

HOME GROUPS 2024

***“Learning evangelism
from Jesus”***



1. Caught in the act

John 8:1-11

In every encounter Jesus did exactly what the Father wanted him to do (Jn 12:49-50). And so that is the case in this passage too.

1. Why do the teachers of the law and the Pharisees bring this woman to Jesus instead of just dealing with her?
2. Why do they not bring the guilty man too? After all, they caught her 'in the act' and so obviously they caught him too.
3. What should we learn from Jesus' attitude and behaviour in this story? How would we respond if faced with such a situation of flagrant sin?
4. Are there particular kinds of sinners from whom we tend to separate ourselves?
5. Are there examples you can think of where you or others have shown the kind of love to a sinner that Jesus showed to this woman?
6. How can we prepare ourselves to bear the sort of witness that Jesus bears here?
7. Why do we all find it easier to see the sins of others and criticise them, rather than to see our own sins and to criticise ourselves? Does it make a difference to our behaviour, if we know ourselves as sinners too?
8. Quietly, in your own heart for a few minutes, consider whether there are things in your own life which you would hate to have exposed to public view. How are you dealing with them? Pray about them now.

2. The woman of Samaria

John 4:1-30

In this story Jesus brings good news to a woman who belonged to a community that was despised by his own Jewish community.

1. What do you think John means by these words: 'Now he had to go through Samaria' (Jn 4:4)? There were two other routes from Judaea to Galilee and many Jews would have used one of them to avoid Samaria. *Are we intentional about evangelism?*
2. What are the most striking aspects of Jesus' encounter with the woman?
 - What barriers does Jesus break as he engages her in conversation? What barriers might hold us back in our own evangelism?
 - How does he help her to confront her own sin?
 - How does he deal with the theological question she raises?
 - How does he confer dignity on her and show her respect?
3. What groups of people might be equivalent to Samaritans for us or our society? How might we build relationships with them?
4. Are there other examples in the gospels of the way in which Jesus demonstrates respect for other people too, especially these who were despised?
5. Are there situations in which we can build relationships with non-Christians by seeking their help? Jesus is tired and thirsty and shows his vulnerability.
6. Find the different ways in which Jesus is named or described in this passage, and explain them.
7. In concrete terms how have we experienced Christ's gentleness and grace towards us?
8. In the end, what is the testimony of the woman? How effective is it? Do we have that testimony?

3. Jesus and the Bible teacher

Luke 10:25-37

1. Why did an 'expert in the law' confront Jesus with this question: 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' What was his motive? Was he sincere?
2. Why did Jesus refer him to the law? Would it help?
3. What do you make of Jesus' answer in Lk 10:28? Could the man be saved by obeying those two commands? Compare Jesus' response here with what he said to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:10) or to Nicodemus (Jn 3:3). Why did Jesus agree with the man? Did he mislead him?
4. When should we confront people with the law rather than the gospel? How are the two related? What is the purpose and role of the law?
5. Why did the man ask who his neighbour was? What does Luke mean when he writes, 'But he wanted to justify himself ...'?
6. Why does Jesus tell the parable: why a parable and why this parable? What answer does it give to the question: 'And who is my neighbour?' *And for each of us, who in fact is my neighbour?*
7. The parable also responds to a question the man doesn't ask: 'What is the nature of the love which I should demonstrate towards my neighbour?' Why and how does Jesus answer that question too?
8. Do we restrict the command to love our neighbour? Are there people we exclude from its scope – either personally or in our Christian circles?
9. Jesus' parables were intentionally subversive: they challenged the way people thought. How is this parable working subversively in our own hearts and minds? *Does the parable actually point towards the gospel?*
10. Does this whole passage suggest that there are dangers in being a 'Bible teacher' ('expert in the law'), at whatever level we may teach the Bible?
11. What does the story tell us about evangelism? Notice that finally Jesus did not tell the man how to inherit eternal life! Notice too that Jesus asked questions – and he asks lots of them and in all the gospels. Why should we ask people questions – perhaps more than we answer them?

4. A wealthy young leader

Luke 18:18-30

The man Jesus encounters in the passage is probably an elder of his local synagogue. He is rich and young and upright. And in his approach to Jesus he is honest and straightforward too. He's an all-round good guy. What a nice chap! We'd probably like to have him in our church.

1. Why does Jesus reply to the man as he does, with this particular question and statement (v19)? *Notice that he turns the conversation to the person of God. Why would he do this?*
2. Why does Jesus summarise the second table of the law in answer to the man's question? Is he telling him he can have eternal life by obeying the law?
3. What should we make of the young man's answer in v21?
4. Jesus does not contradict the young man's claim to obedience. Why not? Instead he adds something else the young man must do (v22). Why does he respond in this way? Is he suggesting the man can have eternal life by giving up his possessions?
5. Why does the man go away sad? Jesus has wounded him, hasn't he? Is that good? Has Jesus just driven him away?
6. What does the story tell us about asking questions? And about sometimes being indirect in our approach to sharing the gospel?
7. Are there idols in our own hearts which challenge our commitment to God himself? Is the idolatry of money/wealth a danger to us?
8. How important is self-awareness? Do we pursue it? Do we avoid it?

Look at Psalm 139:23-24.

5. An unusual dinner invitation

Luke 19:1-10

Amazingly, Jesus knows this man. He knows his name, and he knows his heart and he knows his desire to see who he, Jesus, is.

1. What does this man's tree-climbing say about him, apart from the fact that he is vertically challenged?
2. It is an unusual, even impolite, thing to invite yourself to somebody's house for a meal. Why does Jesus do this? Notice that normally, no Jew would visit a man like Zacchaeus, and he would not dare to invite a Jew into his home. Why? Notice too that eating together is an event of close fellowship and intimacy. So what is Jesus saying when he invites himself 'for tea'?
3. Obviously it is Jesus who initiates this close encounter with Zacchaeus. When and why would we need to do that for the gospel's sake?
4. People get upset about Jesus' visit to Zacchaeus:
 - Why do they get upset?
 - Who might be Zacchaeus' equivalent in our own society?
 - Are there people we ourselves would not want dealings with?
 - Are there social or even religious conventions that hold us back?
 - Do we ever consider people so worthless, whether Christians or non-Christians, that they are not worthy of our attention?
 - Are there ever right reasons for staying separate from other people?
5. There is a lot here about repentance too:
 - Are there things we should learn from Zacchaeus about repentance?
 - What can you see in the passage that would have helped bring Zacchaeus to repentance?
 - How can Jesus be so sure that Zacchaeus is indeed saved?
6. Think quietly about what there is in your own life that would show other people that salvation has truly come to you?
7. Notice Jesus' words in v10. How should they challenge us?
8. What do we need to pray about now, in the light of this story?

6. The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin

Luke 15:1-10

Jesus welcomed sinners and was criticised for it. In response he told three parables and we look at two of them here. At the time they challenged people's beliefs about God and religion and other people. Do they challenge ours?

1. Of course, everybody is a sinner. But who might these 'sinners' be whom Jesus welcomed and ate with? And what was wrong with tax collectors? In our culture, who might 'sinners' and tax collectors be equivalent to? Who do we tend to write off and why? Why should we write nobody off? Can we see beyond the sin of other people?
2. Why did 'sinners' and tax collectors like being with Jesus? What was different about the way he treated them? Do 'sinners' like being with us? Or we with them?
3. It looks as if the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all with Jesus as he spoke. He addressed them all. So what did he communicate to the tax collectors and 'sinners' through these two parables? And what did he communicate to the Pharisees and teachers of the law? And finally, do they have anything to say to us? Indeed, should we be asking who we are in the parables?
4. Notice that in the parables both the shepherd and the woman seek for what is lost, but in Jesus' application of the parables the joy in heaven is because of the sinner's repentance. But neither the sheep nor the coin repents! So how do the seeking and the repentance relate to one another?
5. Why are the shepherd and the woman so pleased when they find what they had lost? Why is heaven so pleased when sinners and tax collectors repent? Do we rejoice in the same way? Might we rejoice more if we were more committed to the search?
6. What did it actually cost the shepherd to go looking for the sheep? What might it cost us? Are we ready?

7. The Two Lost Sons

Luke 15:11-32

This is one of the most powerful and beautiful stories ever told. The father and two sons probably lived in a small house on one side of the narrow street in a small village. People lived close together and everyone knew everybody else's business. There were no secrets, and in the story three things would scandalise all the neighbours: first, the younger son's demands; second, the father's reaction to his return; and finally, the older son's ugly response to the celebration and to the appeal of his father.

1. How does this story bring the three parables of Luke 15 to a climax?
2. How do the request of the younger son and then the reaction of the older son to his return, help us understand the nature of sin?
3. Looking right through the parable, what do we learn about the nature of God? From the father's initial response to the younger son's demand, for example? Or the father's response to his return? Or from the way he deals with the complaints and accusations of the elder son?
4. As Christians people see in us something of the God we claim to serve. What sort of God do they see? How can we seek to ensure that the God that others see in us is the true God who is revealed here? Note that this is not just about 'trying harder' and 'doing better' but much more about what we are – about the transformation of our nature. How does that happen?
5. And 'every one of us has an older brother in our hearts.' Is this true? How can an 'older brother' person become more and more like the father?
6. At the heart of this story there is massive joy—a huge and extravagant celebration with lots of food for the whole village. Why? What does it tell us about God and his kingdom? How can we share in the joy?
7. What point does Jesus make by not finishing the story completely?
8. What does the story say to sinners? And to Pharisees?

8. The Sinful Woman and the Righteous Man

Luke 7:36-50

This passage speaks of the behaviour of two people at a dinner, and Jesus' words to each of them. Both pay honour to Christ. Of the two most people at the time would have seen Simon as the righteous one: a man committed to serving God; a man of prayer and good deeds; a man who read the Scriptures and tried to live them out; a teacher of God's word; a man who tried to avoid association with bad people. Jesus' response to them, however, challenged popular assumptions and may challenge ours.

1. Why is Jesus able to tell the woman she is forgiven (50)? Does she earn forgiveness by her tears and acts of service and devotion (37-38)?
2. In what ways do Jesus' acts and attitudes scandalise Simon and his guests in the course of the story and why (39, 49)? Does Jesus' behaviour scandalise us? Why or why not?
3. Why are Simon's omissions significant: failure to provide water to wash Jesus' feet; to kiss him; to anoint his head with oil (44-47)? What would equivalent things be for us? Are we saved by doing things such as these? Does it matter if we do not do them?
4. Would Jesus be able to tell Simon that he was forgiven?
5. What was Jesus' parable intended to teach (41-48) and what should we learn from it?
6. Which of these two people are we? Do we see ourselves as the sinner in need of forgiveness, or do we congratulate ourselves on our own righteousness?
7. Should we condemn notorious sinners, which this woman seems to have been, or mix with them?
8. How should this story transform us? How should we think, and how should we live, in the light of it? And what impact should it have on our evangelism?

9. Revealing the Pharisee's Heart

Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 18:9-14

Some people need to be persuaded that they are sinners. In these two passages Jesus confronts the Pharisees of his day who were confident of their own righteousness and contemptuous of 'sinners'.

1. In the parable in Luke 18 Jesus identifies some basic problems in the Pharisees' attitude. One of them is pride. What are they proud about? How do they show it? What things make us proud?
2. The opposite of pride is humility. What is humility? How can we maintain a consistently humble spirit?
3. Jesus reminded the Pharisees of the need to show mercy (Mt 9:13). Why did he do that? What stopped the Pharisees from showing mercy to 'sinners'? Apart from the text he quotes, how does the Old Testament teach us the importance of mercy?
4. Are we merciful—towards those we live and work among, and towards Christian brothers and sisters? Why should we be merciful? How should we show mercy?
5. The church is a place of fellowship in which we should help one another to grow in Christ. Should true Christian fellowship help us as we seek to be humble and merciful? How might it do so?
6. We easily criticise one another. Jesus challenges us to be aware of our own sins. Should we engage in self-criticism? Do we? Or do we just learn to live with our sins and tolerate them? How might we deal with them? There is a vital truth to grasp here: as we truly see our own sins, and understand the greatness of God's mercy towards us, we will be merciful to those around us as he was merciful towards us.

Spend some time in quiet prayer, each one reflecting on his or her own life in the light of these passages. Then spend some time praying together around the two passages and their challenge to us.

10. Religious and moral traditionalists – the problem of rules and traditions

Mark 7:1-23

In this story Pharisees came up from Jerusalem to Galilee and they ‘gathered round Jesus’, perhaps to check up on him. They then criticised his disciples for not washing their hands before eating. The criticism was not about hygiene but ritual cleanliness—‘ceremonial washing’.

In the Old Testament there were laws about cleanliness for priests and Levites. The Pharisees extended these laws to ordinary Israelites too and constructed quite a system of rules and regulations based around them: ‘the tradition of the elders’. They tried to impose them on people, and so criticised Jesus’ disciples for not observing them.

1. What was wrong with what the Pharisees had done? Would it not be good to extend the priestly laws of cleanliness to everybody? After all, Israel as a whole was a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Ex 19:6).
2. Jesus actually accuses the Pharisees of being hypocrites and quotes Isaiah in support (6-7). In what ways were they being hypocritical? Notice two things especially: one in verse 9 and the other in verses 15-23.
3. What was happening in the ‘Corban’ tradition?
4. Do we ever add to the commandments of God with ‘rules taught by men’: for ourselves, our children, our fellow believers? Do we even, as with the Pharisees, risk disobeying God’s explicit will as we do so?
5. In 14-17 why do you think the disciples were so slow to understand what Jesus said? What is the meaning for us of the words he spoke to them? Remember from last time: I desire mercy, not sacrifice (Mt 9:13).
6. What is the heart, which Jesus speaks of in verses 19 and 21? Do we recognise our own hearts in the description Jesus gives of it in 21-22? What will help, and (according to the passage) what will not help, to change the state of our hearts?
7. In what ways might this controversy and Jesus’ teaching here help us as we engage in evangelism?

11. Faith among the Canaanites

Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30

In this story Jesus entered a Gentile area. A Canaanite woman who had an afflicted daughter came to him for help as soon as she heard of his arrival. Her Canaanite origin shows she belonged to Israel's ancient enemy whom God had commanded the Israelites to drive from the land.

Jesus' words to her seem harsh, but he is probably quoting a Jewish proverb and doing so with irony. Her response suggests this: she joins in the joke: Yes Lord, but even the dogs ... Then Jesus heals her daughter.

1. This story immediately follows that of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees when they criticised his disciples for not washing their hands before meals. Is there any significance in that?
2. Why do Jesus' disciples behave towards her as they do? What warning should their attitude and behaviour convey to us?
3. In the two passages what things show that this woman had some understanding and faith before she approached Jesus?
4. Why does Jesus speak to the woman as he does? Does he share the disciples' attitude towards her?
5. Do the words of Psalm 10:1, help us to understand what he says: Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
6. As his words suggest, during his earthly ministry Jesus mainly worked among Jewish people. Why was that? What should our attitude as Gentile Christians be towards Jewish people and Jewish evangelism? Have a look, for example, at Romans 11:13-21.
7. What should we learn from the fact that Jesus nevertheless took time to minister to this Gentile woman?
8. Notice that it was the woman's strong point, her love for her daughter, that brought her to seek Christ. How might this thought help us sometimes in our evangelism?
9. Are there other lessons about evangelism that we might learn from the way in which Jesus dealt with this woman?

12. The Faith of the Centurion

Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10

In this story Jesus responds to a request for help from a Roman officer stationed in Galilee, a man who represented and enforced Roman imperial power over the Jewish people.

The two accounts are slightly different, partly because Matthew abbreviates the story. Moreover, each writer emphasises certain particular parts of the incident they describe.

1. What is good – even remarkable – about the centurion?
2. What is the significance of the fact that the Jewish elders were willing to intercede on his behalf (Luke 7:3-5)?
3. How do the centurion's good qualities become a means of bringing him to Jesus? What might we learn from that for our own evangelism?
4. What is so special about the centurion's faith that it causes Jesus' to be amazed and brought his commendation: 'I have not found such great faith even in Israel'? In what ways might we manifest faith like his?
5. Why does Jesus warn the Jews of his day so severely (Mt 8:10-12)? What might we need to learn from his warning?
6. What is Jesus talking about when he speaks of 'the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Mt 8:12)? What does this language mean?
7. Do we believe there is such a 'darkness'? What impact should Jesus' language about 'the darkness' have on us as believers?
8. When is it appropriate to speak of 'the darkness'? How can we explain it to non-Christians?
9. Why is the coming kingdom described here and elsewhere as a feast?
10. Notice the division Jesus speaks of: there is 'the darkness' and there is 'the feast'. How far does an awareness of these two great future realities impact us now in our daily lives, decisions, ambitions?

13. A Night Visitor

John 3:1-15

1. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night (2). John probably says this not only as a matter of fact but also because it has a spiritual significance, as it does in John 9:4 and 13:30 as well. What is its significance here?
2. The Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion understood who Jesus was more readily than many Jewish people. Sometimes previous understanding can stop people coming to a true knowledge of him. Was it so with Nicodemus, Israel's teacher (10)? Why? Can it be true of us?
3. Is Nicodemus's view of Jesus adequate (2)? What inadequate views do people have about him today? How can we challenge such views?
4. Why does Jesus so quickly and unexpectedly make his declaration in verse 3? How does it fit into the conversation? It clearly disorients Nicodemus. What can we learn from it?
5. What does Jesus mean by being born again or born from above (both translations are possible)? How do his words challenge Nicodemus? How could we in our own context say the same thing in other words?
6. Why does Nicodemus fail to understand? And why does Jesus express surprise at his incomprehension: You are Israel's teacher ... (10)? See Ezekiel 36:24-29 and 37:1-14.
7. What is Jesus telling Nicodemus in 11-13? Why are his words here so important: what are they saying? How do they respond to Nicodemus's opening words: we know you are a teacher who has come from God (2).
8. What do Jesus' final words mean (14-15)? Why does he say them near the end of the conversation? How would they challenge Nicodemus? And how would we communicate the same truth to people who have never even heard of the snake in the desert?
9. Notice the two places where Jesus says must (7, 14)? Why is he so insistent at these two places? How are they connected with each other?
10. Notice the phrase Jesus uses three times: I tell you the truth (3, 5, 11). Why does he say this? And why does he say it where he says it?
11. What do we learn here about evangelism, specially among religious folk?

14. Not the Most Comfortable Guest

Luke 14:1-24

One Sabbath Jesus eats in the home of an obviously important and wealthy Pharisee. Other guests are present too and he speaks to them and challenges them on numerous matters. It was quite a lively occasion!

1. Jesus shows mercy on the Sabbath in front of a disapproving audience who were carefully watching him (v1). Is showing mercy part of our own Sabbath observance? How might it become part of it in practice?
2. Do we sometimes have the same problem the Pharisees had: focused on the law in an external and rigid way rather than being concerned with the principles that lie at its heart? What are those principles?
3. Can we think of particular occasions when we have taken a higher place than we merited? Or a lower one? (v7-11) Why can it seem so important to us to have other people accord us the position, respect, priority we think we deserve? What is the answer?
4. Do we tend only to be hospitable, generous, kind when we can expect some return for our pains? In practice how might we behave differently? What should motivate us to do so?
5. Are we looking forward to the 'great banquet'? What is there about it that especially fills us with anticipation? Or are there things that actually blunt our longing and desire to be there?
6. The master was urgent about getting people to come to his banquet (v21-23). Are we also urgent about getting people there? Are there some people for whose presence there we are especially concerned?
7. How does Jesus manage to share so much of the gospel at the meal? Does the account of his conversation at the table suggest how we too might use such occasions for the gospel?
8. Notice especially Jesus's boldness at the table. He challenges wrong attitudes about the Sabbath; he rebukes pride; he urges those around him to a true hospitality; he refuses to let a superficial platitude about the coming feast pass without comment (v15); and he warns those present most severely (v24). What does all this teach us?

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