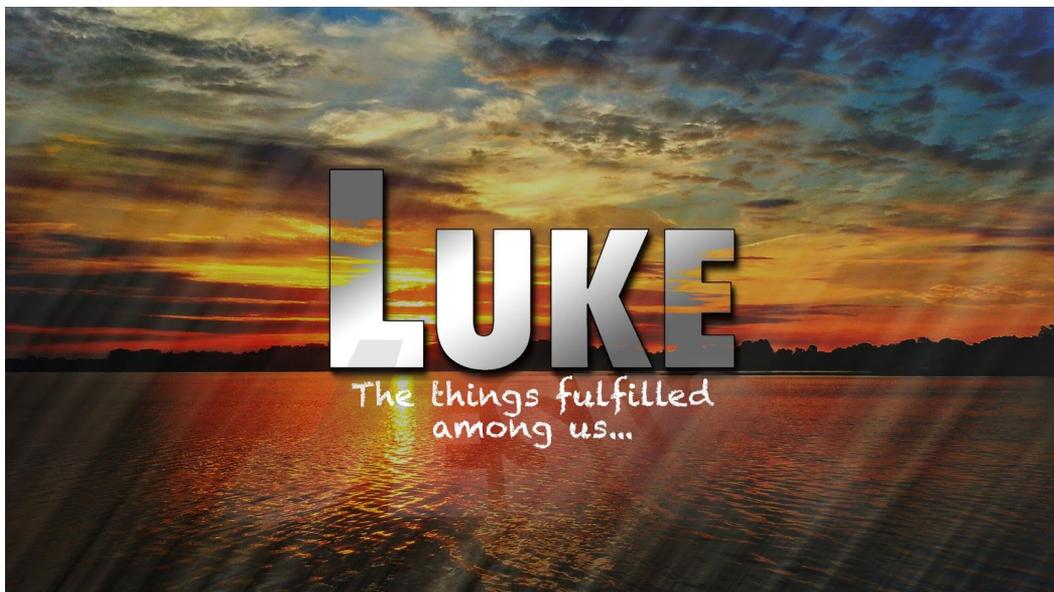




“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Jesus, Mark 10:45)



“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Jesus, Luke 6:20)



Term 2 - 2017

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(Sermon Dates)

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Four Topics for Growth Group Leaders

[1] About The Leader

Being a Growth Group leader can be a highly rewarding act of service – I pray that you will grow too in the process!

3 essentials for Growth Group leaders

1. **Be trained.** Look out for moments of **leader training** organised at church so that you can know and improve your skills in leading a Growth Group and understanding God's word.
2. **Partner with the church.** Operate in partnership with other groups in your congregation and with the plans of the church. Don't be a lone ranger.
3. **Be growing.** What is your own discipline and plan for Christian maturity?

[2] About Growth Groups

We are about *growing* or *maturing* and doing that alongside one another. Let's describe these as '*coaching*' and '*community*'.

Coaching

1. **Learn to Read.** The bible is a book and learning how to read it is so important to Christian **maturity**. The Growth Group study material is a tool only and must not overshadow the primary goal of learning to read and listen to God's word.
2. **Learn to Pray.** The primary way of learning how to pray is by listening to others and practising. Sing praises to God in your prayers and learn how to **magnify** God with your prayers together.

Caring

1. **Learn to Care.** Growth Groups provide a close community of people who can be praying, sharing and caring for one another. One reason we encourage groups to be formed from the same congregation is for easier follow-up and strengthening the sense of church **membership**.
2. **Seek to Grow.** Your congregation is the **mission** field for your Growth Group. Remember, there's no such thing as a full Growth Group - only groups that are ready to multiply! A large group of 15, with two leaders added, can become two new groups of 8 or 9.
3. **Work Together.** What **ministry** or initiative could your group do together this year? Sunday morning-tea or supper? Letterbox leafleting for the church? A street party in your area? Gardening at the church? A BBQ at a church event? A dialogue dinner with friends?

[3] Preparing The Study

In short, you want to be familiar with the bible text and the aim of the study before the group meets. Read the whole book once or twice before a series starts.

The Essentials of Preparation

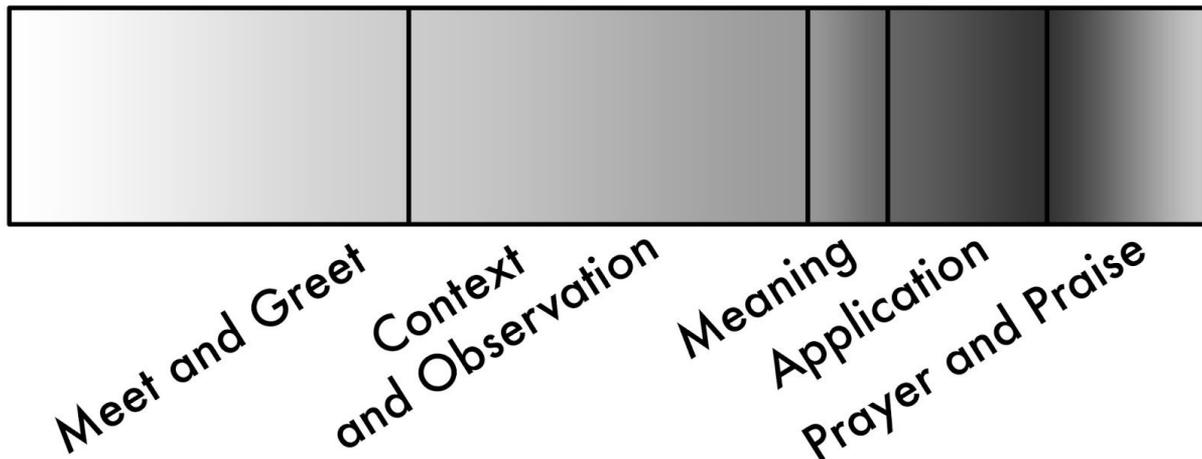
1. **Pray.**
2. **Read the passage** you are studying for the week.
3. **Make notes**
 - a. **Context** - What has happened previously in the book, testament and bible that helps illuminate this section?
 - b. **Observation** - What is obvious in the text? What words stand out? What seems weird, out of place, or abrupt in the text? Paraphrase each paragraph. Write down any questions that you have.
 - c. **Meaning** - What is the point of this passage? What is the purpose and meaning of it? And what is unique to this passage that the bible would be worse off for not having?
 - d. **Application** - How would you apply this passage? Be careful to find specific application instead of things like: have faith, or know that Jesus is Lord, or trust God.
4. **See the point.** What is your number one aim for this study?
5. **Pray.** Thank God for what you have learned and pray for his help in guiding the group to know him more too.

The Tools for Help

1. **Growthgroups.campbelltownanglican.org** contains a pastor's notes on each passage as well as other general resources.
2. **The study book material.** This is a tool to assist discussion and direction for the group and is in no way a mandatory book for the group to use.

[4] The Meeting Plan

Meet and Greet. First 30 minutes: Members arrive, grab a drink and have good conversations which can be handed to God in prayer at the end of the study.



Context and Observation. Now, spend about 30 minutes reading and comprehending the bible together. The questions in the book are aimed at comprehension before moving to a meaning and application.

Meaning. Take a moment to try and summarise what the group has covered. Skillfully draw in all the ideas that have been discussed to show what the bible has taught the group tonight.

Application. Put forward an application for the group to discuss. It may have already been covered during the discussion but if not, draw everyone's attention to **one** area that you decided was a good application from the text.

End in prayer together. Make a point of encouraging prayer from everyone. This may take time and strategy but it is worth the effort.

About 90 minutes from the starting time, everything has been covered and all that is left is for people to hang around and chat some more. The aim is not to exhaust people but create a refreshing and sustainable plan for everybody.

Name	Things to pray for...

Introduction to The Cross Series



Jesus died upon the cross. He was crucified, died and was buried. This is a central part of the Christian faith. It is the high point of all four gospels, included in the Apostles Creed and in an early statement of faith recorded in 1 Corinthians 15, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

While on the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished” and then gave up his spirit (John 19:30). What was finished?

We need clarity about what happened at the cross.

Penal substitutionary atonement (PSA) is a technical way of describing what took place on the cross. The penalty for sin was dealt with. A substitution was made so that an innocent man died in place of the guilty. What was achieved through this act was the peace of God toward repentant sinners (atonement) who put their trust in what Jesus did and who he is. The consequences of this great exchange are what we will study over the following weeks.

We will look at four words which illustrate what has been achieved for us on the cross. They are not four alternative theories but the fruit of penal substitutionary atonement. If God in Christ did not die in our place, there could be no *propitiation*, *redemption*, *justification* or *reconciliation*. The meaning and importance of these words, as described in the bible, will be the focus of our study on The Cross.

“Moved by the perfection of his holy love, God in Christ substituted himself for us sinners. That is the heart of the cross of Christ.”¹

¹ John Stott, “The Cross of Christ”, 1998, p167

The “Two Ways To Live” Challenge

As a supporting tool to our studies on The Cross, it would be useful this term to discover, try, practise and use the tract called Two Ways To Live by Matthias Media. Although they can be purchased for 75 cents as small handouts to give to people, it would be a great training exercise for someone in each group to get familiar with the presentation and how to draw the pictures, and to take the whole group through learning this description of the gospel.



You can buy the iPhone app for 99 cents - I’m sure someone in the group will have an iPhone or iPad!

Each week, have your whole group add to their memorisation of drawing the pictures and speaking the text. Before the end of Term 2 you should have a whole Growth Group who knows and can explain the gospel!

TWO WAYS TO LIVE: THE CHOICE WE ALL FACE

- God is the loving ruler of the world.
- He made the world.
- He made us rulers of the world under Him.



1. "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." (Rev 4:11)

- Because of His love, God sent his Son into the world: the man Jesus Christ.
- Jesus always lived under Gods rule.
- Yet by dying in our place he took our punishment and brought forgiveness.



4. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;" (1Pe 3:18)

- We all reject the ruler-God-by trying to run life our own way without Him, but we fail to rule ourselves or society or the world.



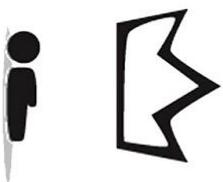
2. "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless;" (Rom 3:10-12)

- God raised Jesus to life again as the ruler of the world.
- Jesus has conquered death, now gives new life and will return to judge.



5. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;" (1Pe 1:3)

- God won't let us rebel forever.
- God's punishment for rebellion is death and judgment.



3. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment;" (Heb 9:27)

The Two Ways To live! Our Way or Gods new way

- OUR WAY:**
- REJECT OUR RULER(GOD)
 - TRY TO RUN LIFE OUR OWN WAY
 - RESULT - CONDEMNED BY GOD, FACING DEATH AND JUDGMENT

- GODS NEW WAY:**
- SUBMIT TO JESUS AS OUR RULER
 - RELY ON JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION
 - RESULT - FORGIVEN BY GOD & GIVEN ETERNAL LIFE

6. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him;" (Joh 3:36)

Study 1 - The Cross: Propitiation

God's anger turned away

Definitions

Propitiation: to appease or pacify someone's (God's) anger.

Expiation: dealing with sin and guilt.

Discuss this quote

"...man is alienated from God by sin and God is alienated from man by wrath. It is in the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath averted, so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated and God is propitiated."²

Questions

Use the bible references listed below to discuss each of the questions.

1. Does God get angry?

Numbers 11:1

Deuteronomy 4:24-26

Ezekiel 7:7-9

Mark 3:5

² Dr David Wells "Search for Salvation" as quoted by John Stott in "The Cross of Christ" (1998) p175

2. What is sin?

1 John 3:4

Romans 8:5-9 (esp. 7)

“What is common to the biblical concepts of the holiness and the wrath of God is the truth that they cannot coexist with sin. God’s holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it. So sin cannot approach God and God cannot tolerate sin.”³

3. How does God’s anger and his love work together without contradiction?

1 John 4:10 (note the ESV and KJV use the word ‘propitiation’)

4. How can God’s anger be turned away (propitiated) by Christ’s blood?

Romans 3:21-26

³ Stott, John, “The Cross of Christ” (1998) p106

“God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us. If it is God’s wrath which needed to be propitiated, it is God’s love which did the propitiating. [...] ‘God’s feeling toward us never needed to be changed. But God’s treatment of us, God’s practical relation to us - that had to change.’ He forgave us and welcomed us home.”⁴

The Truth of the Matter

God does not change. He is God, and will always respond and react the way that is true to himself. To do anything else is to betray himself and he is always faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). God is holy and will not tolerate sin. The bible describes God as ‘the Most High’ in order to illustrate how far from us he is in holiness. God burns with anger in response to sin. If we are to approach God as sinners, his anger must first be appeased. God himself, out of love, grace and mercy to his creatures, has made propitiation of himself through his own Son - who is God. Propitiation highlights his holy wrath and shows us what great love God has for us.

⁴ Stott, p174

Study 2 - Redemption

Sinners bought by God

Definitions

Redemption: the action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment, or clearing a debt.

Ransom: obtain the release of (a captive) by payment.

Introduction

“In seeking to understand the achievement of the cross, the imagery changes from temple court (propitiation) to market-place (redemption), from the ceremonial realm to the commercial, from religious rituals to business transactions. For at its most basic to ‘redeem’ is to buy or buy back, whether as a purchase or a ransom.”⁵

Questions

Use the bible references listed to discuss each question.

1. How was redemption or ransom used in the Old Testament?

Numbers 18:14-17

redeeming every firstborn creature (also Ex 13:11-16; 21:28-32)

Exodus 30:12-16

financial atonement - literally a ransom for their lives

Numbers 3:40-51

the Levites ransom for the firstborn of Israel

Leviticus 25:47-55

a slave buying himself back and the knowledge that all Israel are slaves to the Lord because he bought them

Exodus 6:6; Deut 7:8; 15:15

⁵ Stott, “The Cross of Christ” (1998), p175

God will redeem Israel from slavery with an outstretched arm

Isaiah 43:1-4

because I love you I will redeem you with Egypt

Further references: Leviticus 25:25-28; 27; Jeremiah 32:6-12;

2. What are we ransomed from?

Eph 1:7; Col 1:14

transgressions and sins (Heb 9:15)

Gal 3:13; 4:5

the curse of the law

1 Peter 1:18

from the empty way of life handed down

Titus 2:14

all wickedness (lawlessness)

3. What was the ransom price?

Mark 10:45

1 Timothy 2:5-6

Titus 2:14 and Galatians 3:13

1 Peter 1:18-19; Hebrews 9:12; Romans 3:24-25; Eph 1:7

his blood - Jesus' death

4. How is the deal sealed?

Luke 21:28

Eph 1:14; 4:30

Romans 8:18-23

5. What is the outcome of the ransom paid?

Revelation 5:9; 1:5-6; 14:3-4

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

The Truth of the Matter

“Bought by Christ, we have no business to become the slaves of anybody or anything else. Once we were the slaves of sin; now we are the slaves of Christ, and his service is the true freedom.”⁶

⁶ Stott, John, “The Cross of Christ”, 1998, p182

Study 3 - Justification

His righteous way of righteousing the unrighteous

Definitions

Justification: pronounced not guilty. A righteous standing before God.

Condemnation: pronounced guilty.

Forgiveness: remits our debts and cancels our liability to punishment.

Regeneration: made new, made alive.

Sanctification: set apart to belong to the holy people of God (1 Corinthians 1:2). Also, a continuous and lifelong process of being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 6:19).

Righteousness: the quality of being morally right or justifiable. To be right with God who is himself holy and right.

Introduction

“Propitiation inevitably comes first, because until the wrath of God is appeased (that is, until his love has found a way to avert his anger), there can be no salvation for human beings at all. Next, when we are ready to understand the meaning of salvation, we begin negatively with redemption, meaning our rescue at the high price of Christ’s blood from the grim captivity of sin and guilt. Justification is its positive counterpart. [...] Forgiveness remits our debts and cancels our liability to punishment; justification bestows on us a righteous standing before God.”⁷

Questions

1. On what basis can a person be justified?

Ephesians 2:8-9

Not works but grace

Galatians 2:16

Not law but faith

Titus 3:5

Not righteous deeds but his mercy

2. How does God expect the guilty to be treated?

Deuteronomy 25:1

justifying (acquitting) or condemning through judgement.

Exodus 23:7

God will never acquit the guilty.

Prov 17:15

⁷ Stott, “The Cross of Christ” (1998), p182.

God despises injustice. See also Isaiah 5:23-24

3. Who is declared guilty?

Psalm 143:2; (51:4); 130:3; Romans 3:10

Everybody! So how can justification be just?

4. Justified by grace!

Romans 4:5

God...justifies the wicked!

Romans 3:24

justified by his grace - his utterly undeserved favour.

Romans 8:33

it is God who justifies

5. Justified by his blood!

Romans 5:9

justified by his blood

Romans 1:17; 3:21

the righteousness of God

Romans 3:24-25

justification, redemption and propitiation

Isaiah 53:11

he will justify many because he will bear their iniquities.

6. Justified by faith!

Romans 3:28; 5:1

Galatians 2:16

Philippians 3:9

7. Justified in Christ!

Romans 8:1-4; 33-34;

2 Corinthians 5:21

Justification by faith alone 'advances the true glory of Christ and beats down the vain glory of man.'⁸

The Truth of the Matter

“The new community of Jesus is an eschatological [last days] community which lives already in the new age he inaugurated. For justification is an eschatological event. It brings forward into the present the verdict which belongs to the last judgment. That is why the church is a community of hope, which looks with humble confidence into the future.”⁹

⁸ Stott, p187

⁹ Stott, p192

Study 4 - Reconciliation

Enemies to friend

Definitions

Reconciliation: to restore a relationship, to renew a friendship.

Atonement: the event through which God and human beings, previously alienated from one another, are made 'at one' again.

Introduction

“The fourth image of salvation, which illustrates the achievement of the cross, is ‘reconciliation’. It is probably the most popular of the four because it is the most personal. We have left behind us the temple precincts, the slave-market and the lawcourts; we are now in our own home with our family and friends. True, there is a quarrel, even ‘enmity’, but to reconcile means to restore a relationship, to renew a friendship. So an original relationship is presupposed which, having been broken, has been recovered by Christ.”¹⁰

Questions

Look at all four of these passages to discuss the questions below.

Romans 5:9-11; Galatians 3:26-4:7; Ephesians 2:11-22; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

1. Who needed to be reconciled?

2. Who initiated reconciliation?

God the Father

3. How was reconciliation achieved?

¹⁰ Stott, “The Cross of Christ”, 1998, p192.

the Son

4. Who pronounces reconciliation?

Romans 5:9-11 We were enemies of God but now reconciled through Christ

Galatians 3:26-29, 4:1-7 - clothed in Christ and all children of God together!

Ephesians 2:11-22 - The great wall of hostility is torn down through Christ and all in Christ are made the people of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - Reconciliation is authorised by God but is also communicated and taught and declared by those who have been reconciled.

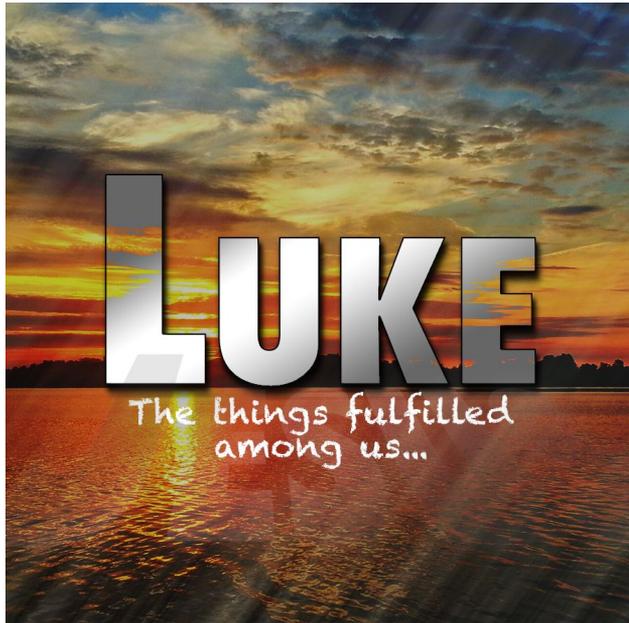
The Truth of the Matter (as reflected in the Lord's Prayer)

Note how dependant the Lord's prayer is on the principle of reconciliation. We are invited to call God our Father - a close and connected relational title. And we are forgiven before God and reflect our new life in our forgiveness of our neighbour.

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread
And forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
 But deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom,
 the power and the glory
 forever and ever. Amen.

Study 5 - Luke 6:17-36

Living and Loving like Jesus



Luke Chapters 1 and 2 describe the birth narratives of Jesus and John the baptist. They introduce the reader to the promised Messiah who has been prophesied for centuries and who Luke and his sources believe to be fulfilled in Jesus. His public ministry began in Chapter 4 continuing on from John's ministry described in Chapter 3. Jesus quickly became a public figure

because of his amazing teachings accompanied with signs and wonders. As the crowds followed Jesus, so did the curiosity of the religious elite. Some believed him while others grew in aggression towards him. There were twelve men whom Jesus called to be his close disciples. These men, listed in Luke 6:14-16, would become the Apostles who brought their faith in Jesus to the rest of the world - except for Judas who was a traitor.

The section that follows is comparable to Matthew 5-7 commonly referred to as the sermon on the mount. Luke 6:17-49 is referred to as the sermon on the plain. There are similarities between the two sermons and differences also, namely length and location. They also do not appear to sit in the same place in the ministry of Jesus. It appears that Luke and Matthew are recording two different lessons of Jesus.

Read and Discuss

- 1. Verses 17-19 set the context of the sermon on the plain. Describe who is present and why they have come to Jesus. Luke 5:17 and Acts 2:22 may be useful in your discussion.**

Crowds have come from near and far to hear Jesus - even from the edge of the Mediterranean Sea.

The crowds have been drawn to the healing power of Jesus. We were told in 5:17 that Jesus had a power present with him to heal. Acts 2:22 tells us that this is all revealing God's approval of Jesus to the world.

The 12 disciples are there along with more people identified as disciples - ie, followers of Jesus.

2. Using Verses 20-26, contrast the way of a disciple with the way of someone who does not follow Jesus.

A disciple of Jesus is

- *Looking forward to the riches or God's kingdom*
- *Longing for the satisfaction of heaven to come instead of this world*
- *Sure of the joy of heaven and not banking on temporal laughter*
- *Friends with Jesus and that is all that matters*
- *Will see conflict, persecution and suffering as a way of discipleship*

A disciple of this world is

- *Seeking riches now*
- *Seeking security and satisfaction now*
- *Living for every moment of joy they can grab*
- *Loves to hear the approval of people*

3. Now look at Verses 27-36. Why would Jesus expect people to follow these instructions?

His instructions are incredibly counter-cultural. They don't even make practical sense. Eg, if anyone asks you for something then give it!

But the model we are asked to follow is not the way of this world but the way of God the Father.

In fact, we are being asked to model our life off the gospel of God! 1 John 4:10.

Jesus doesn't expect everyone to accept what he is saying. But he begins this section with the words: to you who are still listening - ie, the disciples who choose to be disciples.

What is the purpose of the passage?

Many people were coming to Jesus, attracted by his teaching and healing, but his description of a disciple is radical. There is a way of life that is familiar to us by nature and then there is the kingdom of God. We can choose to be a disciple of this world or a disciple of Jesus and his kingdom. The choice comes with either blessings or woes. We can live and love the way the world does or we can live and love the way a disciple of Jesus should, because that is the way of the kingdom of God. Having been drawn to Jesus, he calls his followers to

live for the kingdom of God now and not for the kingdom of this world. And he calls us to love like our heavenly Father loves.

Application

Topic A: Listening to Jesus. The sermon on the plain is directed to the disciples of Jesus who needed to be listening. To stop listening is a mark of abandoning Jesus. His lesson in this passage goes directly against the ways of humanity, and yet Jesus expects his disciples to listen, understand and put it into practice. This is true of the whole bible. It is a book that steers us away from the judgment of hell and into the protection of grace. It rebukes and corrects. It instructs us to repent and believe. The bible is not written to approve of us but to approve of all that God has done to redeem us. Discipleship is about listening to the word of God and admitting that it is true.

Topic B: Loving our enemies. This is often a sticking point for people interested in Christianity. Have you heard someone say, “I know I’m called to love everybody but I just cannot love *that* person!” Does Jesus give us an exception clause in his lesson? The Lord’s prayer compares God’s forgiveness of us with how we forgive others. The gospel itself declares that while we were still enemies of God, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). One way to think of loving is that it is choosing not to hate. And so we can leave justice and judgment in the hands of God instead of acting out of revenge. Do you need to change your behaviour toward some people? Ask God to help you.

Topic C: The joy of God’s promises. Look at the positive ways Jesus talks about the future for his disciples and see how they inspire us to persevere through trials and suffering in this life. Yours is the kingdom of God. You will be satisfied. You will laugh. Your reward will be great. You will be children of the Most High. He is kind to sinners like us, the ungrateful and wicked. He is merciful.

Prayer for the week

Father, thank you for your love and mercy in being kind to the ungrateful and wicked. May we always listen to your voice and follow your Son for eternity. Help us in this world of strife, struggle and suffering, and give us now your peace and joy in believing that you

will make all things new, at peace and satisfied. May your kingdom come. Amen.

Study 6 - Luke 6:37-42

Jesus has begun speaking to those who would call themselves his disciples in what is often called the sermon on the plain. He has contrasted the way of discipleship with the way of the rest of the world who do not wish to listen to Jesus. Living as though they live in the kingdom now enables the disciples to put up with suffering in the present. They are to love others on the basis of how God has loved them rather than how the world loves them. He continues in this section to teach us where we stand in reference to our fellow man. Are we on higher ground because we are a disciple of Jesus?

Read and Discuss

1. What should the mindset of a disciple be toward others according to Verses 37-38? Why?

We do not stand over anyone else in judgment. We do not stand as ones to do the condemning. We forgive as we've been forgiven and we give like we would like to be treated ourselves. We are not above others but we are all under the judgment and mercy of our God.

2. What is Jesus preaching against in Verses 39-40 and what is he promoting?

Clearly, he is preaching against blind guides - people who presume to know more than they actually do. What he is promoting is being taught well and trained properly so that you can be more like your teacher - only then will you be able to lead like someone who has already been shown the way.

3. Can we rebuke others according to Verses 41-42?

Only after we have examined ourselves and learned to be rebuked and corrected ourselves.

What is the purpose of this passage?

Judge like one being judged; lead like one being lead; and rebuke like one rebuked. Of first importance to a Christian is their place in relation to God. We are under his judgment and condemnation. We are forgiven people who receive grace upon grace from our Father. All truth comes from him and we are his students. The first person I know that needs rebuking is me. This is the context in which we relate to others. We may be able to rebuke a brother with the humility that

comes from being rebuked ourselves. We may be able to lead others in the way of life if only we are able to be lead by the Teacher first.

Application

Topic A: Judging or discerning. God is the judge of all and it is his to avenge the guilty. Discernment falls into a different category where we are instructed to watch out for false teaching and people who might lead us away from the Lord. While we don't want to close the door of salvation to anybody, we remain alert to correct those who teach anything other than Christ crucified and risen as the basis of salvation.

Topic B: Being able to lead others. Jesus instructs us to be humble in all of our dealings with people. We recognise his supremacy and the great graciousness he has shown to call us and include us in his kingdom. That said, he calls on us to be ready to lead people into the kingdom of God. The trick is to do it with all humility and know that without Christ, we would know nothing of the way, the truth and the life.

Topic C: A recipe for rebuking. The following passages give some insights into rebuking one another. The ultimate source of rebuke must be the Lord, and we as his humble servants. Luke 17:3; 1 Timothy 5:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15; Revelation 3:19.

Prayer for the week

Almighty God, we do not presume to judge alongside you, nor condemn others as less righteous than ourselves. By your grace and mercy, you have called us to live and to learn as disciples of Christ. Help us to humbly walk with you and to lead others to your Son as you have first lead us. Amen.

Study 7 - Luke 6:43-49

Each tree is recognised by its own fruit

We are still in the sermon on the plain as Jesus speaks to his disciples and us about living for the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of this world. The two kingdoms are not compatible and the way of Jesus is very counter-intuitive to humans. He has spoken about living and loving; judging, leading and rebuking. Now he continues to include bearing fruit before finishing the sermon on the famous parable of the wise and foolish builders. Thus he ends his sermon with a call for us to decide which life are we going to choose.

Read and Discuss

- 1. Looking at Verses 43-45, what type of fruit does Jesus have in mind? Note especially the last sentence.**

“For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” You can tell a lot from what a person says and the way it is said. The things we love the most come flying out of our mouths to betray our hearts. A disciple of Christ cannot be one simply by name but must be one by nature and working to change the heart for Christ.

- 2. How is Verse 46 a misfit to what was said previous?**

Verses 43-45 teach us that our speech will reveal the love of our hearts but Verse 46 tells us that what we say can be a lie. This question ought to lead straight into how the following verses answer this contradiction.

- 3. The first man who built the house represents who we should be. Look back over the sermon on the plain (Luke 6:20-50) and discuss what a person who puts Jesus words into practice will do.**

This is a famous parable repeated in Matthew 7:24-27. The one who hears Jesus words and puts them into practice is the wise builder. He builds deep and strong on a rock foundation. He knows who God is and how he is a saved sinner. He does not live like the world lives but in response to the compassion and kindness that God has shown to him/her. He does not love like the world loves but modelled directly from the love of the Father. He does not presume to judge others or condemn where he himself stood except for the grace of God. He does not lead out of his own wisdom but only after carefully listening to his Master. And he does not dare rebuke while there are issues to deal with in his own life. His mouth declares his love for God which wells from his heart - the heart that was purchased by God. And he puts into practice everything that Jesus has said in this sermon, even though it goes against his instincts and against the ways of this world.

The fool just goes his own way. He doesn't regard Jesus' words for long at all but proceeds to build his life on whatever is fleeting - riches, full stomach, laughter and applause from men.

What is the purpose of this passage?

The instructions from Jesus in the sermon on the plain are founded on the logic of God not of men. To build your life on Jesus is to stop and listen to him, trusting him enough to put all of his words into practice. Being a disciple of Christ cannot be faked or mimicked. It is so radically different from this world that the fruit of following Jesus will be plain to see.

Application

The depths of discipleship. The good builder made such a huge foundation to build his house upon which is paralleled with the extent that we stop and listen to Jesus and put his words into practice. Are there shortcuts that you are taking in your walk with Jesus?

Prayer of the week

Our Lord and our God, please continue, by your Spirit, to train us in righteousness. We thank you that it is by grace that we are saved. Help us to put your words into practice so that people around us will see that we trust you, we love you and we want to be known as your disciples. Amen.

Study 8 - Luke 7:1-17

Such a great faith

Our passage this week follows on from Jesus' sermon on the plain. After naming his 12 disciples, Jesus described the life of discipleship to all who would listen. His sermon covered how to view life's trials, how to love and relate to others regardless of how they treat you, the place of judgment, leadership and of rebuking. Lastly, he painted a picture for all this instruction as laying a solid foundation for life. Being a disciple of Jesus is to have a mind for the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of this world.

Read and Discuss

- 1. Looking at Verses 1-10, discuss why Jesus concludes that the Centurion's faith is exemplary.**

The Centurion concluded things about Jesus on reports alone. The facts of Jesus had lead him to trust Jesus as he did.

Jesus was regarded as superior to the Centurion and able to command death and disease just at his word.

The Centurion does not regard himself worthy to be in the same room as Jesus.

The greatness of his faith is not so much the greatness of the Centurion but the insight and knowledge of the One he puts his faith in.

- 2. Compare and contrast the account in Verses 11-17 with the story of Elijah in 2 Kings 17:17-24.**

Both involve a widow and her dead son being raised.

Elijah must prostrate himself 3 times and cry out to God while Jesus simply commands the boy to get up.

Both the widow and the people conclude that Elijah/Jesus have come from God and can be trusted.

- 3. What do Verses 9 and 13 add to our understanding of Jesus?**

He was a man moved by people and reacted to the faith of people. Our God has emotion and interacts with his people.

The next scene fits with the previous because we see the faith of some in Israel see who Jesus is: a great prophet from God.

4. What can we say differs between the faith of the Centurion and the faith of the people at Nain?

The Centurion's faith showed his belief that Jesus is in command of nature even when he had never met Jesus in person. His faith is based on second hand reports but it is solid and seems to conclude that Jesus has the power and authority of deity (calling him Lord on the basis of who he is and has done and not according to any Roman ranking).

The crowds gathered at Nain have been following Jesus and witnessing his miracles. Their faith is growing slower and their conclusion is still at Jesus being a great prophet sent by God. Perhaps this is the same as the Centurion but he has arrived at this sooner.

Both faiths, however, are built on evidence. Perhaps it will take a resurrection for the people of Israel to reach the conclusion that Jesus is Lord.

What is the purpose of this passage?

Faith in Jesus is about our understanding of who he is as much as it is our trust in him. The Centurion showed his great faith because he treated Jesus as a man with God-like authority to make things happen at his command. The people who witnessed the son's resurrection concluded that God has come to rescue his people. Their faith is about their understanding of who Jesus is.

Application

Topic A - Describing your faith. What would you list as your core beliefs in Jesus that you know and trust. In what ways does your life reflect this faith?

Topic B - Belief through the witness of others. Our faith is based on the eye witness accounts of others. The Centurion demonstrates a great faith without ever having met Jesus personally. Are you able to map out how you have come to trust Jesus? What evidence or experience has lead you to faith in Christ? Perhaps you still have questions that need answering to help establish your faith.

Topic C - The miracle of all miracles. Perhaps the greatest miracle that our faith relies on is the resurrection from the dead. This story described Jesus able to undo death for the widow's son. Luke and the other gospels all highlight the risen Lord as the victory of God. Spend some time in prayer celebrating the resurrection and Jesus as Lord of

all. Thank God for our common hope and ask him to grow our faith and conviction of the resurrection and eternal life.

Prayer for the week

Our Lord and our God, we thank you for the example of the Centurion's faith, who saw before many others that your Son has the power and authority to command death and disease. Help us in this life to trust you and to grow in faith. We thank you for the hope of the resurrection and pray that you will protect us and keep us all of our days. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Study 9 - Luke 7:18-35

A reed swayed by the wind?

The previous section of Luke described a scene where Jesus raised a widow's son from the dead. It was reminiscent of the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 17. In both stories, the conclusion was made that a great prophet of God has arrived. It could seem confusing to some whether Jesus is the Messiah or the one like Elijah who was to come. All of the pieces of Luke's investigation on Jesus is coming to the conclusion that Jesus is Lord and our passage this week describes Jesus assuring both John the Baptist and the crowd around him that the kingdom of God is right under their nose, it just won't be like you expect.

Read and Discuss

1. What do you suppose is behind John's question in Verse 19?

It's a good question. We don't want to follow the wrong Messiah (Brian). There are two schools of thought on this question: the first is that John, who is now locked away in prison, seeks assurance that Jesus is the Christ; the second is that he is subtly pointing his disciples to go and see Jesus and so continuing even in prison to point people to the Messiah. This last view grasps onto the idea that John is somehow faultless in his testimony of Jesus. After all, Jesus declares him as the greatest man ever to have lived in Verse 28. I think this view is weak, however. Firstly, he only sends two of his disciples - why not send them all? Secondly, his ministry has been all about preparing people for the coming of Jesus and he himself declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! Surely his disciples had grasped that message by now. Thirdly, Jesus statement in Verse 23 fits well with assuring John that he ought not to stumble but rather carry on believing that Jesus is the Messiah.

2. How is Jesus' response in Verses 21-23 helpful? Use the following passages to feed your answer: Isaiah 29:18, 19; 35:5, 6; 61:1, 2; Luke 4:18.

His ministry is qualified with every wonder he performed. They point to new life, restored creation and release from captivity. These are the very sort of passages that John and others new as signs of the coming Messiah.

3. Re-read the beatitudes of Luke 6:20-26 and compare them to Jesus' description of John in Luke 7:24-28.

In general terms, he places humility and lowliness in this world as a greatness in kingdom terms. More specifically though, Jesus describes John in Verses 24-27 as neither double minded (a reed swayed by the wind), nor rich and indulgent, but a man of God speaking the mind of God into this world and pointing others to Jesus. That's important in the kingdom of God.

4. How does Verses 33-34 shed light on Jesus' description of people in Verses 31-32?

The phrase 'He has a demon' leads us to see Jesus is mostly describing the Pharisees and the like who rejected John's ministry and were not baptised. So to say that he is describing all people alive in his day with the term 'this generation' is misleading. It seems clearer now that he is referring to people of this age or of this world. So, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't seems to be the notion of the riddle. If you minister like John did, neither eating nor drinking wine, you are labelled evil. If you go eating and drinking you are labelled a friend of evil-doers!

What is the purpose of this passage?

There are those who will see Jesus and declare that he is the One who was promised to come. Others will sway in their decisions and stumble because Jesus is not who they want for a Messiah.

Application

Topic A - Stumbling at Jesus. Are there aspects of who Jesus is or what he has done or promised that stick with you and bother you? Your group may not be able to resolved issues for you here and now but perhaps raising them will give your group something to work on theologically and to pray for in community.

Topic B - Great at humility. Reflect on Jesus' description of John in Verses 24-28 and ponder how we can seek to be great in the kingdom of God instead of the kingdom of this age. Consider the following bible verses on humility...

*“For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.” Psalm 149:4*

*“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like
children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Whoever humbles himself like this child is the
greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:3-4*

*“...if my people who are called by my name humble
themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn
from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven
and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”
2 Chronicles 7:14*

Prayer for the week

*Save us, Lord, from the whims of our own generation and anchor us
in wisdom that leads to life. Amen.*

