eat leavened bread (see Lev. 23:17).

Together, these two parables paint a picture of God’s plan for His kingdom. While God’s kingdom might start small, the kingdom would grow exponentially. This parable encourages Christians who wonder, “What can I do for the kingdom as just one person?” When we obey God and step out in faith to share the gospel with others, God can accomplish quite a bit! If God’s work looks tiny at first, like a seed, we should not determine that this plant will be insignificant. If a little bit of leaven is worked through an entire batch of dough, then God’s ways are not our ways and His kingdom will surprise us by its incredible growth.

POINT 2

THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM (MATT. 13:44-46)

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. **45** Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. **46** When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 13:44-46** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 44** commentary to highlight how true faith understands the value of Christ and His work (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #68: Faith: Biblical faith is the resting, or **trusting**, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and **confession** of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

DISCUSS: In what ways have you radically embraced the kingdom of heaven in faith? (some may have lost friendships or have found that their family relationships are strained because of their faith; others may have given up sinful habits and pleasures that they really enjoyed; for those who aren't as sure what sacrifices they have made, encourage them to ask the Lord to show them how they have embraced the kingdom)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 45-46** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

The kingdom of heaven is **worth** the **price** of giving up everything else for it.

DISCUSS: How has following Christ brought you great joy? (being freed from the power of sin and from its effects means that believers can live in peace with God; guilty pleasures and pursuits feel empty, but Christ brings joy; Christ's presence and peace bring joy; His faithfulness brings joy)

TRANSITION: Because the kingdom is of inestimable value, Jesus's last parable in Matthew 13 speaks to the importance of the purity in the kingdom of heaven.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 44 / In this verse, Jesus compared the kingdom to a treasure hidden in a field. A man stumbling across this treasure would be a rare occurrence. Before the Babylonian exile, hiding a treasure underground would be a reasonable practice. When the Israelites returned to Judah post-exile, they brought back the banking profession they learned in Babylon.²

It is possible that the treasure had been buried several decades before by someone who was now deceased, leaving the personal fortune to be discovered by a new landowner. Had the man removed the treasure when he found it, this would have been theft. To rebury it was to place it back in the field and leave the land as it was. The only way the man could secure this field with the treasure was to sell everything he had. Therefore, he joyfully accepted the loss of everything to gain this land, knowing he discovered great wealth.

The value of the kingdom, Jesus teaches, is of inestimable value. The radical action taken by the man to purchase the field is comparable to the radical action of Jesus's disciples to leave everything and follow Him. It seems unreasonable, but it is extremely rational to someone who understands what he is gaining in Christ by giving up the world (cf. Phil. 3:8). That's true faith.

Some have questioned the morality of the man's behavior, believing that he found the treasure in someone else's field, and instead of disclosing the value of the property, he paid less for the field than if the actual treasure had been revealed. While Jesus was not teaching about the morality of real estate, He may have implied that the kingdom was being taken from an owner who did not know nor appreciate the value of what he had. Just like the parable of the vineyard, the kingdom is taken from the tenants and given to others (Matt. 21). In a similar way, the kingdom belongs to those who know its value because of their faith and live in light of its surpassing worth.

VERSES 45-46 / In the second parable in this section, Jesus once again showed the great value of the kingdom. This time, a merchant of fine jewels sought fine pearls for his collection. He was intentional in his pursuit, knowing what he was looking for.

In the Middle East at this time, pearls were some of the most precious of jewels. So when this merchant came across this single pearl, he quickly realized that this pearl was of a greater value than anything he owned. As a result, he joyfully sold everything so that he might secure this one precious pearl. Jesus was not saying that the kingdom can be purchased; rather, He pointed to its surpassing worth. The call of discipleship in the kingdom of heaven is worth giving up the world so that we might know the joy of the invaluable kingdom.

There are similarities in these two parables. Both men acted in a way that seemed out of the ordinary. Their behavior would look extremely questionable to any onlooker. But this is the nature of the kingdom. The normal practices of self-interest in this world are put aside in order to gain eternal life with Jesus.

Put in economic terms, the kingdom changes our perspective, attitude, and use of wealth. A disciple of Jesus is willing to sell everything he or she has for the sake of the kingdom.

There are differences between these two parables. One treasure was found on land, the other by sea. One was discovered by surprise, the other was sought after. But both parables make the same point. Whether discovered or sought, the kingdom of heaven is worth more than anything in this world. Therefore, the disciple of Jesus who follows Him will give up everything for the sake of the surpassing worth of Christ and His kingdom, doing it willingly and joyfully.

POINT 3

THE PURITY OF THE KINGDOM (MATT. 13:47-50)

47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a large net thrown into the sea. It collected every kind of fish, **48** and when it was full, they dragged it ashore, sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but threw out the worthless ones. **49** So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out, separate the evil people from the righteous, **50** and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 13:47-50** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 47-48** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

The kingdom of **heaven** will only have those who have put their **faith** in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

DISCUSS: Why is judgment a necessary part of God’s final work? (God is purifying His kingdom for Himself and will not allow anything to enter it that would defile His kingdom; judgment is a gracious act of God to show that evil will not be victorious so that believers might have hope to persevere in the face of trials)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 49-50** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Judgment will come at the end times for those who have **rejected** Christ.

DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 11: PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM**, and then ask: **What should be our response to the warning of God’s judgment?** (eager to take the gospel to those who have not put their faith in Christ and urge them to turn from sin and trust in Christ; seek to live pure lives that honor the Lord by obeying His commands and confessing our sins; living in true righteousness and helping others to do the same)



COMMENTARY

VERSES 47-48 / In this parable about the nature of the kingdom, Jesus described it as a net that was thrown into the sea and captured every kind of fish. Recall that Jesus had called His disciples to fish for people (Matt. 4:19). Now Jesus made it clear that this mission included going out to all people from every nation, not merely Jewish people.

When casting a dragnet, the top of the netting had floats and the bottom had weights. It would be anchored to shore or attached to two boats. The boats would then move into position to entrap every fish that was near. After pulling the net filled with fish onto the shore, fishermen would sit down to make a judgment on which fish should be kept. The fish would be sorted, throwing out the bad ones and keeping the good ones. The good fish were probably clean according to the dietary laws of Leviticus 11:9-12, though Jesus may be referring to those fish that are edible and those that are not. Some fish may have been too small to keep, some may have been diseased, and others may not have been suitable at all. In the end, those fish that were discarded had no value, and so they were not kept.

The implication of Jesus's teaching is that the kept fish were the ones that responded favorably to the message of the kingdom of heaven. They responded with faith to the news that Jesus came to save sinners, and Jesus saved them from their sins. Those fish that were discarded did not accept the message of the kingdom, remaining unconvinced and failing to respond in repentance and faith. This becomes the basis for the separation of the good and the bad fish in this parable. The fish could not be separated until the entire catch was brought in, when the fishermen could make a final judgment on which ones could be kept and which should be discarded.

VERSES 49-50 / Jesus warned that a final judgment is coming. Similar to how bad fish were discarded, Jesus described what would happen to the wicked at the end of the age. Jesus had already given a similar warning in His parable about the wheat and the weeds (Matt. 13:39). While Jesus called His disciples to be fishers of people (4:19), here the angels were the fishers who brought in all the fish, which were then sorted in a final judgment. The righteous—those who have trusted Christ and lived by the values of the kingdom (see 5:3-10)—are gathered, and the wicked—those who have rejected Christ—are cast out into the blazing furnace.

Jesus prophesied that there would be a time when His kingdom would finally be realized. While we may not be able to sort between the good and the evil now, Jesus made it clear that our responsibility is to fish for people and share the good news that Jesus came to save sinners. Christ is the ultimate Judge. His kingdom will be a pure kingdom in the end, and He will ensure that evil does not prevail.

In Revelation 21:8, John described the New Jerusalem as being without cowards, the faithless, those who are detestable, murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars. These ones, John said, will be cast into the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.

While we may wonder why, in our world, the righteous suffer while the wicked flourish (the question that Psalm 73 wrestles with), this parable reminds us that it is only for a season. At the end of the age, when the kingdom comes in all of its fullness, God will deal with every person according to their deeds. The righteous will be blessed with the realization of eternal life with God and joy in His presence forevermore. The wicked, on the other hand, will receive the punishment of eternal judgment, where the suffering will never end and the misery of rejecting God will be realized forever and ever.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know the unmatched value of God's kingdom, we live willing to sacrifice everything so that others may be part of the kingdom through faith in Jesus.

HEAD:

Because the kingdom of God comes from heaven and displays the saving rule of God, His kingdom is not like those of this world. His kingdom does not come by force, but Christ changes hearts and lives. By showing us how precious and valuable His kingdom is, Jesus stirs our hearts to long for Him above anything else.

Based on Scripture, how would you describe the kingdom of God?

HEART:

With confidence that Christ has come and will come again, we can trust the Lord deeply from the heart to accomplish His purposes. When we wonder if evil will prevail, we can remind ourselves that the kingdom of God is secure because Christ has overcome sin and death and has promised to build His church. From a handful of people in Jerusalem, we can now see that the church spans across the globe.

How can you praise and thank God for the growth and advance of His kingdom across the world and throughout history?

HANDS:

Since the kingdom is worth more than anything else, we give our lives, our time, our resources, and our talents to pursue and know Christ and to make Him known. By seeking first His kingdom and righteousness, we can tell others of the surpassing worth that Christ has become to us and invite them to share in the joy of this kingdom.

Who is someone you can tell about the great joy of the kingdom of God?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy."³

—Lesslie Newbigin
(1909–1998)

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM (MATT. 13:31-33)

+ COMMENTARY

“Like yeast the kingdom will continue to grow until it permeates the world. The parable of the yeast builds on one aspect of the mustard seed parable, that of growth. Jesus promises that growth will signify the kingdom community, the church.”⁴

+ COMMENTARY

“Together the parables of the mustard seed and leaven pair illustrations of typical male and female tasks of Jesus’ day and probably reflect his concern to relate well to women as well as men in his audience. Neither parable depicts the culmination of the kingdom so impressively as to justify grandiose dreams of Christianizing the earth, but each does caution against a defeatism or siege mentality when Christian witness seems temporarily ineffective. One day God’s causes will triumph.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

When the church met after Jesus’s ascension in Acts 1, there were about 120 people assembled in the upper room. Who could have imagined, some 400 years later, that Christianity would spread across the Roman Empire, resulting in the conversion of one of its emperors, and would oust the gods of the Greeks and Romans.

In our day, the growth of Christianity across countries such as Korea, China, and throughout Latin America and Africa has been substantial. Conservative estimates place the number of Christians in China at 100 million believers today. In spite of the oppression of the communist government, Chinese Christians have seen the steady growth of the kingdom of God in their midst.

While North Americans might wonder about their individual congregation and how it is managing in an increasingly secular world, Jesus’s parables call us to look far beyond our locale and see that the prayer He taught His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9-13 is being answered: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Evil may look like it is advancing, but God’s sovereign rule and promises to build His church are true. Throughout each age and in every generation, the kingdom of God will expand, and God’s purposes will prevail.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM (MATT. 13:44-46)

+ COMMENTARY

“Both parables illustrate a point Jesus has made already in the sermon on the mount, namely, that we should seek the kingdom above all else. In Matthew 6, Jesus told His disciples not to be anxious for food, drink, clothing, or any other necessity. The Father provides liberally for His children, so there is nothing to fear. These two parables make the same point in a more symbolic form. A true disciple is willing to give up everything for the sake of the kingdom, willing to sell all in order to have the pearl.”⁶

+ COMMENTARY

“Because the kingdom of heaven is something worth losing everything for, we joyfully let go of all things in order to passionately take hold of one thing. Jesus is speaking to disciples who, like the merchant seeking for pearls, would lose much for following Christ; in fact, most of them would lose their lives. But they were following a King who promised, ‘And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life’ (Matt 19:29). We come to Christ because He offers great reward; He is great reward.”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

As One who has come who is wiser than Solomon (Matt. 12:42), Jesus offers us the wisdom of heaven (Jas. 3:17-18). When we seek first the kingdom, we are forsaking the wisdom of this world. Humans have amassed a great amount of information, but this has not produced a better morality. When we pursue the kingdom of heaven with all of its value, Jesus gives us the wisdom of heaven so that we might live skillfully.

Allan Bloom makes this point in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*: “My grandparents were ignorant people by our standards, and my grandfather held only lowly jobs. But their home was spiritually rich because all the things done in it, not only what was specifically ritual, found their origin in the Bible’s commandments, and their explanation in the Bible’s stories and the commentaries on them, and had their imaginative counterparts in the deeds of the myriad of exemplary heroes. . . . I do not believe that my generation, my cousins who have been educated in the American way, all of whom are M.D.s or Ph.D.s, have any comparable learning. When they talk about heaven and earth, the relations between men and women, parents and children, the human condition, I hear nothing but clichés, superficialities, the material of satire.”⁸

When we seek the kingdom of God and pursue it above everything else, we are pursuing a wisdom from heaven that enables us to live well and joyfully for another kingdom.

POINT 3: THE PURITY OF THE KINGDOM (MATT. 13:47-50)

+ COMMENTARY

“[In hell], thou shalt have none but a company of damned souls, with an innumerable company of devils to keep company with thee. While thou art in this World, the very thoughts of the devils appearing to thee makes thy flesh to tremble, and thine hair ready to stand upright on thy head. But O what wilt thou do, when not only the supposition of the devils appearing, but the real society of all the devils in hell be with thee howling and roaring, screeching and roaring in such a hideous manner, that thou wilt be even at thy wits end, and be ready to run stark mad again for anguish and torment. . . . Again, that thou mightest be tormented to purpose, the mighty God of heaven will lay as great wrath and vengeance upon thee, as ever he can, by the might of his glorious power. As I said before, Thou shalt have his wrath, not by drops, but by whole showers shall it come thunder, thunder upon thy body and soul so fast, and so thick, that thou shalt be tormented out of measure.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

If you have ever experienced a burn on your skin, you know how agonizing the pain can be. The suffering lasts long and the ability to find relief can be quite tricky. Having a burn gives us a little picture of what the final judgment will be like for those who do not trust Christ and repent of their sin. Jesus describes it as a blazing furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The picture ought to give us great pause. Instead of being gleeful at the damnation of the wicked, this passage shows us the urgency of our need to take the gospel to others.

The final judgment also reminds us of the absolute severity of what lies ahead for those who have not trusted in Christ. Therefore, a Christian ought to speak in such a way that does not make light of the fate of the wicked. Using colloquial phrases of the language of damnation is to make light of the eternal suffering that lies ahead for those who have not trusted Christ. The coming wrath for the unbeliever will be unbearable for all of eternity, far worse than any burn one might experience here on this earth. For there to be no relief from the consequences of sin ought to compel us to go with the good news of Jesus and plead with unbelievers to avoid the wrath that is to come.

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DISCIPLES LONG FOR JESUS'S COMING

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Christ's followers recognize that God's kingdom is here in part (Luke 17:20-21).
2. Christ's followers anticipate that God's kingdom is coming in full (Luke 17:22-35).
3. Christ's followers work for God's kingdom to be known by all (Matt. 24:45-51).

Background Passages: Matthew 24; Luke 17

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God's kingdom is present today and will be established in full when Christ returns.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

All who have trusted in Christ are part of His church, living under God's rule as King today while waiting for Christ's return to establish the kingdom in full. As such, the church's mission is to proclaim salvation through Christ to the world so that others might be part of the coming kingdom as well.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have come to know God as our good and perfect King, we live joyfully and obediently under His reign, proclaiming Christ to the world so that others might enter into the kingdom.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: Sometimes we can wonder when things are ever going to change. If Jesus's disciples live according to the values, norms, and conditions of the kingdom, and if they are going to the lost with the good news, then when will the arrival of the kingdom come? Shouldn't we see a more dramatic impact than what is going on today? Since the kingdom is going to come differently than expected (Matt. 13), Jesus prepares us for the arrival of the kingdom as both already among us and not yet fully here.

EXPLAIN: The Bible tells us Jesus will return at the end times, and then the kingdom of God will be fully established, which will include judgment on those who have rejected Christ.

DISCUSS: What are some reasons Christians hesitate to talk about judgment? (people can feel that it is mean or rude to talk about difficult things like the end of the world; the topic can seem distant and remote from people's everyday experience and so there is a temptation to feel like you may appear weird or sound crazy; others want to avoid the topic because so many people have disagreed about what will happen at the end and they feel uncertain about how to communicate about Christ's return in an effective and helpful way)

TRANSITION: Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is already here but it has not yet been fully established, which will occur at Jesus's return. In the Gospels, Jesus shared what that will be like.

POINT 1

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS RECOGNIZE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS HERE IN PART (LUKE 17:20-21).

NOTES

20 When he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; **21** no one will say, ‘See here!’ or ‘There!’ For you see, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 17:20-21** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 20-21A** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Unlike the expectations of the Jews, the kingdom of God was not **ushered** in by grand triumphs but by the birth and **ministry** of Jesus.

DISCUSS: In what ways do you long for the kingdom of God? (people may long for the liberation from the effects of the curse—disease, death, destruction, injustice, and evil; others may express a longing for happiness and joy where sorrow and mourning are gone; some may express that they long for the day when they are freed from sin; others may talk about the Lord’s Prayer—that they pray for God’s kingdom to come and His will to be done)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 21B** commentary to emphasize the idea that the church and the kingdom are related (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #77: Church and Kingdom: The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the **reign** of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, anticipating the full manifestation of God’s kingdom in the future. The church’s **mission** is to witness to God’s kingdom, proclaiming God’s message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the **gospel** through good works so that others may be brought to live under God’s reign.

TRANSITION: While there are signs that the kingdom of God is already among us, we still wait for the fullness of the kingdom to come. The longing for a day without sin, sorrow, suffering, and sadness is evidence that we long for eternity in our hearts.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 20-21A / In Jesus's day, the Jewish people hoped and expected that the Messiah would come and immediately usher in a new era where the totality of the kingdom would come. The Messiah would come and bring an end to all oppression and evil. The desert would blossom, justice would be restored, people would be healed, and the redeemed of the Lord would return to Zion with singing. This is what Isaiah told the people who were experiencing trials of political pressure around them. Isaiah 35 foretold of a renewed land of promise.

Deep down in the human heart, people know that we were not meant to live with sorrow, death, and decay. We long for a world where the wrongs are made right, where people live in peace, and where joy and happiness abound.

The Pharisees wanted to know when the kingdom of God would come. Since the people of Israel lived under Roman occupation, the Jews were longing for the restoration of their homeland. Some longed for the days of political rule, others were longing for the spiritual rule of the King, but everyone waited for the renewal of all things that the Old Testament had foretold.

The expectation that God's kingdom will come with some renewal of government or speculating upon the signs of the times have always been common. But the kingdom cannot be predicted with end times charts or with set dates. Jesus said, **"The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable."** It will not come so that someone can say, "See, here it is!" or "There's proof!" Jesus said the kingdom would not come with signs that people are looking for. It is not predictable, it cannot be controlled by human planning, nor can human wisdom determine the plans in the mind of God.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Human hearts desire and long for a renewed world

where God's rule and reign are established, and that is what Jesus taught us to pray.

VERSE 21B / In response to the Pharisees, Jesus told them that the kingdom of God was right in front of them—it is **"in your midst,"** if they would have eyes to see and ears to hear. Because the kingdom of God is God's people living in God's place under God's rule, the kingdom of God is already present in the lives of those who trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Jesus said that the kingdom of God is in the midst of the Pharisees. Some have translated this passage to say that the kingdom of God is among you or within you. What makes the kingdom of God present is the reality of Jesus's presence and power in bringing salvation to the world. Jesus told a teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, that flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God. Rather, a person enters the kingdom of God through faith in the Son of God. It begins with an inner transformation of the heart through faith, and it continues to work in our midst as Christ is proclaimed.

Jesus demonstrated that the kingdom of God was breaking into this world. Through His preaching, He proclaimed the message of the kingdom (cf. Luke 8:1). When performing miracles, Jesus said that the kingdom of God was on display (11:20). If people wanted signs, Jesus pointed out that the year of the Lord's favor that Isaiah foresaw (Isa. 61:1-2) had come: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news (Matt. 11:5).

There will never be enough evidence for an unbelieving heart to see the kingdom. Jesus had come, in all humility, as the King of kings. Unless one trusts in Christ as the Savior who frees people from sin and death, no sign will ever be sufficient for an unbelieving heart.

POINT 2

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS ANTICIPATE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS COMING IN FULL (LUKE 17:22-35).

22 Then he told the disciples, “The days are coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you won’t see it. **23** They will say to you, ‘See there!’ or ‘See here!’ Don’t follow or run after them. **24** For as the lightning flashes from horizon to horizon and lights up the sky, so the Son of Man will be in his day. **25** But first it is necessary that he suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. **26** Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man: **27** People went on eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage until the day Noah boarded the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. **28** It will be the same as it was in the days of Lot: People went on eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building. **29** But on the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all. **30** It will be like that on the day the Son of Man is revealed. **31** On that day, a man on the housetop, whose belongings are in the house, must not come down to get them. Likewise the man who is in the field must not turn back. **32** Remember Lot’s wife! **33** Whoever tries to make his life secure will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. **34** I tell you, on that night two will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. **35** Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 17:22-35** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 22-25** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus had to suffer and die so He could resurrect and ascend to heaven to one day **return** in a sudden and **obvious** manner.

DISCUSS: What are some unhelpful ways people have speculated about **Christ’s return?** (setting dates and falsely predicting the future; trying to live in a bubble, solely waiting and not serving others; disregarding it altogether)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 26-35** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus **warns** His disciples to be alert and ready for His return, anticipating **judgment** coming.

DISCUSS: *From Day 5 in the DDG:* **How are you working as you actively wait for Christ’s return?** (sharing the gospel with others; not holding to things of this world tightly; serving God and others; not holding grudges but forgiving others)

NOTES

SODOM

A city in Canaan during Abraham’s time, possibly at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Lot, Abraham’s nephew, and his family moved there, but its inhabitants were so immoral and wicked that God couldn’t find even ten righteous men (Gen. 18:22-32). The city was thus judged, with its neighboring town Gomorrah, and destroyed with fire.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“At the end time of the world, he will not descend from heaven obscurely or secretly, but with godlike glory.”¹

—Cyril of Alexandria (c. 375–444)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 22-25 / Jesus taught His disciples what they needed to know about the coming kingdom so that they would be ready for its arrival. Jesus knew that His disciples would be wondering when He would return. So Jesus made it clear that there would be several key events that must take place before His return.

First, Jesus said that He must **“suffer many things and be rejected by this generation”** (17:25). This refers to Jesus’s death on the cross. He made it clear that the kingdom would come through His own people’s rejection of Him (John 1:11), leading to His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus first had to die for sinners, redeeming those who would trust in Him. And as the disciples told others about Jesus’s death and resurrection, the kingdom would grow. By coming in the flesh and starting His ministry, Jesus had brought the kingdom in part, but the kingdom had not yet fully arrived. That would come, Jesus explained, at His second coming.

The Son of Man will return in a sudden and obvious way, like **“lightning flashes”** across the sky. Jesus’s return will be evident to all. Speculation, rumors, and uncertainty that He may be here or there will be so obviously false to all disciples (17:24), though some still claimed to have information. In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, false teachers tried to say that they had missed Jesus’s return (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-3). But in Daniel 7:13-14, Daniel prophesied that the Son of Man would come upon the clouds and would be given dominion and glory. Also, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John stated that He saw Christ riding on a cloud, and every eye would see Him (Rev. 1:7). By His death on the cross, Jesus purchased for Himself a people from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). So when He returns, He will gather them to Himself (Rev. 7:9) in an obvious way.

VERSES 26-35 / Jesus then gave two Old Testament examples to describe how the kingdom will arrive suddenly, and how terrible the coming judgment will be for those who have not trusted in Him. It took Noah one hundred years to build the ark according to God’s instructions, and the people around him went about their lives without any thought for tomorrow (Luke 17:27). When the Lord sent the rain, Noah, his family, and the animals inside the ark were rescued, but the **“flood came and destroyed”** the rest of the world in judgment. Similarly, the people of Sodom were going about their everyday lives when the fire of the Lord descended upon the city and only Lot and his family were spared.

Jesus said His appearing will be sudden and without warning: people will not have time to pack a quick bag, nor will a worker who is out in the fields have time to rush home (Matt. 24:17-18; Mark 13:15-16). The judgment will be swift and immediate. While Matthew and Mark warn of the coming judgment on Jerusalem, Luke communicated that Jesus was not only referring to the coming judgment of the temple in AD 70 but also to the judgment at the end of the age. One day, it will be too late to turn away from sin.

To highlight how critical it is not to turn back to an old way of life, not to hesitate, and not to live without urgency, Jesus simply said, **“Remember Lot’s wife”** (Luke 17:32; cf. Gen. 19:26). Lot’s family had been warned by the angels not to look back nor stop as they fled Sodom. Lot’s wife, however, looked back, and her judgment was instant. She was longing for the past as well as not seeing the urgency to obey and move.

For now, God graciously has provided a way of salvation—whoever gives up his life and submits to Christ will be saved from the final judgment and not be **“left”** behind (vv. 34-35). As disciples of Christ, then, we are to anticipate Jesus’s coming as if it could happen tomorrow but live out our lives in service to the kingdom as we wait.

POINT 3

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS WORK FOR GOD'S KINGDOM TO BE KNOWN BY ALL (MATT. 24:45-51).

NOTES

45 “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? **46** Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes. **47** Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. **48** But if that wicked servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delayed,’ **49** and starts to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards, **50** that servant’s master will come on a day he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know. **51** He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 24:45-51** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 45-47** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Waiting for Jesus's return, we continue to live **faithful** lives in **service** to the King and kingdom.

DISCUSS: What are the marks of a faithful and wise servant who follows Christ? (they are doing the work of their Master; they are obeying Christ's commands; they are seeking to take the message of the King's authority to forgive sins and cleanse hearts to those around them; they are not passive about their faith but are working for the good of those around them to know Christ)

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 3: HEARING THE OLD IN THE NEW** and the **VERSES 48-51** commentary to emphasize that from the Old Testament to the New, judgment has always been a reality for the enemies of God (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Judgment will come to those who don't live with faithfulness and **expectancy** of Christ's return.

DISCUSS: Why is it easy for some to think Christ won't come back in their lifetime? (He hasn't come back yet, so people may think they still have a long time to wait; they want to hold onto the pleasures of their life; they want to hold onto their relationships, like seeing their kids grow up; they want more time on this earth)



COMMENTARY

VERSES 45-47 / Since no one knows the day or the hour when Christ will return, it is critical to be ready. Every believer will have to account for his or her life before the Lord. Following Jesus's call to be ready in Matthew 24:44, Jesus told a parable of what it would look like to be ready for His return.

Jesus set the story: a master was looking for a servant to appoint as a leader over his household while he was away for an extended period of time. This wealthy master had many servants, so he sought a **“faithful and wise servant,”** one who could be trusted to do what the master would want done with his household.

As a result of his faithful work while his master was away, the servant was **“blessed”** upon his master's return. The word “blessed” was used to describe kingdom disciples in Matthew 5:3-10, and it is used to describe the favor the servant receives for his faithful service in his master's absence.

The servant did not spend his time looking for his master or wondering what should be done. He knew what his master expected and he obeyed. Just as the servant was blessed upon his master's return, so those disciples who work for their Lord while they wait for His return are faithful and wise, and they display God's blessing upon their lives. Jesus reiterated the idea that faithful servants will be entrusted with greater authority and responsibility.

Jesus told His disciples to take the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. This task remains unfinished. Christians have been working to bring the gospel to every people group in every corner of the world. Whether we go across the street or around the world, our task remains the same as it did two thousand years ago: to prepare for Christ's return by sharing the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

VERSES 48-51 / The next verses describe a wicked servant, one who is unfaithful and lacks wisdom (see v. 45). Jesus

is not describing the same servant in verses 45-47. Rather, these are two servants with completely opposite behaviors and attitudes. The wicked servant presumed his master was going to stay away for a long time and showed his true colors when the master left. Jesus described the wicked servant as violently abusing his authority against his fellow servants and partying with drunkards—eating and drinking what belonged to his master.

When the master returned home, he undoubtedly surprised the wicked servant and caught him off guard. The punishment he received seems quite severe: to be cut in pieces. He was then cast **“with the hypocrites”** because he had pretended to be faithful when he was not. This fierce judgment was intended to jolt the listener into action. Jesus had repeatedly called the religious leaders of His day “hypocrites” (see Matt. 23), implying that “the wicked servant” was not merely one in the parable but those who were also in Israel's leadership.

Jesus described the final destination of the wicked servant and hypocrites as a place of **“weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** Matthew has used this phrase in Jesus's teaching on several occasions (cf. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 25:30). This is the final judgment that all those who refuse to ready themselves for their Master's return will face. Jesus's point is clear: He will come in an unexpected time, and when He comes, He will bring judgment for those who have not acted faithfully and lived with the expectation that He will return.

While the wicked servant foolishly thought that the master would never catch him abusing his fellow servants and indulging his own pleasure, the listener would probably have surmised his fate. Yet many of us, even Christians, forget that Jesus's second coming will be like the master's sudden return—this time bringing judgment on all evildoers and blessings for those He finds faithful.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know God as our good and perfect King, we live joyfully and obediently under His reign, proclaiming Christ to the world so that others might enter into the kingdom.

HEAD:

At Jesus's first coming, He brought the kingdom of God to this world. Through His teaching and miracles, He showed us that He will make all things new (Rev. 21:5). While the kingdom has already come, we still see that evil exists, so we wait for Jesus to rule and reign fully and to conquer evil completely so that no enemy is left to oppose Him.

How do we explain to others how evil still exists even as the kingdom is here?

HEART:

The kingdom of God has broken into this world, and all who trust Christ are brought into His kingdom and live under God's authority as King. But the kingdom will come in fullness one day, so we ought to live with a sense of urgency to take Christ to people around us so that they might believe and be part of the kingdom of God.

What are things we can praise God for regarding the good works He is doing through the kingdom today?

HANDS:

Christ's kingdom has come to us because He has saved us. We know that everything that God rules is for our good, so we live under His authority with joy and obedience so that our actions back up the words that we speak about the hope of Jesus Christ. As our words and deeds reflect Christ's rule and reign, we seek to persuade others to come into the kingdom of Christ.

In what ways do you need to connect your words and actions together in a greater way to show Christ's rule in your life to point others to Christ?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"At his call the dead
awaken, Rise to life
from earth and sea;
All the powers of
nature shaken By His
look, prepares to flee.
Careless sinner, what
will then become
of thee?"²

—John Newton
(1725–1807)

POINT 1: CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS RECOGNIZE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS HERE IN PART (LUKE 17:20-21).

+ ILLUSTRATION

In 2015, Tonight Show host Jimmy Fallon invited the Irish pop band U2 to join him at the 42nd Street Subway Station in Manhattan to busk as passersby went to work. Bono, the band's front man, wore a wig, and the group sang "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." Some stopped and listened, while others did not recognize the singer. After some time, Fallon and the band took off their disguises, which drew a large crowd and resulted in an impromptu concert.³

If anyone thinks that they will respond to Christ at His second coming, be warned—they didn't recognize Him at His first coming. There will be no celebration for those who finally recognize Jesus at His second coming, when it is too late, but only sorrow for failing to find what they should have been looking for in the first place.

POINT 2: CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS ANTICIPATE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS COMING IN FULL (LUKE 17:22-35).

+ COMMENTARY

"Jesus' message is not meant for those disciples who think that they deserve a better fate than their neighbors, but for those who, in the midst of universal indifference and complacency, realize the desperateness of their situation, and ask, 'What must I do to be saved?'"⁴

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GOD'S GLORY IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST

“Our Struggle Is Not Against Flesh and Blood”

by Kevin M. Jones Sr.

+

God's glory is revealed in many ways. One way in which His glory is revealed is through the softening of hearts and the writing of the laws and commands on our hearts. God's Spirit dwells in us. This imparting of His Spirit brings us from death to life. Because God is with us, we should have faith in Him. Yet placing faith in God does not free us from conflict from the world and actually frustrates Satan. Satan's desire is to kill, steal, and destroy. God's desire is to give us life and peace.

KNOWING GOD AND HIS GLORY

Personal knowledge of God should cause us to want to know more of Him. The more we know of Him, the deeper the roots of love and knowledge grow. The more we know of Him, the more we want to serve Him. The more we know of Him the more we should hate our sin and fight for righteousness. We do all of this by faith. Ephesians 2:1-2 tells us that we were once dead in our sins, in which we walked according to the ways of this world. But this new way of life in God is different than the way we previously walked. The old, sinful ways in us should be daily put to death as the new, Christ-filled way flourishes.

All glory belongs to God, yet 2 Corinthians 2:18 reminds us that we

are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into His image. Believers get to experience the glory of the Lord now and later. The world was opposed to Christ because Christ's glory revealed the sinfulness and hostility of the human heart toward God. The world opposes believers today because as we walk by the Spirit, we reveal the ways and truth of God and the sinfulness bound in the human heart. We must remember when we are speaking the words of Christ that it is He who is being rejected, not us.

FIGHTING THE GREATEST BATTLE

Did you know we are in the middle of the greatest battle ever? Historians will point to the Civil War fought in the United States, WWI, and WWII as battles that devastated the world, and these historians are correct. Yet there is a cosmic battle that preceded all earthly wars, a battle between God and Satan. Although we cannot see this battle, it is happening around us. God is busy trying to prompt us by the power of the Spirit to walk in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control, and Satan is trying to get us to walk in darkness, hate, ungodliness, sexual immorality,

and division. We must remember that there is a battle we cannot see. Forgetting this can cause us to place attention and emphasis on the wrong things.

Unfortunately, we do forget that we are fighting this invisible fight. I love camp games. Whether tug-o-war, soccer, tag, or other relays, it is usually easy to know who is on what team. Why? It's because each team usually has a color scheme associated with their team. These color schemes may include bandannas, ribbons, silly string, T-shirts, and face paint. Camp teams are easily identifiable. Sadly, Satan, others who reject Christ, and the work that they're doing are not usually as clearly identifiable. It's sometimes difficult to see the spiritual battles going on in the world and around us. So we need to be alert and on the lookout for activities that are in opposition to God's Word and way. We need to be aware of the underlying evils that attempt to dethrone God as sovereign.

Since we are free from the penalty of sin and death, we should, with ambitious affection, seek to serve and snatch others from the fire as well.

But all is not lost. It's a bizarre yet comforting reality to have an active enemy that is already defeated. But that is the truth we live by. Derwin Gray reminds us: "Jesus resoundingly won the battle against humanity's great enemy, the dark powers of sin and death. Sin and death are invasive species that do not belong in God's good creation. Messiah Jesus triumphed over and disarmed these dark powers with his death and resurrection."¹ So although we have an enemy, the enemy is already defeated. We further defeat the enemy by placing our faith in God and not ourselves.

BRINGING OTHERS FROM DEATH TO LIFE

In response then, because Jesus is triumphant and the kingdom is already here though not yet fully complete, we are called to tell others of the good news of Christ.

It is healthy for us as believers to remember we also once walked in sin as we try to bring others from death to life. We once were unable to break free from the snares of this world, but we now have been born again.

We must remember, though, that we now have life, and we did not give life to ourselves. We are victorious, but we did not win the battle ourselves. First John 5:4-5 reminds us that those born of God, those who have faith and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, have conquered the world. This is only because Christ has conquered the world and now lives in us. His power is in us.

It is wonderful to know that God is perfect, omnipotent, righteous, holy, loving, worthy, and is in pursuit of us and our best interest. So we should place our faith in Him and not in things of the world.

To know God is to know that the blood of Christ powerfully purifies us from pride, profaneness, falling in love with perishable things, and the penalty of sin. Since we are free from the penalty of sin and death, we should, with ambitious affection, seek to serve and snatch others from the fire as well. This is a delightful fragrance, pleasing to our Father, and is faith in action that is commanded by Christ.

1. Derwin Gray, *God, Do You Hear Me?* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2021), 2.





UNIT 24 / SESSION 1

JESUS IS THE WAY

+ **SESSION OUTLINE**

1. The Narrow Door (Luke 13:22-30)
2. The Coming Death (Luke 13:31-33)
3. The Future Adoration (Luke 13:34-35)

Background Passage: Luke 13

+ **WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?**

Jesus taught that entrance into His kingdom is difficult and only comes through Him.

+ **HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?**

While all may come to Jesus in faith for salvation, many will not, choosing to trust in some other way to be saved. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

+ **HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?**

Because the way of salvation is narrow, we keep Jesus central in all we do, helping others fix their gaze on Him and trust in Him alone for salvation.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

SETTING: The Gospel of Luke is a literary masterpiece, beautifully depicting the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The climax of Luke's Gospel is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, but the heart is the "travel narrative" (Luke 9:51–19:27), where Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). While journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus performed miracles and taught about the kingdom of God and the way of salvation. In Luke 13:22-35, Jesus portrayed Himself as the narrow door of salvation who saves sinners through His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, which would be accomplished in Jerusalem.

EXPLAIN: Almost everyone has been "lost" at some point in life. Sometimes children wander away from their parents. Sometimes a hiker gets turned around in the woods. Sometimes a driver takes a wrong turn and winds up in unfamiliar territory.

DISCUSS: **When have you been lost and had to find your way back to a familiar person or place?** (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: Every person is born a sinner, spiritually "lost" and separated from God by sin. The only way to be reconciled to God and enter His kingdom is through Jesus, the narrow door (Luke 13:24). No other way of salvation exists—Jesus is the way! Yet Jesus reminded His listeners that not everyone would be saved. Some would refuse to enter through the narrow door and participate in God's kingdom. Despite proximity to and familiarity with Jesus, they would be "thrown out" of God's kingdom (Luke 13:28). Therefore, Jesus exhorted His listeners to "make every effort to enter through the narrow door" (Luke 13:24).



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POINT 1

THE NARROW DOOR (LUKE 13:22-30)

22 He went through one town and village after another, teaching and making his way to Jerusalem. **23** “Lord,” someone asked him, “are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, **24** “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because I tell you, many will try to enter and won’t be able **25** once the homeowner gets up and shuts the door. Then you will stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open up for us!’ He will answer you, ‘I don’t know you or where you’re from.’ **26** Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ **27** But he will say, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you’re from. Get away from me, all you evildoers!’ **28** There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in that place, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves thrown out. **29** They will come from east and west, from north and south, to share the banquet in the kingdom of God. **30** Note this: Some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 13:22-30** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 22-27** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus is the **narrow** door, the only way to **salvation**.

DISCUSS: Why do people seem to bristle at “exclusivity”—the biblical claim that Jesus is the only way of salvation? (our culture elevates tolerance and inclusivity; we like to have options in our beliefs; our culture tends to reject narrow truth claims; we are prone to pride and seek other ways to be saved)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 28-30** commentary to emphasize that the God of the Old and New Testaments is the same God, and God is one (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #9: *God Is One:* The Bible affirms that God is one, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, otherwise known as the *Shema*. In both Old and New Testament times, the advocacy of **monotheism** (belief in one God) was contrary to the surrounding culture. Where most cultures practiced polytheism (belief in multiple gods) or henotheism (the worship of one god with the belief in multiple gods), the people of God knew, based upon God’s self-revelation, that **Yahweh**, the Lord, is the only one **true** God.

TRANSITION: Any person who desires to enter God’s kingdom must do so through Jesus. We will see that He sacrificed all for us.

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“He died to take away our sins for the simple reason that we cannot remove them ourselves. If we could, his atoning death would be unnecessary.”¹

—John Stott (1921–2011)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 22-27 / Jesus traveled to Jerusalem (v. 22), where He would be crucified, buried in a borrowed tomb, and raised from the dead on the third day (cf. Luke 23–24). On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was asked a significant question: **“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”** (v. 23). The parables in the previous section (cf. Luke 13:18-20) prompted the question. The inquirer was likely captivated by the size of the mustard seed and the small amount of leaven, leading to his question about the number of those who would be saved.

In response, Jesus exhorted listeners to **“make every effort to enter through the narrow door”** (v. 24). Jesus was not suggesting sinners were saved by human effort—this would go against the New Testament’s teaching on salvation by grace through faith (cf. Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:21-26). Rather, He emphasized the earnestness with which we should seek God’s kingdom, which can only be entered through faith in Jesus. No other way of salvation exists. Jesus is the narrow door, and all who desire to enter God’s kingdom must come through Him.

There is an urgency though. The opportunity for salvation will eventually disappear. Jesus said many people **“will try to enter and won’t be able”** because the owner of the house **“gets up and shuts the door”** (vv. 24-25). At some point, either through physical death or at the end times, the door of salvation will be closed to them. Once closed, a person will be unable to enter God’s kingdom. They might **“stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open for us’”** (v. 25), but the Lord will say, **“I don’t know you or where you’re from”** (v. 25). They may have eaten meals with Him and listened to His teaching, but they did not receive Him or possess a relationship with Him. Therefore, He will say, **“Get away from me, all you evildoers”** (v. 27).

The interaction between Jesus and those who cannot enter God’s kingdom teaches a powerful lesson: familiarity with Jesus

is not a substitute for faith in Jesus. These “seekers” are turned away because they failed to enter through the narrow door while it was open.

VERSES 28-30 / Jesus described the destination of the wicked: a place where **“there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (v. 28). Jesus used this language to paint a vivid picture of the grief and anguish of those who cannot enter the kingdom of God. Rather than enjoy a meal in the kingdom of God, the wicked will experience pain and sorrow and anger. Those who ate meals with Jesus and heard Him teach are left outside the kingdom of God if they do not trust in Him.

Their despair is compounded by the fact that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets participate in God’s kingdom while they are left out (v. 28). The God in the Old Testament is the same God here in the New. But through Jesus, the narrow door and the only way, we see more clearly that the one God is triune—one God in three Persons. Those who don’t believe are outside, looking into the kingdom of God where the patriarchs and prophets enjoy a meal at God’s table, while they are excluded.

Yet the exclusion of the wicked does not mean only a few people will enter God’s kingdom. Jesus described people **“from east and west, from north and south”** (v. 29) who would enter God’s kingdom. The kingdom of God is not reserved for Jews alone. People from all over the world will enter God’s kingdom and **“share the banquet in the kingdom of God”** (v. 29).

The Gentile inclusion indicates an eschatological, or end times, reversal, which is why Jesus said, **“Note this: Some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last”** (v. 30). The Gentiles, whom Paul described as being “foreigners to the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12), are sharing the banquet in the kingdom of God. Though the door is narrow, it is available for anyone to enter.

POINT 2

THE COMING DEATH (LUKE 13:31-33)

NOTES

31 At that time some Pharisees came and told him, “Go, get out of here. Herod wants to kill you.” **32** He said to them, “Go tell that fox, ‘Look, I’m driving out demons and performing healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work.’” **33** Yet it is necessary that I travel today, tomorrow, and the next day, because it is not possible for a prophet to perish outside of Jerusalem.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 13:31-33** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 31** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus faced **opposition** from Herod and the religious leaders, but He refused to **abandon** His mission of salvation.

DISCUSS: What are some ways obedience to God’s mission might lead to opposition for Christians? (believing in one man and one woman in marriage leads to being called intolerant; affirming a pro-life position on abortion can lead to persecution from the world; sharing the gospel can lead to opposition)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 32-33** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus announced His upcoming death, revealing His **sovereignty** and **commitment** to His mission.

DISCUSS: From Day 4 in the DDG: How can Christians take comfort in the truth that God is in control of everything? (no matter how chaotic life gets, Christians can remember God is always at work, even when we don’t see it, and He is working for His glory and our good; when Christians feel unseen or alone, God’s omniscience and omnipresence provide encouragement; God is not blind to our struggles nor ignorant of our situation)

TRANSITION: Jesus faced opposition from religious leaders and political leaders during His ministry. Yet He refused to be distracted from His mission to redeem sinners by dying on the cross. As the next point demonstrates, Jesus knew there would be mixed responses to Him and His mission.

HEROD

Herod is a family name, so many Herods existed. Herod Antipas, mentioned here, was a tetrarch, one of four rulers. He governed over Galilee and Perea and was known to be sly and deceitful in his rule. Though married, he eloped with Herodias, the wife of his half-brother. He beheaded John the Baptist.²

COMMENTARY

VERSE 31 / After Jesus's teaching on how some will be cast out and some will be invited into the kingdom, some Pharisees came and warned Him: **“Go, get out of here. Herod wants to kill you”** (v. 31).

The Gospel writers often portray the Pharisees as enemies of Jesus who challenge His authority, question His miracles, and oppose His teaching (cf. Mark 8:11; 10:2; 12:13-14; Matt. 12:38; 16:1). Yet here the Pharisees' motivation is unclear. The Pharisees may have been looking for a way to get Jesus to move on and leave quickly, or they could simply be delivering a message. Regardless, the chief antagonist in the passage was Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. His father, Herod the Great, was reigning when Christ was born and unsuccessfully attempted to kill Jesus (cf. Matt. 2:1-18). Like his father, Herod Antipas wanted to kill Jesus and threatened to accomplish what his father could not in verse 1. Eventually, Herod Antipas, in concert with Pontius Pilate, succeeded in killing Jesus (Luke 23:8-12), but here Luke simply recorded the threat, which was intended to intimidate Jesus and deter Him from accomplishing His mission.

VERSES 32-33 / Jesus was not intimidated however. He replied, **“Go tell that fox, ‘Look, I’m driving out demons and performing healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work’”** (v. 32).

The exact meaning of the fox imagery is unclear. Jesus could be highlighting the craftiness of Herod, or He could be mocking Herod as a fox rather than a lion.

Regardless, Jesus would not be deterred by Herod's threats. Jesus continued performing miracles as He traveled to Jerusalem, specifically casting out demons and healing people. Jesus's miracles demonstrated He was the Messiah who had come to save His people. Jesus would not be shaken from accomplishing His mission.

Ultimately, Jesus knew His mission would result in His death. The Pharisees hoped Jesus would not continue traveling to Jerusalem. Yet Jesus knew He would die in Jerusalem because He told the Pharisees, **“It is not possible for a prophet to perish outside of Jerusalem”** (v. 33). Jesus's response reveals that His death was part of God's providential plan and that He was going to fulfill that plan no matter the cost.

While Herod and the religious leaders conspired to put Christ to death and were responsible for their actions, God was sovereignly working through them to redeem sinful humanity. Peter noted their responsibility and God's sovereignty in his prayer in Acts 4:27-28:

For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place.

The death of Jesus was not accidental; it happened according to plan. Jesus knew He had to die for the sins of the world. He knew where He would die: Jerusalem. He knew how He would die: by being lifted up, or crucified. He knew these details because He is the Son of God and had set out on a mission to do exactly this for the salvation of humankind. His love and faithfulness to His people set Him out on a seemingly impossible task where He sacrificed and suffered not only in His death but in His life. He was opposed, mocked, persecuted, abandoned, and betrayed—finally resulting in His torture and death. And He continued on this journey for you and for me to give us life.

POINT 3

THE FUTURE ADORATION (LUKE 13:34-35)

NOTES

34 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! **35** See, your house is abandoned to you. I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 13:34-35** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 34** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus **laments** over Jerusalem, expressing His desire to **care** for the people of Israel, yet they were **unwilling** to come to Him.

DISCUSS: What are some ways people reject God's compassion? (atheists deny God's existence; many refuse to acknowledge God's common grace; many unbelievers reject the gospel; many professing Christians refuse to repent when sin is exposed)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 35** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus pronounced **judgment** on Israel, but He also announced **hope** for a future moment when they would call Him **blessed**.

DISCUSS: How does the gospel and the coming of Christ give us hope? (we know our sins are forgiven and we will no longer be separated from God; we know our salvation is secure; we know our future is in heaven; we know Christ is returning for His people)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 34 / Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem to die, which should not have been surprising given the city's history. Jesus lamented over the city and highlighted its bloody past: **"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her"** (v. 34). The Old Testament recounts the death of various prophets. Many of the Lord's prophets were killed by Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4). Uriah was killed by Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:20). Zechariah was stoned by Joash (2 Chron. 24:21; cf. Luke 11:51). The city of Jerusalem, specifically the Pharisees and religious leaders, had rejected Christ and would eventually kill Him, just as they had killed the prophets who came before Him.

Several of Jesus's parables reflect Israel's rejection of God's messengers. The parable of the wicked tenants is one example focused on the theme of rejection (Luke 20:9-19). In the parable, a man planted a vineyard and leased it to tenant farmers. When the man sent his servants three times to gather fruit from the vineyard, the tenant farmers beat the servants and sent them away. Finally, the farmer sent his son, believing the farmers would respect him. Tragically, the farmers killed the son to steal his inheritance. The parable concludes with the vineyard owner returning to punish the wicked tenants.

The message of this parable is clear: judgment awaits those who reject God's messengers. The servants represented God's prophets, who warned Israel to repent and return to God. The son represented Jesus, the Son of God who would be killed by the religious leaders and the Roman government. The wicked tenants represented the people of Israel, especially the Pharisees, scribes, and religiously leaders who rejected Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Despite the city's rejection of the prophets and Jesus in particular, Jesus displayed compassion for the city and its inhabitants. He used the imagery of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings to

convey His desire to protect them: **"How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings"** (v. 34). The imagery is drawn from the Old Testament, which uses zoomorphic language to describe God as a bird (cf. Deut. 32:11; Ruth 2:12; Ps. 17:8; Isa. 31:5). The point of the imagery is clear: Jesus cares for the city of Jerusalem and expresses His compassion for them. Unfortunately, the people are obstinate. They refuse to come to Jesus and find protection (Luke 13:34). The problem is the heart of the people: they refuse to enter God's kingdom through the narrow door.

VERSE 35 / Because of their rejection, Jesus pronounced judgment on Jerusalem: **"See, your house is abandoned to you"** (v. 35). This imagery is drawn from the Old Testament as well. The prophet Jeremiah warned about God's judgment on Israel and the possibility of God abandoning or forsaking the people due to sin (cf. Jer. 12:7; 22:5). The warning becomes reality, as "Jesus is more emphatic than Jeremiah's statement of the potential rejection of the nation. He states that a time of abandonment has come. Rather than being gathered under God's wings, their house is left empty and exposed. The now-empty house is the nation."³ Because they have rejected Jesus, they must face God's judgment on the nation.

While judgment was certain, Jesus did not leave them without hope. He pointed to a future time when they would see Him and say, **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"** (Luke 13:35)! Some have read this as a reference to the triumphal entry, but in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus made this statement (Matt. 23:37-39) after the triumphal entry (Matt. 21:1-11). Jesus was referring to a future time when Israel would recognize Him as Messiah. One day, Israel will enter God's kingdom through the narrow door.

MY RESPONSE

Because the way of salvation is narrow, we keep Jesus central in all we do, helping others fix their gaze on Him and trust Him alone for salvation.

NOTES

HEAD:

Jesus is the only way of salvation. No other path of salvation exists. As Peter said in Acts 4:12, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.” The way of salvation is narrow, and all other “paths” of salvation are dead ends. Therefore, we must reject competing claims of salvation and cling to Christ alone. He is the narrow way of salvation that must be received by faith alone.

How can you communicate the “narrowness” of salvation in a compelling and convincing way?

HEART:

Jesus lamented over the city of Jerusalem, which demonstrates His compassion for the people in the city and His desire to save Him. Unfortunately, they were unwilling to come to Him. We do not know whether people will accept the gospel or reject the gospel, but we should have compassion on them and share the gospel with them. Our willingness to share the gospel is evidence of compassion and reflects Christ’s compassion for sinners.

In what areas can you confess to God concerning your lack of compassion for others or lack of obedience in sharing the gospel?

HANDS:

Jesus is the narrow way of salvation, which is a crucial truth for believers and unbelievers. Christians need to be reminded of the exclusiveness of the gospel and cling to Christ alone for salvation and sanctification. Security and spiritual maturity are connected to Christ, so we must remind ourselves and others of the confidence and progress in the spiritual life that come from Christ. Similarly, unbelievers need to be informed of the exclusiveness of Christ and encouraged to trust Christ, the narrow way of salvation. There is no hope apart from Him. We must communicate the gospel—with believers and unbelievers—so that God can save sinners and strengthen His people.

Who needs a reminder of the good news of the gospel this week that you can share with?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“As we worship we celebrate our salvation through Christ who will bring us to glory, we pray for that kingdom to come, we quicken our hope by praises and anthems that direct our thoughts to the next life, and through the ministry of the Word we build our faith in this eternal hope.”⁴

—Allen Ross

POINT 1: THE NARROW DOOR (LUKE 13:22-30)

+ COMMENTARY

“Very solemnly significant is the difference between striving and seeking. It is like the difference between wishing and willing. There may be a seeking which has no real earnestness in it, and is not sufficiently determined, to do what is needful in order to find. Plenty of people would like to possess earthly good, but cannot brace themselves to needful work and sacrifice. Plenty would like to ‘go to heaven,’ as they understand the phrase, but cannot screw themselves to the surrender of self and the world. Vagrant, halfhearted seeking, such as one sees many examples of, will never win anything, either in this world or in the other. We must strive, and not only seek.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

In order to drive a car in the United States, a person must obtain a driver’s license. Multiple tests are required to obtain the license, including a driving test, a vision test, and a road sign test. Some of the road signs on the test can be challenging or confusing, especially for teenagers who do not have much experience on the road. However, one road sign is significantly easier to identify than the other signs: the “one way” sign. If a person can read, they should have no trouble recognizing this sign, because “one way” is written on the sign!

The simplicity of the sign is likely intentional. Drivers need to be able to identify the road sign quickly and easily, because ignoring the sign and driving the wrong way could lead to a major accident. There is only one direction a driver can legally go on a one-way street. Similarly, Jesus is the “one way” to enter God’s kingdom. There are no other ways or routes to God. He is the narrow door, and all who enter God’s kingdom must come through Him. Failure to recognize this reality and embrace it will lead to disaster, just like drivers who ignore a “one way” sign to their own peril.

EXTRA

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Ask your group if anyone knows anyone famous or has met anyone famous. Have that person tell how he or she knows that celebrity or how they met.

Consider one of the answers that may be just a perchance meeting (NOT one where the person actually does know the celebrity). Ask that person if he or she thought that celebrity would remember that one meeting. The answer would probably be no. Use that illustration to describe how there's a difference between meeting someone or even having dinner with someone and actually fully knowing a person. In this passage, Jesus is saying the same thing. At the end times, there will be some who will say they knew Jesus because they ate in His presence and heard Him teaching in the streets (Luke 13:26), but Jesus will say He doesn't know them and then tell them to go away (Luke 13:27). To have a relationship with Jesus is to really know Him, not just know of Him.

POINT 2: THE COMING DEATH (LUKE 13:31-33)

+ COMMENTARY

“Some claim that malevolent motives lie behind this warning. They are trying to drive him into a trap in Jerusalem where he will come under the power of the Sanhedrin, and his followers will panic. Or, they use this ruse simply because they want him out of their hair and sphere of influence. Or, perhaps they are trying to expose him as a false prophet for rejecting God's plan (7:30) by seeking to save himself. Such speculation is unwarranted. Luke is neither concerned with their motives for warning Jesus nor with Herod's motives for wanting to do away with him. The scene simply sets up Jesus' response, his acceptance of his divine mission with its attendant fate, and his lament over Jerusalem. Neither the Pharisees nor Herod direct his destiny; only God does.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the largest funeral gathering to ever take place occurred in 1969. Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai, the Chief Minister of Madras (a state in India), died on February 3, 1969, and an estimated 15,000,000 people attended the funeral for the departed Chief Minister. The size of the crowd revealed his personal popularity and his political influence in the state of Madras and the nation of India. Clearly his life was impactful, and his death was a significant historical event.⁷

However, the death of Jesus Christ is the most significant event in human history. On the cross, Jesus “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). Through faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven. We are dead to sin and can live a righteous life because of Christ's death. He is the narrow door, and His death made salvation and sanctification possible. Moreover, the impact of Christ's death is global. People from every tongue, tribe, and nation will worship around the throne in heaven because Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain (cf. Rev. 5:8-14; John 1:29).

POINT 3: THE FUTURE ADORATION (LUKE 13:34-35)

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus’ turbulent lament over Jerusalem is the result of his compassion (‘I have longed to gather your children together’) being met by a stubborn countercurrent of human rejection (‘but you were not willing’). God is not infrequently portrayed in the OT as a protective mother bird. Jesus assumes the same image here, perhaps as a hen, ‘under whose wings you will find refuge; whose faithfulness will be your shield and rampart’ (Ps 91:4). The maternal instinct of the hen is powerful, and no less the compassion of Jesus for Jerusalem. Jerusalem spurns Jesus’ compassion, however, for Jerusalem ‘kills the prophets and stones those sent to you.’ The literal meaning of ‘apostles’ in Greek is ‘sent ones.’ Hence the reference to ‘prophets and those sent’ (v. 34) repeats Jesus’ earlier prophecy of 11:49, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill.’ Stoning can be an impulsive expression of wrath in the Bible, but it also was the prescribed form of execution for the sins of idolatry and apostasy. The stoning of v. 34 implies determination rather than impulsiveness. Those whom God sends to Jerusalem, in other words, received the ultimate religious sanction—stoning. The will of God is thus rejected by a perversion of the law of God.”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

Every year, children from all over the world write a letter to Santa Claus with a list of demands, also known as a wish list. They ask Santa to bring them bikes, skateboards, books, clothes, video games and gaming consoles, and a host of other toys and gadgets. They send their list off to the North Pole, and then they wait for December 25. For many of them, the time seems to drag. They are eagerly waiting for Christmas Day, and the special day cannot get here soon enough. Even adults get excited during the holiday season and look forward to Christmas Day.

In Luke 13:34-35, Jesus talked about a day in the future in which He will receive praise. Jesus was anticipating that day. He desired for people to recognize Him as Messiah and trust Him for salvation, but as long as people rejected Him, they would continue to remain under God’s judgment. Nevertheless, hope remained for Israel. Jesus anticipated a day when His people would receive Him as Messiah and worship Him as Lord.

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JESUS IS THE LIFE

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Messiah brings life from death (John 11:20-27).
2. The Messiah brings glory from grief (John 11:38-44).
3. The Messiah brings salvation from rejection (John 11:45-53).

Background Passage: John 11

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In the raising of Lazarus, Jesus revealed that He has power over life and death, both physically and spiritually.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He showed that He has power over death. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, we have full assurance that Jesus has defeated death forever and will one day resurrect us from the dead.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been given eternal life in Christ, we glorify God always, even in sickness and in death, trusting in His power to raise us from the dead.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: The Gospel of John is often considered the most evangelistic Gospel in the New Testament. John explicitly stated the evangelistic nature of his Gospel toward the end of the book, stating how Jesus did many other signs unmentioned in his writing, but that the signs written were to help people believe Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God that they might have life (John 20:30-31). John 11:1-46 records the final, climactic sign that Jesus performs—the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

EXPLAIN: When people get sick, they have various signs or symptoms that confirm their illness.

DISCUSS: What are some common symptoms or signs of illnesses? (a person with a common cold might have a headache or a fever; a person with strep throat will have a sore throat and difficulty swallowing; lack of taste may be a sign of COVID)

TRANSITION: The Bible states the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Because every person has sinned (Rom. 3:23), every person receives the wages of sin: death. This means that apart from Christ, people have no spiritual life or relationship with God. They are dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Yet they are not without hope. Jesus alone has the power to raise the spiritually dead to life. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Those who trust Jesus Christ alone for salvation are raised from death to life and made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5). The resurrection of Lazarus in John 11 is a vivid sign that Jesus is the Messiah who has power to raise the dead.

POINT 1

THE MESSIAH BRINGS LIFE FROM DEATH (JOHN 11:20-27).

20 As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house. **21** Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. **22** Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” **23** “Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her. **24** Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” **25** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. **26** Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” **27** “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 11:20-27** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 20-22** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Amid sorrow, Martha clings to her **faith** in Jesus and remains **convinced** of His power.

DISCUSS: Read the Athanasius quote on **PACK ITEM 12: THE VOICE OF LIFE**, and then ask: **How can Christians cling to Jesus Christ in the midst of difficult circumstances and situations?** (pray to Him for comfort; read His Word for His presence; go to church to learn from and with the body of believers; talk to church members/Christians who will encourage you; read gospel-centered resources that exalt Christ)

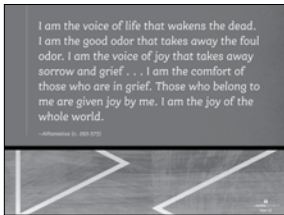
EXPLAIN: Recall **PACK ITEM 6: THE GREAT “I AM”** and use it along with the **VERSES 23-27** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus is the resurrection and the **life**—those who trust in Him will **overcome** death and live forever.

DISCUSS: **What are some reasons Christians should trust Christ to give them eternal life?** (the Bible affirms a future resurrection of the just and the unjust, and God always keeps His promises [John 5:28-29]; Jesus rose from the dead Himself, and He is the firstfruits of the resurrection [1 Cor. 15:20-23]; the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in the hearts of believers [Rom. 8:1])

TRANSITION: Any person who desires to enter God’s kingdom must do so through Jesus. Faith in Jesus—not familiarity with Him—is the necessary response to enter God’s kingdom. Jesus can bring life from death and glory from grief.

NOTES



VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“There is no spiritual life of which he is not the author, and there never will be. When you and I come to deal with men for their salvation, we discover our inability; for we perceive that the creation of life is out of our power, since it remains the sole prerogative of the Son of God.”¹

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 20-22 / John 11 contains the final, climactic sign in John's Gospel: the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha (vv. 38-42), two women from Bethany who loved and followed Jesus. When Lazarus became sick, Mary and Martha sent for Jesus: "Lord, the one you love is sick" (v. 3). Jesus waited for two days before traveling to Bethany because He planned to raise Lazarus from the dead for two reasons: (1) to glorify God (vv. 4,40), and (2) to generate faith (vv. 15,42). As Jesus approached Bethany, Martha **"went to meet him,"** while **"Mary remained seated in the house"** (v. 20). Martha's move toward Jesus, even in her grief, is inspiring and instructive. Her faith was not shaken, even though she experienced loss.

Martha's faith can be seen in her first words to Jesus: **"Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died"** (v. 21). Though she was grieving the loss of her brother, she knew that Jesus had power and authority. Martha believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, but perhaps was unclear about the extent of His power. She continued: **"Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you"** (v. 22). Martha remained confident in Jesus, acknowledging His close relationship with the Father and His ability to intercede. Martha grieved the loss of her brother, but her faith and confidence in Jesus remained intact.

VERSES 23-27 / Jesus offered hope to Martha in her grief: **"Your brother will rise again"** (v. 23). There are two ways these words could have been received by Martha: (1) Lazarus will rise again in the general resurrection on the last day, or (2) Lazarus will rise again in the present. While Jesus had the latter sense in mind, Martha understood Jesus to be speaking in the former sense. She responded: **"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day"** (v. 24). Her statement is consistent with orthodox Jewish belief and reveals she knew of a future bodily resurrection. Note that the group of Jewish leaders known as

the Sadducees denied the resurrection, so Martha's statement aligned with the teaching of the Pharisees. Nevertheless, Martha misunderstood the point of Jesus's statement. He was not speaking of the future resurrection; He was talking about an immediate resurrection.

Jesus told Martha: **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** (vv. 25-26). This is one of seven "I AM" statements in the Gospel of John, designed to reveal Jesus as the Son of God. The other six "I AM" statements are: "I am the bread of life" (6:35), "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "I am the gate" (10:7), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "I am the true vine" (15:5). As the resurrection and the life, Jesus had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead immediately. Yet Lazarus was not the only one who would benefit from Christ's identity as the resurrection and the life. Jesus said every person who believes in Him will live, even if they die, and every person who believes in Him will live and never die. The certainty of a bodily resurrection in the future and the possession of eternal life in the present is available through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Martha answered Jesus's question with one of the strongest confessions of faith in the Bible: **"Yes, Lord, she told him, 'I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world'"** (v. 27). She affirmed Jesus is the Messiah, the One to whom the Old Testament pointed. She affirmed Jesus is the Son of God, acknowledging His deity. She affirmed Jesus came into the world, highlighting His pre-existence and eternity. Martha recognized Jesus as the divine Son of God who came to die and rise from the dead to secure eternal life and a bodily resurrection for all who believe.

POINT 2

THE MESSIAH BRINGS GLORY FROM GRIEF (JOHN 11:38-44).

NOTES

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. **39** “Remove the stone,” Jesus said. Martha, the dead man’s sister, told him, “Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days.” **40** Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” **41** So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. **42** I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.” **43** After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” **44** The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 11:38-44** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 38-39** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus was moved by the grief of Martha, Mary, and the crowd, which reveals His **sympathy** and **compassion**.

DISCUSS: *From Day 3 in the DDG: How can Christians display compassion and help others who are struggling with grief?* (provide meals for families; start a grief recovery ministry or encourage people to attend one; help pay for counseling if someone needs professional help; lend a listening ear)

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 3: HEARING THE OLD IN THE NEW** and the **VERSES 40-44** commentary to emphasize that God, and thus Jesus, has always had the power to give life (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

The resurrection of Lazarus was intended to display God’s **glory** and to inspire **faith** in the hearts of those who witnessed it and read about it.

DISCUSS: What are some other ways God has made His glory known? (creation declares the glory of God [Ps. 19:1-4]; Jesus reveals the glory of God [Matt. 17:1-8; John 1:14]; God is glorified when disciples bear fruit [John 15:8]; God is glorified in the salvation of sinners [Gal. 1:22-24])

TRANSITION: The resurrection of Lazarus allowed everyone present to witness the glory of God and provided another reason to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. But as the next point shows, not everyone responded to the sign of Lazarus’s resurrection by believing in Jesus.



JEWISH BURIAL CUSTOMS

In Jewish custom, many families had family tombs to bury their loved ones, usually carved into a cave and sealed with a large stone. Burial would be rather immediate after death, usually including the wrapping of the body in linen cloths with spices to help hide the smells.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 38-39 / John recorded Jesus's being moved by the death of Lazarus and the grief of his family and friends. He wrote, "When Jesus saw [Mary] crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, He was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled" (v. 33). Some scholars think Jesus was angry about Lazarus's death or angry at the display of grief, while others believe Jesus was experiencing His own personal grief. Whatever the reason, John wrote, "Jesus wept" (v. 35), and the crowds observed Jesus's tears and exclaimed, "See how he loved him!" (v. 36).

When Jesus arrived at the tomb, He was **"deeply moved again"** (v. 38). The inner stirring and movement in Jesus's spirit likely highlights Jesus's eagerness to raise Lazarus from the dead, but this should not be viewed in isolation from His love for Lazarus and His sympathy toward Martha and Mary and the Jews who accompanied them in deep anguish. Indeed, one of the reasons Jesus was eager to raise Lazarus was because He loved him and his sisters (vv. 3,5).

Jesus's humanity is evident in this passage. John records Jesus experiencing common human emotions: love, grief, and excitement. Yet Jesus's deity is also evident, as His human emotions led to divine action. Jesus commanded those present to **"remove the stone"** (v. 39) so He could raise Lazarus from the dead. Martha objected: **"Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days"** (v. 39). Her objection reveals her love for her brother and her desire to honor him while revealing her inability to grasp what would take place in the next few minutes.

VERSES 40-44 / Jesus responded to Martha's objection by reminding her of their previous conversation: **"Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"** (v. 40). Before Lazarus died, Jesus told the disciples his sickness would not end in death. Instead, Lazarus's sickness was "for the glory of God, so that

the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v. 4). Jesus knew Lazarus's sickness would not ultimately end in death but in resurrection and life. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, God was glorified and Jesus was shown to be God's Son, both of which accomplished the first purpose for which Lazarus was raised.

After the stone was removed, Jesus prayed to God the Father. Although He prayed to the Father, Jesus's prayer was intended to be heard by those present. Jesus was confident God heard Him, but He prayed in the crowd's hearing **"so that they may believe you sent me"** (v. 42). Jesus wanted the crowd to know God the Father always heard the Son's prayers, and He wanted them to believe God the Father sent Jesus. The sign of Lazarus's resurrection was designed to produce faith in those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. The next section demonstrates the sign accomplished exactly what Jesus intended (cf. John 11:45).

After the prayer, John records the resurrection of Lazarus. In the broader narrative, the actual resurrection of Lazarus is relatively short. Jesus shouted, **"Lazarus, come out"** (v. 43). Lazarus walked out of the grave in his graveclothes, **"bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth"** (v. 44). Jesus said, **"Unwrap him and let him go"** (v. 44). Then the narrative transitions to the response of the Jews to Lazarus's resurrection. Yet the significance of the sign cannot be overlooked. The entire chapter builds up to verses 43-44, where Jesus demonstrates He is the resurrection and the life. The resurrection accomplishes exactly what God designed it to accomplish: God was glorified, and many Jews present believed in Jesus.

POINT 3

THE MESSIAH BRINGS SALVATION FROM REJECTION (JOHN 11:45-53).

NOTES

45 Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he did believed in him. **46** But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. **47** So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and were saying, “What are we going to do since this man is doing many signs? **48** If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” **49** One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! **50** You’re not considering that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish.” **51** He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, **52** and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God. **53** So from that day on they plotted to kill him.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 11:45-53** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: On **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS’S MINISTRY MAP**, point out the proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem to show how close the Pharisees and Sanhedrin in Jerusalem were, then use the **VERSES 45-48** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Many Jews **believed** in Jesus, but the Pharisees rejected Him and plotted to **kill** Him.

DISCUSS: Why might someone reject Jesus as the resurrection and the life? (they might not believe in God or the supernatural; they might believe the Bible contradicts itself; they might have been hurt by the church or hypocritical Christians; they might have past struggles and blame God)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 49-53** commentary to emphasize the doctrine that Christ is our substitute (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #60: Christ as Substitute: At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament **sacrificial** system, which provided a picture of humanity’s need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the **redemption** of humanity from sin.



THE SANHEDRIN

A counsel of 70 men, led by the high priest, somewhat similar to Moses and the 70 elders ruling over the Israelites. They were responsible for local rule over Jews in the Roman province of Judea. “Included in its responsibilities were the investigation of charges related to the violations of the Mosaic Law and the assessment of claims made by people to be prophets or the Messiah.”²

COMMENTARY

VERSES 45-48 / The reaction to Jesus's miracle was mixed. Many of the Jews **"believed in him"** (v. 45). A significant number of those who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus placed their faith in Jesus. However, some of the people present went to the Pharisees and told them about the miracle (v. 46).

The chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. They needed to discuss further how to deal with this Jesus. They had been worried about Jesus all along, and now they were hearing accounts of Him raising the dead. How could it be?

The "many signs" performed by Jesus were irrefutable, so the religious leaders had the choice to either believe or harden their hearts even more. They chose the latter and felt compelled to act. **"If we let him go on like this,"** they said, **"everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation"** (v. 48). The chief priests and Pharisees were concerned that Jesus would garner such a large following that Rome would intervene and punish the nation, so they ultimately decided to plot to kill Him (v. 53). Readers should observe the irony in the religious leaders plotting to kill the One who is the resurrection and the life. Even if they could succeed, their efforts would be pointless. He had just demonstrated His power over death, and He would do so again!

VERSES 49-53 / Caiaphas, the high priest, chastised the gathering of religious leaders: **"You know nothing at all"** (v. 49). This less-than-diplomatic response revealed his frustration with their thought process. Caiaphas reasoned the death of Jesus would be beneficial for the Sanhedrin and Israel, since Jesus would die rather than **"the whole nation perish"** (v. 50). His proposed solution was to kill Jesus.

Yet Caiaphas spoke better than he knew. John clarified that Caiaphas **"did not say this on his own"** but **"prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation"**

(v. 51). John discerned a deeper, spiritual meaning in the words of Caiaphas than Caiaphas himself realized.

Jesus would die for the nation, but He would also die **"to unite the scattered children of God"** (v. 52). Jesus truly is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by dying on the cross (cf. John 1:29). The religious leaders clearly understood Caiaphas's words as instructions to kill Jesus because **"from that day on they plotted to kill him"** (v. 53).

Caiaphas unknowingly spoke about one of Scripture's most important doctrines: substitution. Caiaphas was not using sacrificial language in a Christian sense. His statement that it was better that **"one man should die for the people"** (v. 50) reflected his own thoughts of a "better Him, than us" mentality. Nevertheless, Christians can identify the unmistakable spiritual truth of the high priest's statement.

Jesus is the substitute for sinners. Michael Lawrence pointed out Christ's substitution is similar to other examples of substitution in Scripture:

An effective sacrifice is a substitute. We saw a ram slain in the place of Isaac. We saw the Passover lamb slain in the place of the firstborn. And we see the same kind of substitute pictured in the book of Leviticus—a point punctuated when the person lays his or her hand on the animal. In the same way, Jesus provided an effective sacrifice for us by offering himself to God as a substitute.³

Yet Jesus's substitution is greater. He died for the sins of the world, and everyone who **"believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16).

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been given eternal life in Christ, we glorify God always, even in sickness and in death, trusting in His power to raise us from the dead.

NOTES

HEAD:

Only Jesus can make alive those who are spiritually dead, and only He can raise Christians from the dead to enjoy God's presence forever. Apart from Him, there is only sin and death. Yet through faith in Christ, there is resurrection and eternal life. Therefore, we affirm the historical nature of biblical resurrections and anticipate the return of Christ, when the dead will rise and God's people will enjoy Him forever.

Why must we as Christians affirm the historical nature of the resurrection? (See 1 Corinthians 15, especially verses 12-19.)

HEART:

Mary, Martha, and their friends were overcome with grief when Lazarus died, but Jesus did not scold them or rebuke them. Instead, He wept (John 11:35). He was moved (vv. 33,38). He loved them (v. 36). The emotional language and the tears reveal Jesus's compassionate heart. Christians can take comfort in the fact that God loves them faithfully, even in their most difficult moments. We know God loves us even when we face sickness and death, so we remain faithful to God and glorify Him with our bodies, whether in life or death.

When facing difficult circumstances, how can we continue to praise God?

HANDS:

Mary and Martha both announce their confidence in Jesus even after Lazarus died (cf. John 11:21,32). They did not allow their present circumstances to shake their faith in Jesus. Their unshakable confidence in Jesus was based on the fact that He is the resurrection and the life (v. 25). Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave, and then He Himself died and rose from the dead to give us spiritual life and to guarantee our future resurrection from the dead. Because our sins are forgiven and our future is secure, we can face whatever happens in life with confidence. We can glorify God by continually trusting Him, loving Him, and obeying Him, even when tragedy strikes.

With whom can we share this message of hope this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Christ assumed our identity, as it were, and endured the retributive judgment due to us ... as our substitute, in our place, with the damning record of our transgressions nailed by God to his cross as the tally of crimes for which he was now dying."⁴

—J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE MESSIAH BRINGS LIFE FROM DEATH

(JOHN 11:20-27).

+ COMMENTARY

“In the context of Jesus’s discussion with Martha, the occurrence of the ‘I am’ statement is significant. . . . Here Jesus claims for himself the authority over life and death given to him by the Father (cf. 5:21-29). It is important to note that this resurrection and life are both coming and not yet; as Jesus explained it, ‘An hour comes and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live’ (5:25). In this way, ‘belief’ in Jesus is faith placed in the person of Jesus, so that Jesus is both the promise of the provision of God for the future and the present reality of the provision of God.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration at the time of this writing, there are currently 105,910 people on the national transplant waiting list.⁶ The people on the list are waiting for one of the following organs: the liver, heart, pancreas, kidneys, and lungs. When a person registers as an organ donor, in a limited sense, they bring life from death.

In John 11:1-44, Jesus brought life from death. Today, Christians anticipate a future resurrection and a glorious reunion in heaven because Jesus brings life from death.

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Martha, even in her time of distress and sorrow, was able to declare Jesus for who He is: the Messiah, the Son of God who has come into the world (John 11:27).

Pass out a sheet of paper or have people write in their DDGs some pains or stress items or prayer requests they might be struggling with. Then have them write down who they believe Jesus to be in the midst of those pains. For example: a broken relationship—Jesus is the God of reconciliation; a habitual sin—Jesus is our strength; a loss—Jesus is our comforter. Provide concordances or let your group use their phones to find verses that support their ideas. Provide an opportunity for group members to share their thoughts and ideas and Bible passages to encourage the rest of the group.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE MESSIAH BRINGS GLORY FROM GRIEF

(JOHN 11:38-44).

+ COMMENTARY

“When the group arrived, Jesus witnessed their sorrow and was ‘deeply moved in spirit’ and ‘troubled.’ . . . Some have suggested the general state of unbelief among the people angered Jesus, but this seems out of place given His compassionate care for Martha, whose struggle was not so much with incomplete faith as with incomplete knowledge. Unlike the selfish gods of mythology, the triune God of the Bible empathizes with His creation. Furthermore, He is justifiably angry with the cruelty of evil, which oppresses His beloved creation. Death is the ultimate affront to His creative act; it tries to destroy what He intended to last forever.”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is considered a literary masterpiece and is one of his more well-known works. The tragedy centers on two young lovers from rival families who are forbidden to see each other. Toward the end of the tragedy, Juliet fakes her own death to be with Romeo, but the details of the plan do not reach Romeo in time. When he discovers her unconscious body, Romeo believes Juliet is dead and takes his own life. When Juliet awakes and finds Romeo dead, she takes her own life. The grieving families finally agree to end their feud, but not until Romeo and Juliet are dead.

The story of *Romeo and Juliet* is familiar, so sometimes readers fail to fully appreciate the sad ending. *Romeo and Juliet* were robbed of a happy ending, and both died in a tragic twist of fate. Yet through their death, the Montague and Capulet family feud was ended. Good came from the grief and sorrow of their death.

In a much greater way, Jesus turned the grief of Mary and Martha into glory—demonstrating that God the Father sent Him and empowered Him to raise the dead to life. No matter what Christians go through, God is glorified by Christians who are resolved to trust Him and follow Him, regardless of the circumstances.

+ ILLUSTRATION

In our day and age, people, especially younger adults and teens, are fascinated with zombies. Movies, comic books, and stories with zombies seem to saturate our media, including *Abraham Lincoln vs. Zombies* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. People coming back from the dead is a fun, fearful, or fantastical storyline that sells. People want to know that it might be possible to come back from the dead.

But unlike fictional zombies, the resurrection that Jesus provides is real and true. Because Jesus had the power to resurrect Himself, He also has the power to resurrect us in the last days. And we can have eternal life through Him. Unlike zombies, our resurrection is restorative and comes with glorified bodies that we may reign with Christ and be in His presence forevermore.

POINT 3: THE MESSIAH BRINGS SALVATION FROM REJECTION (JOHN 11:45-53).

+ COMMENTARY

“That statement in 11:50—it was an advantage (sumpherein, ‘better’) for one man to die ‘on behalf of’ (hyper, NIV ‘for’) ‘the people’—is filled with sacrificial meaning. The term hyper is frequently associated with a substitutionary or replacement view of the atonement. In the Old Testament the devotees and priests would place their hands on the sacrificial animals or scapegoat in identification (cf. Lev 16:7-10, 20-22), and thus the animals would carry the weight of sin and guilt on behalf of (for) the worshipers. Accordingly, the worshipers would not bear the punishment of God. Here the word of the high priest provides insight into the means whereby the nation would be spared from perishing. But the evangelist added that the death of Jesus (the sacrificial victim) would extend beyond the ethnic and geographical borders of Israel (‘the nation’) and unite into one group all the scattered children of God (11:52; cf. 10:16).”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

Rejection is hard to accept. When you get passed over for a promotion, it stings. When you get denied a loan, it is frustrating. When you get turned down for a date, it hurts. Everyone has faced rejection. Consider sharing a story about a time you experienced rejection firsthand. This could be from the distant past or more recently. Use your story to transition into the rejection of Jesus.

In John 11:45-53, John recorded the rejection of Jesus. While some of the Jews saw the sign of Lazarus’s resurrection and believed, many of the Pharisees did not. They rejected Jesus as the Messiah and plotted to kill Him. The Pharisees and religious leaders were worried about Roman retribution should Jesus gain a large following, so they decided to kill Him before that could happen. Little did they understand that Jesus would die, rather than the nation, so that all who believe in Him might live eternally.

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JESUS IS THE TRUTH

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. We are to resist the powers of the world (Eph. 6:10-17).
2. We are to reject the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17).
3. We are to proclaim Jesus to the world (2 Cor. 4:3-6).

Background Passages: 2 Corinthians 4; Ephesians 6; 1 John 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Believers are to have nothing to do with the evil powers of the world and their fruit but are to share the one true gospel with the people of the world.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Satan has blinded the eyes of the world to the truth of God, offering false hope in the things of the world while also opposing God through the world's evil systems. Jesus came so that the eyes of the blind might be opened to the truth. All who trust in Him find true hope in God's kingdom.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because the world is opposed to God, we stand against the world's evil systems, rejecting anything that is contrary to God's truth and good design.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: The world will say truth is one thing and Jesus will say truth is another. Jesus taught that He is the truth (John 14:6) and that His Word is truth (John 17:17). But the world and Satan's forces will try to tempt us toward their false truths. As disciples of Christ, we are to resist these temptations by holding onto the truth of God, living and proclaiming the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

INSTRUCT: Play the game "Two Truths and a Lie." Pass out index cards and ask group members to provide two true statements and one false statement about themselves. Then read the individual cards and guide group members to guess which statements are true and which statement is false.

DISCUSS: How do you determine what is true and false? (be an eyewitness of it; research the answer; hear from many other eyewitnesses or people you trust; search for evidential proof)

TRANSITION: In contrast to Jesus, who is the truth and speaks the truth, the world is opposed to the truth. The powers of the world—led by Satan—are opposed to God and His followers (Eph. 6:10-17). The things of the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—do not come from God (1 John 2:15-17). The people in the world—those who are perishing—are blind to the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:3-6). Therefore, Christians are called to live the truth and share the truth by resisting the powers of the world, rejecting the things of the world, and proclaiming Jesus to the world.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: What are some common lies that Christians are tempted to believe? ("God doesn't love me" when times are hard; "church attendance isn't that important" when we are busy or tired; "this sin isn't THAT bad" when tempted to give in to sinful desires)

POINT 1

WE ARE TO RESIST THE POWERS OF THE WORLD (EPH. 6:10-17).

10 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. **11** Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. **13** For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. **14** Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, **15** and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. **16** In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 6:10-17** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 10-13** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

While engaging in **battle** against spiritual **enemies**, we must rely on God's **power** to prevail.

DISCUSS: In what areas is Satan currently “attacking” Christians and the church? (the family unit: divorce is common, and raising children to know and follow Jesus is hard; the social pressure to affirm same-sex marriage and the growing LGBTQ+ movement; the existence of God, the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Jesus, the exclusivity of the gospel are being challenged)

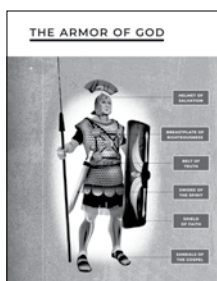
EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 13: THE ARMOR OF GOD** and the **VERSES 14-17** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God provides spiritual **armor** and a spiritual **weapon** for Christians to stand firm against **Satan** and his followers.

DISCUSS: From Day 2 in the DDG: **What are some ways we can use God's armor well on a daily basis?** (read and study the Bible diligently; seek out news and information that is truthful; be intentional with meeting and building relationships with people who need the truth of the gospel; live out justice and righteousness)

TRANSITION: Christians can resist the power of Satan and his forces. We merely need to rely on God and His weaponry as we reject the things of this world.

NOTES



ARMOR

Body armor was first made of leather, and later metal was added to further protect vital areas. Later, scales of metal were sewn to a leather shirt to enable the soldier to move better. The armor of God can refer to both the idea that it is from God, given to us, and that it is His armor itself, that He shares with us (cf. Isa. 59:17).

COMMENTARY

VERSES 10-13 / Paul concluded his letter to the church in Ephesus by addressing spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20). The final paragraph can be divided into three major sections: (1) the need to depend on God while facing spiritual opposition (vv. 10-13), (2) the spiritual armor and weapon necessary to win the spiritual battle (vv. 14-17), and (3) the importance of prayer (vv. 18-20). In the first section, Paul commanded believers to **“be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength”** (v. 10). Spiritual warfare requires supernatural strength, which comes from God alone. Christians should humbly acknowledge their complete dependence on God in the Christian life, and in spiritual warfare in particular.

Not only does spiritual warfare require supernatural strength, but it also requires spiritual armor. Paul commanded believers to **“put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil”** (v. 11). Paul went on to describe the various pieces of spiritual armor and weaponry, but here he simply instructed them to put on the armor. Spiritual strength comes from God, but this reality does not mean Christians are passive. Christians must use the resources God provides to resist Satan and his schemes.

Christians do not struggle **“against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in heaven”** (v. 12). Paul reminded believers that their true enemies were not other people. Instead, Christians engage in spiritual warfare with evil spiritual forces. These spiritual forces—Satan, rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of darkness, and evil, spiritual forces—are opposed to God and determined to attack God’s people. Given the spiritual opposition to God’s people, Paul again exhorted the Ephesians to **“take up the full armor of God”** and **“to take your stand”** (v. 13).

VERSES 14-17 / Paul listed the armor necessary to stand against Satan and his forces of darkness. Every piece of armor is essential for spiritual warfare and must be equipped by believers. Paul described each piece in the order a soldier would equip it.

- First, Paul commands Christians to engage in spiritual warfare with **“truth like a belt around your waist”** (v. 14). Truth refers to the truth of the gospel as well as the importance of living with honesty and moral integrity. Christians are encouraged to wrap truth around their lives—to embrace the gospel and to live accordingly.
- Second, Paul directs Christians to have **“righteousness like armor on your chest”** (v. 14). Christians receive by faith Christ’s righteousness, which serves as the foundation for righteous living.
- Third, Paul instructs Christians to have **“feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace”** (v. 15). Christians receive the gospel by faith, and then they share the gospel with boldness, being ready at all times for opportunities the Lord brings our way.
- Fourth, Paul exhorts Christians to **“take up the shield of faith”** to **“extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one”** (v. 16). As Christians put their faith in God’s power, they can be assured of their identity and security in Christ.
- Fifth, Paul encourages Christians to **“take the helmet of salvation”** (v. 17). Christians have been saved from the penalty and power of sin, and Christians must remind themselves of this glorious reality. They have a “new identity in Christ, which gives believers power for deliverance from the supernatural enemies on the basis of their union with the resurrected and exalted Lord.”¹
- Finally, Paul tells Christians to pick up **“the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God”** (v. 17). The Word of God is the Christian’s weapon. By reading it, memorizing it, and meditating on it, Christians can effectively resist the evil powers of the world.

POINT 2

WE ARE TO REJECT THE THINGS OF THE WORLD

(1 JOHN 2:15-17).

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 John 2:15-17** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 15** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Christians cannot love the **world** and the **Father**; these two are mutually exclusive.

DISCUSS: **How can Christians keep themselves from falling in love with worldly things?** (read the Bible to grow in knowledge and love for God; pray and deepen your relationship with God; attend church consistently; spend time with believers who encourage you to pursue holiness)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 16-17** commentary to emphasize the doctrine that the world—with its fleshly desires, lustful looks, and prideful hearts—is opposed to God (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #46: *The World Opposed to God:* There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and **evil** spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and **deceit** that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by **faith** in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

TRANSITION: The world is opposed to God and will pass away. The one who knows God and does His will, on the other hand, will remain forever (1 John 2:15-17). Therefore, Christians should devote themselves to sharing the gospel in hopes that unbelievers will forsake the world and come to God through faith in Jesus.

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Those who seek happiness from [the world] make a wretched and miserable provision for themselves, especially when God calls us to the ineffable glory of eternal life.”²

—John Calvin (1509–1564)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 15 / John addressed several major themes in his first letter to believers, including the theme of walking in the light. Because God is light (1:5), Christians are called to walk in light and not darkness (1:6-7). One of the ways believers walk in the light is by rejecting the things of the world. Specifically, John instructed his readers not to **“love the world or the things in the world”** (v. 15).

What does John mean by “world”? While John used the term “world” in a positive sense in other writings (see John 3:16, for example), here the usage is negative. World refers to the systems of this present age that are opposed to God as well as the things in the world that dishonor God. To be clear, John is not saying Christians should not love people in the world, souls that need to come to know Jesus as Lord. He is referring to the things of this world that are not eternal.

The reason Christians should not love the world is stated at the end of verse 15: **“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”** Christians cannot love the systems of this present age and the Father. These two are mutually exclusive. How can a Christian love the world, which is opposed to God, and God Himself at the same time? No person can serve two masters (cf. Matt. 6:24). Christians must set their affections on God; they must love Him rather than the world.

VERSES 16-17 / After commanding believers not to love the world, John identified three things in the world that Christians must not love: **“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions”** (v. 16). These three things constitute **“everything in the world”** and do not come **“from the Father”** but **“from the world”** (v. 16). The first “thing” in the world to be rejected is the lust of the flesh. “Flesh” does not refer to the body or skin in a strictly literal sense. John used the term in a metaphorical sense to describe the natural or sinful desires of fallen humanity.

This usage is not unique to John. Throughout the Bible, “flesh” is shorthand for the sinful nature of man that is bent toward sin (cf. Rom. 8:1-11; Gal. 5:16-21; 1 Pet. 2:11-12). Christians are called to love God and walk in the power of the Spirit rather than yielding to the sinful desires of the flesh.

The second thing to be rejected in the world is the lust of the eyes. Here John focused on the sinful things that a person sees and desires. The lust of the eyes is “moral shortsightedness that obscures higher and better realities,” or “the moral bankruptcy of the spiritually blind heart.”³ This lure of the world causes people to focus on the things of the world rather than on God and desiring His kingdom.

The final thing in the world to be rejected is pride in one’s possessions. John was warning against materialism. The unrestrained pursuit of possessions is a worldly endeavor that should be rejected by God’s people.

John concluded this passage by highlighting the folly of loving the things of the world. The world is temporary; it **“is passing away”** and will not last (v. 17). Therefore, Christians would be foolish to set their hearts and affections on the world. Instead, Christians should seek to know God and do His will, since **“the one who does the will of God remains forever”** (v. 17). John was not suggesting Christians earn their salvation by doing God’s will. He was writing to Christians who already placed their faith in Christ, those already cleansed by His blood. He merely was reminding these believers of the value of obeying God’s Word and doing God’s will. As those who knew God and sought to do His will, they would remain forever. This truth would help them continue to resist the things of the world and set their affections on God Himself and God alone.

POINT 3

WE ARE TO PROCLAIM JESUS TO THE WORLD

(2 COR. 4:3-6).

3 But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** In their case, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5** For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake. **6** For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **2 Corinthians 4:3-6** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 3-4** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Unbelievers do not **see** or **understand** the beauty of the **gospel**.

DISCUSS: In what ways does sin affect a person? (sin affects every aspect of our lives: our minds, hearts, and hands; it can corrupt us; it makes us blind to truth; it breaks our relationships with others; it plays with our minds and hearts)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-6** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Christians share the **gospel** in hopes that God will open the **eyes** and **hearts** of unbelievers.

DISCUSS: Why should Christians share the gospel even if many will reject it? (to obey Jesus's Great Commission [cf. Matt. 28:18-20]; we don't know who will accept or reject it; we're motivated by love; we reflect Jesus's love by sharing the gospel with others; if it's good news, we should naturally want to share it)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 3-4 / Paul was committed to preaching the gospel wherever he went (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2; Col. 1:28-29). Yet not everyone responded to the gospel in faith. Paul explained why: the gospel **“is veiled to those who are perishing”** (v. 3). The veil imagery is drawn from the previous section (2 Cor. 3:7-18), where Paul discussed the veil on Moses’s face after receiving the Ten Commandments. Just like Moses had a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from seeing the reflection of God’s glory, unbelievers have a veil over their hearts, keeping them from seeing the truth of the gospel. The veil is removed only when a person trusts Christ (2 Cor. 3:16). Until then, the perishing are unable to see the beauty of Christ.

Paul added another reason that unbelievers do not respond positively to the gospel: **“the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers”** (v. 4). This lowercase “god” refers to Satan, who is a false god, one that prowls around trying to snatch people from God’s hands (1 Pet. 5:8). He has blinded those who wish not to see the truth of Christ and His saving work.

Satan is currently working to blind the minds of unbelievers. His reign is limited and temporary, but until Christ returns, he will continually oppose God and keep unbelievers blind to **“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”** (v. 4). Here Paul highlighted the glory of the gospel and the identity of Christ. The gospel—the good news of Jesus’s death and resurrection—is a glorious, life-giving message. If Satan can convince unbelievers that Christ’s death was shameful and pointless and that Christ’s resurrection did not happen, he can keep them trapped in their sin.

Paul wrote that Christ **“is the image of God”** (see also Col. 1:15). Paul doesn’t suggest that Jesus is just a copy or imprint of God; Jesus is God and reveals the love, righteousness, and character of the Father to those with eyes to see.

VERSES 5-6 / Paul was not deterred by the unbelievers’ blindness nor Satan’s opposition. Paul made sure to note the content of his proclamation was not himself: **“For we are not proclaiming ourselves”** (v. 5). His ministry and preaching were not self-centered. Instead, his ministry and preaching were Christ-centered. He proclaimed **“Jesus Christ as Lord”** (v. 5).

In his first letter to the church of Corinth, Paul wrote to them saying that he did not come with great rhetoric but “decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1-2). The gospel was “most important” (15:3). For this reason, Paul resolved to preach Jesus Christ everywhere he went. Paul also told the Corinthian believers that he and his associates were **“your servants for Jesus’s sake”** (2 Cor. 4:5). His ministry was focused on Jesus but directed toward serving others, in this case, the Corinthians.

Paul committed to proclaiming Christ because he knew God is stronger than Satan, the god of this age. Despite Satan’s efforts, God is able to open unbelievers’ eyes to the light of the gospel.

God created light. The God who spoke light into existence (cf. Gen. 1:3) is the same God who **“shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul had experienced the “light” of God’s salvation on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18). He knew his experience, although unique, was not exclusive. Others had experienced God’s “light” of salvation through Paul’s proclamation of the gospel. Paul had seen God open many eyes and enable many unbelievers to see the light of the glory of Christ. Therefore, Paul resolved to preach nothing but Christ.

MY RESPONSE

PACK ITEM 14: THE DISCIPLE OF JESUS: Pass out copies of this bookmark to remind your group of the ways disciples of Jesus should respond to Jesus.

Because the world is opposed to God, we stand against the world's evil systems, rejecting anything that is contrary to God's truth and good design.

HEAD:

Truth matters. In a world that is confused about many things—sexuality, spirituality, identity, and a host of other issues—Christians know the truth. His name is Jesus, and He lived, died, and rose to enable Christians to live truthfully. Moreover, the Word of God is true and helps Christians stay grounded in reality. When the powers of the world and the things of the world seek to pull Christians away, the Bible helps Christians identify and reject what is false to identify and embrace what is true. Christians must cling to truth in a world that has rejected objectivity and universal truth claims.

How can Christians use the Bible to learn and embody truth?

HEART:

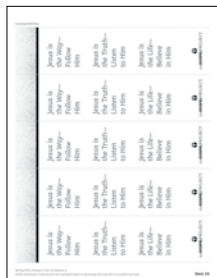
The things of the world often entice believers. The pull to gratify your flesh or your eyes is persistent. The desire to have more constantly resurfaces. In short, the hearts of Christians are not immune from the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, or the pride of possessions. Yet Christians have something more desirable than anything the world has to offer: Jesus! The beauty of Christ and joy of obedience far outweigh the temporary pleasures of the world. By setting our minds and hearts on the glory of Christ, Christians can resist the world's attractions.

What temptations of this world have you fallen for recently that you need to confess to the Lord?

HANDS:

Believers have the joy of knowing their sins are forgiven and their future is secure. These truths should move believers to share the gospel with those who have not experienced God's grace. Satan has "blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). While Christians are incapable of making unbelievers see, they are responsible for proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord (v. 5) so God can open unbelievers' eyes and hearts to the truth of the gospel. Only God can open eyes and change hearts, but He uses the faithful sharing of the gospel to do so.

How can you prepare to share the gospel more clearly and confidently?



NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We're living in a culture that is seeking what the gospel promises. The times are ripe for Christian witness, and we dare not shrink back."⁴

—D. Scott Hildreth and Steven A. McKinion

EXTRA

POINT 1: WE ARE TO RESIST THE POWERS OF THE WORLD (EPH. 6:10-17).

+ COMMENTARY

“Paul exhorts believers to put on the full armor of God in order that they might be able to resist in the evil day and to stand defensively against satanic hosts. This is not about a victory or defeat. It is about holding fast to territory already won by Christ.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

One of the biggest upsets in boxing history was Buster Douglas’s knockout of Mike Tyson in the 10th round, winning the match and shocking the boxing world. With the loss of his trainer and his lack of disciplined training leading up to the fight, Tyson entered the ring unprepared.⁶

Likewise, Christians must stand firm against Satan’s attacks, being equipped, trained, and prepared as they rest in Christ’s victory.

POINT 3: WE ARE TO PROCLAIM JESUS TO THE WORLD (2 COR. 4:3-6).

+ COMMENTARY

“It is the word of the Creator that has created light in Paul’s heart, just as it is the light of the Gospel to which unbelievers are blind. . . . Paul undoubtedly refers to his own experience of conversion here and thus indirectly recounts his vision of the risen Christ. But he only indirectly alludes to this outward vision, for he no longer knows Christ according to the flesh (5:16). His point here is that the word of the Creator alone can create light in the darkness of the human heart.”⁷

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- Unit 29:** You Will Be My Witnesses
- Unit 30:** Every Day the Lord Added to Their Number

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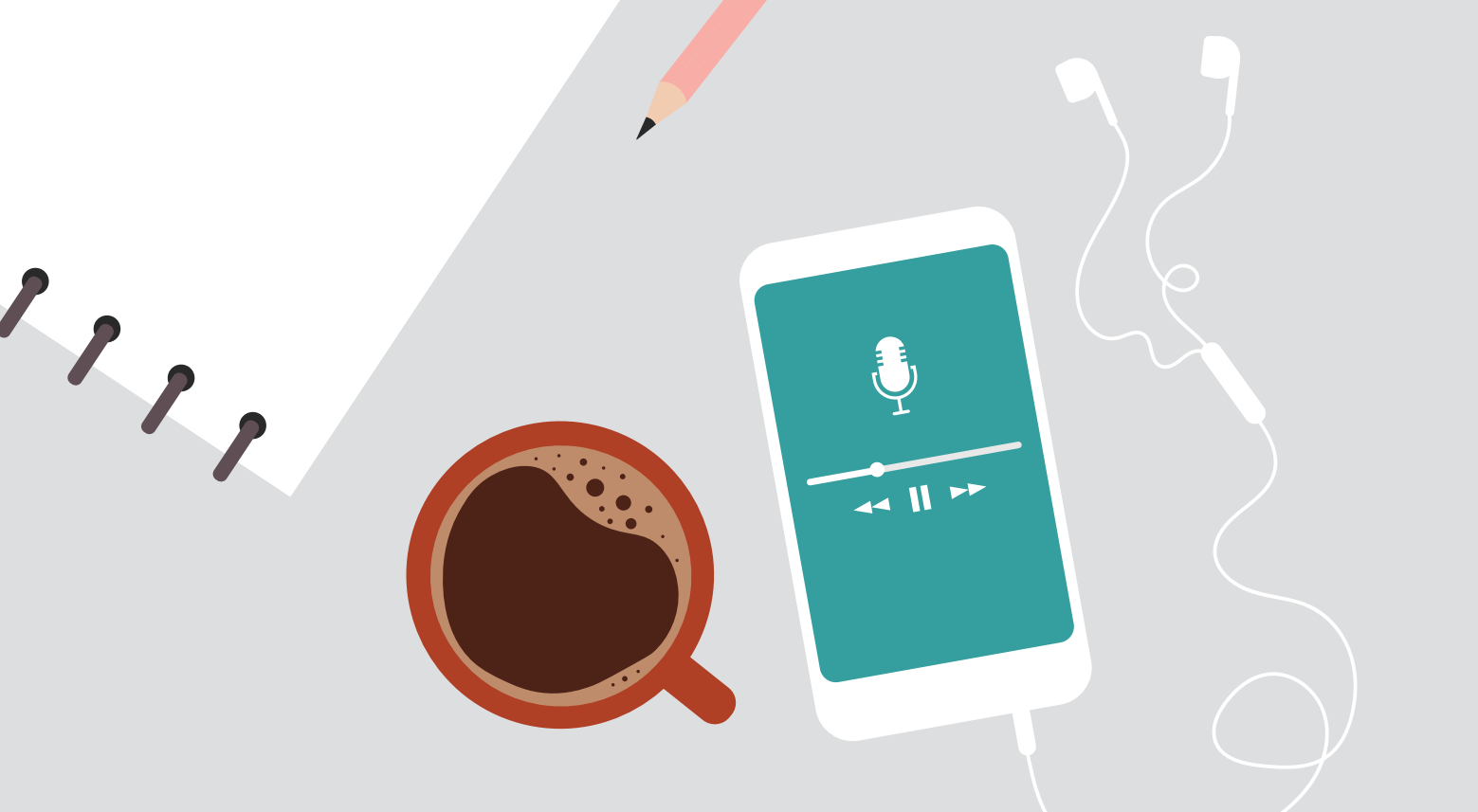
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- Unit 33:** A Prisoner of Christ Jesus

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FROM WONDER TO REJECTION

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