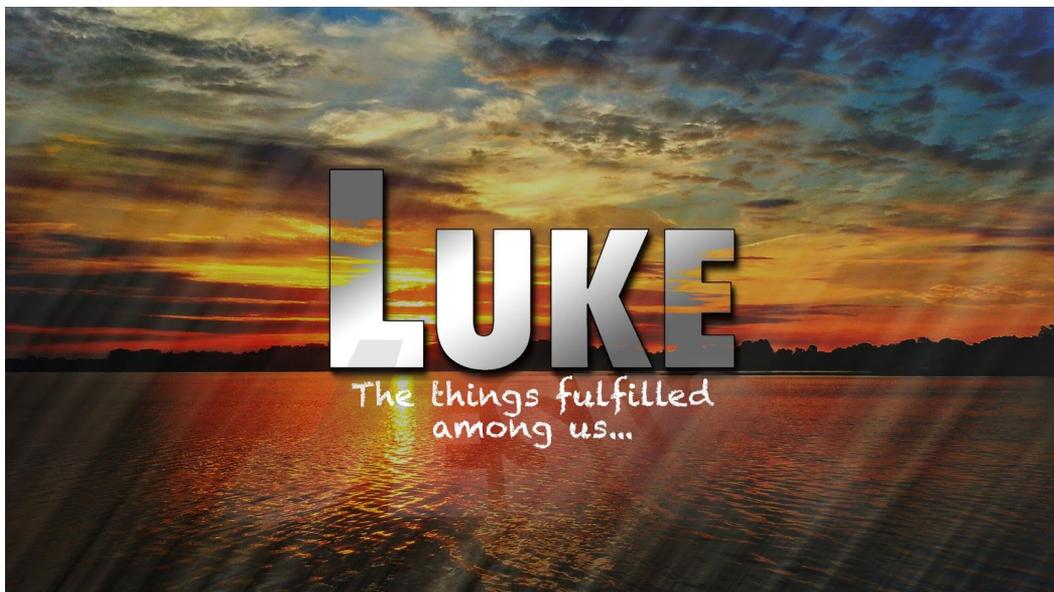




“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Jesus, Mark 10:45)



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



Term 2 - 2017

Contents

(Sermon Dates)

| | |
|---|----------------|
| <u>About Growth Groups</u> | page 3 |
| <u>People in my group</u> | page 4 |
| <u>Introduction to The Cross series</u> | page 6 |
| <u>The Two Ways To Live Challenge</u> | page 7 |
| <u>Study 1 - Propitiation</u> | (23/4) page 9 |
| <u>Study 2 - Redemption</u> | (30/4) page 12 |
| <u>Study 3 - Justification</u> | (7/5) page 16 |
| <u>Study 4 - Reconciliation</u> | (14/5) page 20 |
| <u>Study 5 - Luke 6:17-36</u> | (28/5) page 22 |
| <u>Study 6 - Luke 6:37-42</u> | (4/6) page 27 |
| <u>Study 7 - Luke 6:43-49</u> | (11/6) page 30 |
| <u>Study 8 - Luke 7:1-17</u> | (18/6) page 33 |
| <u>Study 9 - Luke 7:18-35</u> | (25/6) page 37 |

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?

People in my Growth Group

| Name | Things to pray for... |
|------|-----------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

| 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.



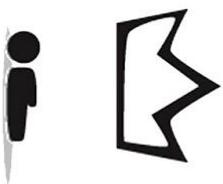
2. "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless;" (Rom 3:10-12)

- 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

Exodus 30:12-16

Numbers 3:40-51

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

Leviticus 25:47-55

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

Isaiah 43:1-4

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

2. What are we ransomed from?

Eph 1:7; Col 1:14

Gal 3:13; 4:5

1 Peter 1:18

Titus 2:14

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

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

Galatians 2:16

Titus 3:5

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

Deuteronomy 25:1

Exodus 23:7

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

Prov 17:15

3. Who is declared guilty?

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

4. Justified by grace!

Romans 4:5

Romans 3:24

Romans 8:33

5. Justified by his blood!

Romans 5:9

Romans 1:17; 3:21

Romans 3:24-25

Isaiah 53:11

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?

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

2. Who initiated reconciliation?

3. How was reconciliation achieved?

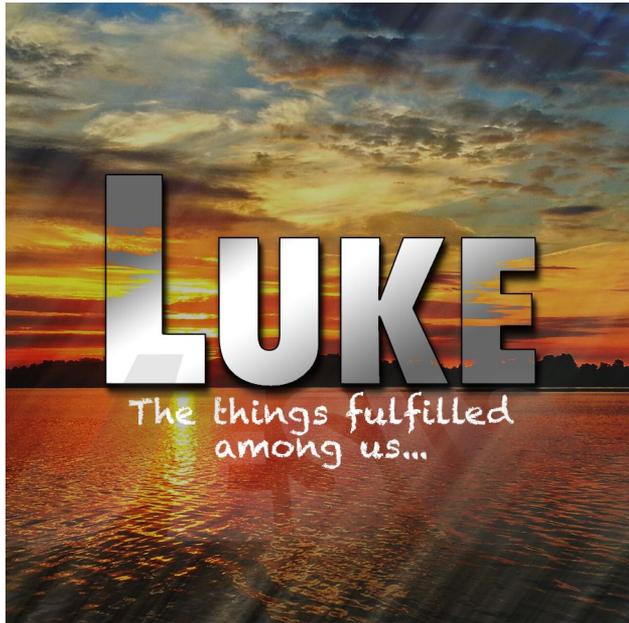
4. Who pronounces reconciliation?

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

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 Luke 6:17-36

¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.

²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

²⁷ “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt

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

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

Can the blind lead the blind?

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 Luke 6:37-42

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

³⁹ He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

⁴¹ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

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 Luke 6:43-49

⁴³ “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

⁴⁶ “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷ As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. ⁴⁸ They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

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 Luke 7:1-17

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

¹¹ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town

gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”

¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Discuss

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

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

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

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

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 Luke 7:18-35

¹⁸ John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, ¹⁹ he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

²⁰ When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?' "

²¹ At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. ²² So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ²³ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

²⁴ After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ²⁵ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. ²⁶ But what did you go out to see? A

prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is the one about whom it is written:

“ ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’ ¹

²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

²⁹ (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

³¹ Jesus went on to say, “To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other:

“ ‘We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not cry.’

³³ For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ ³⁵ But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”

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 resolve 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.

