



Following Jesus
Discipleship Program

**Who is Jesus and
What Does It
Mean to Follow
Him?**

Al Truesdale, Hal Cauthron, Floyd Cunningham,
Linda Alexander, and Wes Eby

BOOK ONE

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JESUS Film™
HARVEST PARTNERS 

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Preface

The *Following Jesus Discipleship Program*, also known as *Following Jesus*, is closely associated with the JESUS film. But it does not directly depend on the film. *Following Jesus* begins where the JESUS film concludes. It begins with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The JESUS film is based mostly on the Gospel of Luke. The *Following Jesus Discipleship Program* uses the stories found in Luke for the lessons. This is called a narrative method.

Following Jesus is a Christ-centered discipleship program. This also means that *Following Jesus* is God-centered. The program concentrates on who Jesus Christ is. It concentrates on what following Jesus means. The program does this because we want to encourage worship of God in all things. This means that *Following Jesus* does not concentrate on being a new Christian. The program first emphasizes how the Christian is "in Christ." Then the program deals with how Christ is "in the Christian." The order is very important in the New Testament. Being a Christian means we turn away from being centered on ourselves. It means now we are centered in Christ.

Following Jesus asks and answers two questions: "Who is Jesus?" and "What does it mean to be His disciple?" *Following Jesus* shows the new Christian just how costly following Jesus will be. It openly presents the radical nature of discipleship.

Following Jesus is presented in three books:

BOOK ONE. The entry book introduces new Christians to the basic elements of Christian faith and Christian life. Completion of this book should prepare a person for baptism and for receiving the Lord's Supper.

BOOK TWO. In this book young Christians will advance to a higher level of understanding their new faith in Christ. They will learn what it means to be a part of the Church. They will learn what it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And they will learn the importance of Christian service.

BOOK THREE. The third book helps new Christians get an overall picture of the biblical story. It introduces them to some of the most important parts of Christian history that affect Christian belief and practice. The three standards together help prepare a person for church membership.

The material that follows can be converted to other formats. Hopefully "stick men" figures will be mobilized to tell the discipleship story for pre-literate peoples. Extensive illustrations can be used in conjunction with the material. The program can be placed in video and audio format. Picture books can be employed. The material is written at the fifth/sixth grade reading level (U.S.A. levels) and can therefore be readily translated into other languages.

Each standard contains several lessons. A teacher will need a minimum of one to two hours to complete each lesson. More time should be taken if needed and if possible.

The lessons, including questions and activities, are purposely designed for oral instruction. Thus, books and paper are not necessary. However, if people in discipleship groups have copies of the lessons, learning may be facilitated.

The lessons are best used in groups of new Christians. But they can be used to instruct just one new Christian. All evangelical groups may use the lessons.

Lesson 1: Who Is Jesus?

Introduction

Christians have that name because they are followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The early Christians recognized Him as Christ, the Messiah, God's "Anointed One." The early followers of Christ were sometimes called "followers of the Way." They were first called Christians in a city named Antioch in ancient Syria. Those who follow Jesus are His disciples. This means many things, and in the *Following Jesus Discipleship Program* we will explore many of these. One thing the word *disciple* means is that Jesus is their most important teacher. Disciples of Jesus live in the school of Jesus.

But who is Jesus? Why would so many people want to follow Him? In this lesson we will begin to ask and answer this question.

A. Jesus Is the Fulfillment of God's Promises to Abraham.

Jesus is the One who completes the story of God. He fulfills the trust God's people had placed in God's promises to Abraham. He is also the fulfillment of the hopes of the whole world.

The angel announced to Mary she would give birth to Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). Afterwards, she praised God for what He had promised to do (Luke 1:46-55). She concluded her song with references to God's earlier promises. "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers" (Luke 1:54-55).

God's purpose in calling Abraham was to create a people. God's purpose in creating a people was to make himself known to them. They would then take the blessing of their knowledge of God to the rest of humanity. God repeated these promises to Abraham later in his life (Genesis 22:15-18). God again emphasized the blessing that would come to all the nations of the earth.

The prophets believed the purpose God intended for Israel to fulfill would, in fact, be accomplished (Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 11:1-5; Isaiah 60:1-3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-32).

Jesus began His public ministry in Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30). In the synagogue on the Sabbath, (Sabbath is the observed day of worship). He read from the prophet Isaiah (61:1-2; 58:6). Jesus declared that these verses were now being fulfilled in Him. Later, some followers of John the Baptist asked Jesus about His ministry (Luke 7:18-23). Jesus replied with words from the prophet Isaiah (29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1). Jesus understood His mission as fulfilling the prophet's expectations for God's future activity.

The apostle Paul referred to God's promise to Abraham as being the scriptural foundation of the Good News that Jesus preached. Paul declared: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the

Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’” (Galatians 3:8). Paul heard the Gospel as a message of God’s mercy. God had revealed in Jesus the way people would be accepted by God. Paul’s word for this acceptance was justified. The word means the loving act of God by which He makes people right with Him. Paul applied the words of the promise to Jesus himself. Paul wrote: “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

Question: What is the promise God made to Abraham?

Question: Why is God’s promise to Abraham so important to who Jesus is?

B. Jesus Is the Messiah.

One day when Jesus was praying, He asked His disciples a question. “Who do you say I am?” His disciples answered, “The Christ of God.” (See Luke 9:18-20.) *Christ* means “Messiah” or “the anointed one.” The Jews hoped for a future king that would come from the family of David. He would be their Messiah. He would free them from their enemies.

“Christ” is the Greek word for Messiah. The disciples believed Jesus was the Messiah. He had been anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism (Luke 3:21-22). God had chosen Him to bring salvation to all the world. He was God’s Christ, God’s Messiah. So, Jesus is the Christ. The enemy He came to destroy was sin. He brought the kingdom of God that the Old Testament promised. Christians are people who recognize Jesus as the Christ. They receive His salvation, the salvation of God. And they follow Him because He is the anointed One of God. The Bible provides the inspired record in which we learn all of this.

Question: What does the word Messiah mean?

Question: Why is it important that Jesus is the Messiah?

C. Jesus Is the Savior.

Mary the mother of Jesus sang, “My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:47). Then she continued by explaining the meaning of Savior. As Savior, God delivers all who are oppressed and who call upon His name. He shows mercy to those who fear Him. He scatters the proud and performs mighty deeds of salvation. He lifts up the humble, feeds the hungry, and remembers to be merciful. (See Luke 1:47-55.)

The angel of the Lord appeared to some shepherds and announced Jesus’ birth to them. The angel identified Jesus as the Savior. The Savior was Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). When Jesus was eight days old, they took Him to the Temple to be circumcised. This was Jewish custom. A righteous man

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named Simeon was serving in the Temple. When he saw Jesus he took the baby in his arms. Simeon gave thanks to God for Jesus. He said, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people” (see Luke 2:29-32). Inspired by God, Simeon said Jesus the Savior would reveal God to the Gentiles and would bring glory to Israel.

In the Old Testament, God is sometimes called the Savior. (See 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 106:21; Isaiah 19:20; 43:3, 11; 60:16.) This is because of His mighty acts of redemption. Also, in the New Testament, Christ is called the Savior. For example, the Apostle Peter said that after Jesus’ death and resurrection, God exalted Jesus to His own right hand. He exalted Him as “Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). The Apostle said that “God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised” (Acts 13:23). He is the Savior God promised through the prophets. Through Him God made salvation possible for all people.

Question: What does it mean to call Jesus the Savior?

Question: What makes Jesus the Savior?

D. Jesus Is the Son of God.

Once Jesus took some of His disciples up to a mountain to pray. While they were there, some amazing things happened. The appearance of Jesus’ face changed. His clothes became very bright. Moses and Elijah appeared and began to talk with Him about His death. A cloud was over all of them. The disciples were terrified. Then out of the cloud God spoke. He said, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen” (Luke 9:35). God instructed the disciples to listen to His Son.

On another occasion Jesus encountered a man that demons had possessed. The man was so broken by (sick with or possessed by) the demons that he could not live in a house. He lived where tombs were located. His mind and body were so much in the power of demons that he did not even wear clothes.

No mere man or creature could break the power of the demons and set the man free. Only God could do that. And that is exactly the way the demon-possessed man recognized Jesus. Just before Jesus forced the demons to leave the man, the man recognized Jesus as the “Son of the Most High God” (see Luke 8:26-31).

Question: How are Jesus and God related?

Question: Because Jesus is the Son of God, what are some special things Jesus can do?

E. Jesus Is God.

Who is this One whom God called His chosen Son? Who is this Son of the Most High God who could force demons to obey Him? He could even raise the dead. He forgave sins (Luke 7:48-50). He set people free from slavery to evil and evil powers.

The answer is also found in another story. One day Jesus got into a boat with His disciples. They intended to cross a lake. Jesus went to sleep. But a fierce storm arose and threatened the ship and its passengers. The alarmed disciples shouted at Jesus. They told Him to do something or they would die. Jesus rebuked the raging storm, and the wild sea became calm.

The frightened disciples naturally asked, “Who is this One who makes even the raging storm to obey His command?” They were overcome by fear and amazement. Why? Because they recognized that in Jesus of Nazareth they had encountered the Holy God. (See Luke 8:22-25.)

The angel had told Jesus’ mother, Mary, that He would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Now we know by looking at these events in Jesus’ life we meet God himself in Jesus of Nazareth. God is uniquely present in Him. The incarnation is what Christians call God’s unique presence in Jesus (John 1:1-5; 14-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20).

Question: What are two ways we know that Jesus is God?

Question: Before Jesus was born, what did His mother already know about Jesus?

Conclusion

When Christ speaks, God is speaking. When Christ acts, God is acting. When Christ forgives sins, it is God who does this. When Christ tells us what God is like, God is speaking for himself.

God is the One who suffered on the Cross. He is the One who overcame death, hell, and all that tries to separate people from God. God is the One who saves and provides salvation for all people. In Jesus, God is the One who forgives and receives all sinners who repent. He is the One who finds the lost coin. He finds and restores the lost sheep. He forgives and restores the lost son. God is the One who brought salvation to Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus preached the Good News of God’s salvation for all. He also is the Gospel, which is God’s Good News.

Activity: Tell another person who Jesus is.

Lesson 2: What Is Important About Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection?

Introduction

When Jesus was still a young man, His enemies killed him. They did this by crucifying Him on a cross. After Jesus had suffered very much, He died. This is called the Crucifixion. A friend of Jesus owned a new tomb where no one had been buried. The friend placed Jesus' dead body in the new tomb. Jesus' disciples were now afraid for their own lives. So they hid in fear. They thought that they had seen the end of Jesus.

But Jesus' Heavenly Father had other plans for His Son. On the third day after Jesus' enemies had crucified Him, some female friends of Jesus came to His grave. They intended to finish the burial process. They brought spices to put on Jesus' body. They wondered who would roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb.

But when the women came to the tomb, Jesus was not there. The stone had been rolled away, and Jesus' body was gone. What had happened? God had raised Jesus to new life. Two angels reminded the women of what Jesus had told them. Jesus had also told them He would be crucified and would rise again. God was the one who raised His Son from the grave. This is called the Resurrection.

A. The Crucifixion and the Resurrection Unlock the Meaning of Christian Life.

The Crucifixion and the Resurrection are the source of our salvation. They are the cause for Christian faith, peace, hope, and joy. Jesus' early disciples sought for the meaning of His death and resurrection. Christian faith is faith in Jesus who was crucified and who now lives. It is Easter faith. Salvation comes through the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. That is what the New Testament declares and explains.

God approved of Jesus forgiving sins. One time Jesus forgave a man of his sins. Then He healed the man. If God had not approved of Jesus' forgiving sins, then God could have refused to heal the man. Jesus spoke for and acted on behalf of His Heavenly Father.

What did the Father think of all this? Did He approve of what Jesus was saying and doing in the Father's name? Yes, without a doubt. How do we know this? We know this because the Father raised His Son from the grave. In Jesus' resurrection, the Father confirmed Jesus' entire ministry and His claims to be God's Son and Messiah. In the Resurrection the Father says He is well pleased with the

testimony and obedience of His Son. The resurrection of Jesus was a testament to the Father's faithfulness to His Son. It was also a testimony to the Son's faithfulness to His Father. Later, Peter said God raised Jesus from the grave and all Christians bear witness to this fact. The Father then exalted Christ to the Father's right hand in heaven (Acts 2:32).

Question: What is important about the Resurrection?

Question: How can people have Resurrection power in their lives today?

B. The Crucifixion and the Resurrection Demonstrate God's Power over Evil.

In Christ's resurrection the Father completely demonstrates His authority over every power that stands against His reign as Lord (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). In the death and resurrection of His Son, the Father defeated—put to flight—all the powers of evil. Our Lord is victor, and He shares His victory with all His disciples (Colossians 2:13-15). The Book of Acts says it was impossible for the Son of God to be held in the power of death (Acts 2:24). Even today the powers of evil take many forms and try to exalt themselves above God. But the resurrection of Christ settled the issue forever. The powers of evil must and will always finally yield to their conqueror, who is the resurrected Lord. God put His great power to work when He raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand (Ephesians 1:20).

Question: Who has more authority, Jesus or evil powers? Why?

Question: How did Jesus defeat the powers of evil?

C. The Crucifixion and the Resurrection Provide Forgiveness of Sins.

On the Cross and in the Resurrection, Christ made it possible for God to forgive our sins (Colossians 2:14). He made it possible for us to live new lives that are changed by God. The New Testament tells us when the resurrected Christ comes to live in us He does away with the old life. In the old life we gave ourselves to sin's power. We made ourselves the slaves of sin (Romans 6:15-19). We were dead in our sins and guilty before God. By ourselves we could not change our sinful condition and patterns. We could not worship and serve God. We could not love what God loves. We could not love our neighbors, our families, or our enemies. We could not show the kind of love God shows to all persons.

But through faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ, the old life passes away. Through the resurrection power of God, our old selves that once were given to sin have now been crucified with Christ. The old life died. Our service to sin died. Now through Jesus Christ we have been raised to new life just as God raised Jesus from the dead. The same resurrection power of God that brought

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Jesus from the grave now works in us (Romans 6:1-4). This is like being born again (John 3:3-7). The new birth is something that God gives us from above. Through Jesus the old life of sin passes away and a new life comes to be. All things become new (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).

Question: Who can forgive our sins?

Question: What does it mean to forgive?

D. The Crucifixion and the Resurrection Bring New Life in Christ.

When we follow Christ, He becomes the center of our life. Indeed, He is our life. Once we served sin and the power of evil. But this is no longer true. Now Christ works in us to direct our whole life toward love for God and love for our neighbors. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The change happens only because the resurrected Christ lives in us. We completely place our trust in Him. He gives us peace with God and sets up God's reign as King in us. This happens because of God's love and grace. The crucified and resurrected One now actually empowers us to live in ways that please God. He actually changes us.

Once we were owned by evil. But in the new life all the parts of our lives begin to praise God. The New Testament describes this as giving ourselves to righteousness (Romans 6:19). This is another way of saying we serve the Holy and loving God. More and more God changes us. Freed from the power of sin, we are now free to serve God and our neighbor. More and more we love all that God loves. The New Testament says this new life in Christ is eternal life. This means the new life is actually the life of the resurrected Christ now living in us. The life that comes from Him will never end or grow old (Romans 6:20-23).

Question: What is the difference between the old life and the new life in Christ?

Question: How can we do away with our old selves and have a new life?

Conclusion

The Heavenly Father did not permit death to have the last word about Jesus. On the third day God raised His Son from the dead. And Jesus' resurrection gives us new life in Him. This is eternal life now and forever.

Activity: Tell someone in your discipleship group what the Crucifixion and Resurrection mean.

Lesson 3: What Is the Kingdom of God?

Introduction

Jesus and His disciples traveled about in the country where they lived. As they traveled Jesus preached and taught all who would listen. He did many wonderful things. He healed sick people, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. Jesus taught many things. One of the most important things Jesus talked about was the kingdom of God. He talked about this topic many times.

One time Jesus and His disciples journeyed through some villages (Luke 8:1). In each village He stopped and told the people the kingdom of God had appeared in Him. God had brought the kingdom of God to earth in His Son Jesus. People should receive the Kingdom as Good News from God. The Good News was that God loves all people and wants all people to be His children.

This was very good news for people who thought because they were sinners God did not love them. Many people thought they were hopeless before God. They feared the kingdom of God would be bad news for them. They thought God wanted only to punish them for their sins. Some poor people thought God had already punished them by making them poor. They thought they had been left out. So they were greatly surprised to hear what Jesus said about God. Hopeless people flocked to Him. They listened carefully as He told them about God's love.

Jesus surprised many people when He said the kingdom of God belonged to the poor and the hungry (Luke 6:20-21). This made many people angry. They thought God should love only them. Because of their good deeds, they thought only they should receive the Good News of the Kingdom. They thought they were already good. So, God should limit His love to them. Instead, Jesus turned to sinners and told them about God's grace. He told them about God's desire to bring all people to himself. Anyone who would receive the rule of God and let Him change them could enter the kingdom of God.

So the kingdom of God came to earth in Jesus, who was crucified and raised to new life. The Good News that Jesus preached was that the kingdom of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness had come. All who would repent, turn from their sins, and receive the Kingdom as little children could enter the kingdom of God. The Kingdom would come to them. To those who heard and understood, this was good news. Those who did not love and long for God's kingdom in this way were angry. In fact, the enemies of God's kingdom of mercy and love finally put Jesus to death.

A. The Kingdom of God Came in Jesus.

The picture of the kingdom of God can be seen in all that Christ said and did. (See Luke 1:47-55.) In this scripture, Luke tells us that Christ extends God's mercy to all who will receive Him. He scatters the proud and arrogant who think they do not need God's grace. He brings down arrogant people from their thrones. The King fills the hungry with good things according to the promises He made to Abraham and his descendants.

To receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ means we will embrace the kingdom of God in all things. Apart from the Kingdom there is no good news. Apart from accepting the kingdom of God, a person just remains in his or her sins. Unless God's kingdom becomes the pattern for one's life, he or she has neither really heard nor received Christ.

In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, He showed perfect obedience to the reign of God. In perfect obedience to His father, Jesus was the means through which the kingdom of God came to earth. Luke describes a number of instances in which Jesus said that in Him God's kingdom had come to earth. Some of these instances are as follows:

1. Jesus sent His disciples to preach in the confidence the kingdom of God had come (Luke 9:1-16).
2. On one occasion some Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus told them they were looking for the wrong signs. In Jesus the kingdom of God was already present among them. But they could not see it (Luke 11:16-30).
3. Once some enemies said that Jesus cast out demons by the power of the demons. Jesus rebuked them and said He cast out demons by the "finger of God." This is proof the kingdom of God has come. He showed how human life appears when lived in obedience to God. The reason Christians say Jesus was sinless is that He lived in unbroken obedience to His Heavenly Father (Luke 11:20).

Whenever we hear what Jesus said and did, it shows what God's reign on earth should look like. When Jesus was baptized, He showed His submission and obedience to His Father. The same was true when Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). He obeyed His Father by forgiving sinners (Luke 5:20), raising the dead (Luke 7:11-17), and blessing children (Luke 18:15-17).

Jesus' perfect obedience to His Father led to His crucifixion. Jesus was crucified by those who rejected the kingdom that He presented. Even the real prospect of His death could not turn Jesus away from His radical obedience to the Father's kingdom. He even spoke to His Heavenly Father about

removing the horrors of trial, rejection, and death. Nevertheless, His desire to obey His Father was even stronger (Luke 22:39-42). On the Cross, forsaken by His disciples, falsely condemned by His enemies, Jesus gave His life. He willingly surrendered His all for the kingdom of God. He even took upon himself our sins. Through His death and resurrection, Christ provided salvation for us all.

Question: What is the Good News Jesus proclaimed?

Question: What is the kingdom of God like? Give some examples.

Question: How did God show people what the kingdom of God is like?

B. The Kingdom of God Is in Jesus' disciples.

Through Jesus' radical obedience to the kingdom of God, Jesus made a way of salvation for all persons everywhere. Our salvation comes through Christ's obedience. Part of His obedience to His Father was to take upon himself our sins. He willingly took upon himself our sins, which causes our separation from God. And He made a way for sinners to return to God.

Jesus was crucified by people who rejected God's reign that Jesus proclaimed and practiced. (Read again Luke 1:47-55.) God rebukes the arrogant and puts down those who hate justice and mercy. God shuts the mouths of those who are proud of the salvation they can create and boast of. He rebukes those who seek power so that they can abuse others. God rebukes those who brag about their own accomplishments, or who love wealth more than they love Him and others (Luke 18:18-25). He casts out those who try to use God for their own selfish purposes (Luke 19:45).

But God receives all those who will receive His Kingdom (Luke 6:20-21). He lifts up the fallen (Luke 7:36-50). He shows tender mercy to those who repent of their sins (Luke 15:18-24). He honors those who will live in radical faith and obedience (Luke 9:23-26). God gives himself to those who will receive Him as obedient children (Luke 18:15-17). He restores to His fellowship all those who will turn from their evil ways and live in obedience to Him (Luke 19:1-10).

Throughout our lives we will continue to grow as Jesus' disciples. Even Christians who have been Jesus' disciples for many years want to learn more about how to follow Him. One mature disciple of Jesus in the New Testament described His Christian growth in this way: "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

Growing as Jesus' disciples will involve many things. The most important part is that we learn more and more what Jesus taught us about God. And we then permit Christ to make our increased understanding a part of our lives. Learning more means to be changed more. The picture of God Jesus gives us is the most important way to learn and grow. He is the one who shows us what God is like. We say that He reveals God. So we study the first four books of the New Testament in which

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the life of Jesus is presented. But the rest of the New Testament is very important also. In the rest of the New Testament some great Christian teachers were inspired by God. They enlarged our understanding of what it means to be in Christ and to be a part of His Church. All of the New Testament and all of the Bible teach us how to be God's people.

Question: Who are the people God receives into His kingdom? Think about the Bible verses you studied in the Book of Luke.

Question: How do we grow as Jesus' disciples?

Conclusion

In the Book of Luke, we learn many things Jesus taught us about God. As we go through the three standards of Following Jesus, we will learn more and more about the life of Jesus. We will learn how He reveals God to us. And we learn how to follow Him in all things. Most importantly, as the Book of Luke teaches us, God loves all sinners and wants to forgive them of their sins. He permits nothing to stand in the way of reaching people who are lost. Like the good shepherd, He searches until He finds the lost sheep. Like the loving father, He forgives and restores the lost son (Luke 15).

But the Book of Luke and all of the New Testament teach us more than what God is like. They also teach us what God wants His disciples to be like because of His Kingdom in them. In Christ's resurrection, God makes clear He has won the battle against all that stands against His rule in us and in the world. His Son fought against all those powers that try to separate us from God, from one another, and from ourselves. But in Christ, all those powers have been defeated. In Christ's resurrection God publicly humiliated all things that challenge God's righteous reign. Through Christ, God sets up His righteous reign in us.

Activity: Think of one way you can show someone else what it means to be part of the kingdom of God. Now, share this with your teacher or discipleship group.

Lesson 4: How May People Have Peace WITH GOD?

Introduction

We have looked at what the Kingdom of God is like. But how does one become a citizen of the Kingdom of God? How does one enter the Kingdom? In this lesson we will answer these questions.

One day while Jesus was teaching, a strange thing happened. People who were recognized as sinners, were trying to get as close to Jesus as they could. They wanted to hear every word He said. But these were the people the religious leaders called sinners. They did not obey all the religious laws the leaders thought righteous people should obey. Because of this, the religious leaders believed sinners could not receive God's favor. Since they claimed to represent God, they thought God would act like them. God certainly would not have anything to do with sinners as Jesus was doing. But Jesus claimed to speak for God. So, it didn't make any sense to them that sinners would be gathered close around Jesus, listening to His every word (Luke 15:1-2).

What were the religious leaders doing while the sinners pressed to see Jesus? Since they claimed to know God, they too must have wanted to be near Jesus. But that wasn't the case at all. They did not enjoy being around Jesus. Instead of thirsting to hear and be near Jesus, the religious leaders were unhappy. They were unhappy because Jesus gladly received sinners to himself. The religious leaders—the Pharisees and Scribes—grumbled and complained. They were sure God loved them, but not the sinners.

Hearing the religious leaders complain, Jesus began to tell stories. He did so for a purpose. He wanted all of His hearers to know what God is really like.

A. Those Who Enter the Kingdom Must First Recognize They Are Lost.

Jesus taught this truth through stories about everyday life.

1. The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7)

Jesus told about a shepherd who had 100 sheep. In the evening, the shepherd realized one sheep was missing. He did not say, "I have 99 sheep, so I will just forget about the one that is lost." Instead, the shepherd left the 99 that were safe in the sheepfold. He then went out into the night and looked for the lost sheep for a long time. He searched and searched until he found it. Placing the sheep upon his shoulders, the shepherd brought the sheep home. He was so happy he called his friends to come and help him celebrate.

2. The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

Jesus also told a story about a woman who had ten silver coins. She lost one of them. She could have said, “Well, I have nine coins. I will just forget about the lost one.” Instead, she lit a lamp and then carefully swept her entire house. Finally, she found the lost coin. She was so happy she called her friends to come and help her celebrate.

3. The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Jesus told another story, which is one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible. A father had two sons. One day the younger son said to his father, “Give me the money I will receive after you die. I want it now.” The father did what the son asked. The son then left home and moved to a distant country. There, he wasted all the money his father had given him. The son lived carelessly and sinfully. Finally, he had nothing to eat. So, he took a job of feeding pigs. This was a shameful job for a Jew in New Testament times. Jews were to have nothing to do with pigs. The young man ate the same food he was feeding the pigs. The son brought shame to both his father and himself.

One day the son realized what a sinful and shameful thing he had done. He admitted he was sinner. Then he said to himself, “My father’s servants have better food than I do. I will go to my father and ask that I become one of his servants.” That was his plan, and that is what he set out to do. He did not think he deserved to be treated like a son.

As the young man came near his home, the father saw his sinful son coming down the road. When the father saw his son, he ran joyfully to meet him. Quickly the son repented of his sins. He told the father he had come back to become a servant. He admitted he had sinned against God and against his father. He said he no longer deserved to be called a son.

How did the father respond? In anger? Did he send his son away? No! The father commanded the servants to bring out a robe, sandals, and ring and give them to the son. The robe would identify him as a son of the father. The ring would announce that the father had forgiven the son’s sins. Then the father held a great feast to celebrate the son’s return. The father was very happy his wayward son had come back home. The father forgave, restored, and treated the son as though he had never gone away and sinned. The father did this because of his love, not because the son deserved it.

The father also had an older son who had not left home. He had stayed home and worked for the father. He resented his brother for what he had done. So, rather than being happy, the older brother was angry. He did not believe that their father should forgive his wayward brother. He thought that once his brother was a sinner, he was always a sinner. He would have urged the father to drive the sinful boy away, never to be seen again.

The older son was correct about one thing. His brother had not earned the right to be forgiven. He deserved to be turned away and rejected forever. But happily, the father responded on the basis of love and forgiveness, not on the basis of worth or merit.

Jesus told these stories to help us see what God is like. He also told the stories to help us see ourselves and to recognize all of us need God's forgiveness.

Who do the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son represent? All of us. All persons. All people have sinned against God. We have not loved and worshiped God as we should. We have not faithfully obeyed and served Him. Therefore, all persons are lost and away from God. We are sinners. Like the younger son, we deserve to be punished for our sins. We certainly do not deserve God's forgiveness and grace. There is absolutely nothing any of us can do to deserve God's forgiveness and favor. Also, no other human being or saint or ancestor or Mary, the mother of Jesus, can assist us. All persons are helplessly in need of God's mercy. All parts of our lives have been affected by our sins.

So what hope is there for any of us? All of us are in despair. All of us are lost, just like the sheep, the coin, and the son. None of them could find themselves. Someone else had to find and restore them.

Question: Who represents God in the stories Jesus told?

Question: Who is God really like?

Question: How are we like the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son?

B. Those Who Enter the Kingdom Must Accept the Kingdom as God's Gift.

Entering the Kingdom of God comes through God's grace alone. Only God can forgive and restore us. In the Gospel of John we read: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17). In another place, we are told God sent His Son, born of a woman, to redeem or save all persons who would repent of their sins and receive Jesus as Savior. Just like the younger son Jesus told about, all who repent of their sins and turn to Christ will receive adoption as the children of God (Galatians 4:4).

Repentance means we fully accept God's judgment against us. It means we are the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. It involves determination to leave the old way of life in which we wasted our lives and rebelled against God. No one can hear the Good News unless, like the lost son in Jesus' story, he or she has heard the bad news about sin. Repentance also means that we totally place our trust in Christ and abandon all of our foolish efforts to please God in our own strength.

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It is through God's Son, Jesus Christ, alone that God makes salvation available to all persons. Only those persons who recognize they are sinners before God can ever hope to receive God's forgiveness and restoration. No repentant sinner contributes anything at all to his or her salvation. Even the ability to reach out to the Savior in faith is God's gift. The Holy Spirit, shows us that we are sinners. He convicts us of our sins and shows us our total helplessness before God. The Holy Spirit shows us just how bound in our sins we really are. But the Holy Spirit also shows us that indeed Jesus is the Savior who can bring us from sinful death into eternal life. The Spirit of God awakens us to our sins and to the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. He promotes within us a hunger for salvation.

Question: What is God's gift to us?

Question: What does repentance mean?

Question: How do we leave the old life behind?

C. Those Who Enter the Kingdom Become Born Again.

Jesus said that to enter the Kingdom of God a person must be born again (John 3:1-15). A person must be born "from above" by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also makes it possible for us to confess our sins and reach out to Jesus. We can't do this in our own strength. It is through the Spirit that Jesus comes to live in us. Receiving Jesus as one's Savior is like being born all over again. We call this regeneration or to become new. A person who enters the Kingdom becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But the second birth is not a physical birth like the first birth. The second birth is a spiritual one. It comes from above, from God. It is the new life of forgiveness and restoration to fellowship with God that He alone can give. When one time we boasted about ourselves, we now boast in Christ alone.

In the New Birth that comes from above, we are reconciled to God. Christ has sought us, found us, and restored us to God's favor. Now we have peace with God through Jesus. The war that existed before has ceased. We are no longer kept apart from God. Christ's life, death, and resurrection made all this possible. Jesus was faithful to His Heavenly Father. Through His faithfulness, we are saved; we are redeemed.

The Apostle Paul explained it this way. Even though Jesus was sinless, God placed upon Him the sins of all of us, who are sinners. God did this so we who are sinners could be reconciled to Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). In the Book of Ephesians we learn more. God is rich in mercy. And because of His great love for us, He loved us even when we were dead in our sins. He made us alive in Christ and saved us by His grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own

doing; it is the gift of God—not the results of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:4-9, nrsv).

Not only are we restored to God's favor, we are truly, at that moment, changed by Christ. The New Testament uses several words to describe this change. We become new creations in Christ. We are born again. Buried with Christ in death like His, we are raised to new life in Him. The old life passes away. A new reality takes place. We are regenerated or created anew. The Holy Spirit, who is at work in us now, makes it possible for us to live in the new reality, the new life in Christ. We become children of God. The apostle Paul wrote: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). All those who have been changed by Christ will bear the results of Christ in their lives. These results are also known as "fruit" of Christ in their lives (John 15:1-11). Paul said they now set their minds on the things of the Spirit, and that doing so is "life and peace" (Romans 8:9-11).

Question: How does a person enter the Kingdom of God?

Question: What does it mean to become a new creation in Christ?

Question: What is the difference between the first and second birth?

D. Those Who Enter the Kingdom Receive Eternal Life.

To be in Christ and to know Him as Savior is eternal life. He is the light of the world. He is life, the life of God. Sin brings eternal death, but Jesus Christ brings eternal life. To live in sin is death and warfare with God. But to live in Christ is life and peace. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. . . . This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son, and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day" (John 6:35, 40, nrsv).

Question: In whom is eternal life?

Conclusion

The religious leaders who grumbled because Jesus received sinners did not know very much about God. But Jesus knew exactly what God is like. God revealed himself in Jesus. So, when Jesus spoke about His Heavenly Father, the Father was speaking through His Son, Jesus. The sinners who pushed forward to hear Jesus heard the Good News they had never heard from the religious leaders. They loved Jesus because in His words and actions they heard about God's love. He spoke of God in ways the religious leaders knew nothing of. So, they rejoiced to learn God would receive them, even though

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they were lost sheep. They, too, could be found. They, too, could live in peace with Him. That God loves sinners and wants to reconcile them is indeed Good News.

Those persons who repent of their sins will completely accept God's judgment that they are sinners. They will fully recognize that left to themselves they would remain in their sins. They hear the Good News that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have eternal life (John 3:16). By the Spirit's strength, they radically place their trust in Jesus. For Christ's sake, the Father forgives them of their sins and adopts them as His children. Through the Spirit's work in them, those who repent of their sins and who turn to Christ are changed, really changed. The old life of rebellion, guilt, and shame passes away. A new reality happens. The new believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. In the power of the Holy Spirit, they now rise to walk a new path, a path that always leads to becoming more like Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Activity: Memorize John 3:16-17 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. See lesson for scriptures.

Activity: Tell someone in your discipleship group how you became a Christian.

Activity: Practice telling someone about the new birth and eternal life.

Lesson 5: WHY IS FORGIVENESS IMPORTANT?

Introduction

Jesus is the One who reconciles sinners to God through His death and resurrection. All humans have turned away from God their Creator and have lived in disobedience. Disobedience separates us from God. But Jesus offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation for all those who trust Him. He also offers reconciliation with one's neighbor. In fact, God wants to reconcile and transform His whole creation.

Jesus was rejected by the Jerusalem authorities and crucified by the Roman governor. He was wrongly accused and viewed as a dangerous person. He died as the worst of criminals. He died utterly abandoned and as an outcast. While He was suffering, He prayed for God to forgive those who were killing Him (Luke 23:34). Jesus cried out to God on behalf of His enemies and tormentors. And He did so while He was dying. This final expression of forgiveness was appropriate for Jesus' life. Throughout His ministry, Jesus offered forgiveness to sinners.

A. Jesus Expressed Forgiveness.

One day some men carried a paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing (Luke 5:17-26). Some of the religious leaders of the Jewish people were listening to Jesus. The men could not get their friend to Jesus inside the house because of the crowd. They went up on the flat roof of the house. They removed some of the roof tiles and let the paralyzed man down through the opening. He was right in front of Jesus. Jesus saw the faith of the men. He declared to the paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven" (Luke 5:20).

The religious leaders heard Jesus' words. They thought to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21). Jesus knew what they were thinking. He asked them, "Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" (Luke 5:23). When they gave no answer, Jesus said to the paralyzed man: "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (Luke 5:24). Jesus connected forgiveness and healing. The man was transformed or changed both outwardly (he could walk) and inwardly (he was forgiven). The power of forgiveness was demonstrated in this miracle.

Jesus also spoke forgiveness to the sinful woman who anointed His feet with ointment as He attended a dinner (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus' host at the meal questioned in his mind why Jesus would allow this sinful woman to touch Him. The man thought, unlike the woman, he deserved to be near Jesus (Luke 7:39). Jesus knew what the host was thinking. So, Jesus told a story about two men who owed debts to the same man. One owed a large amount. The other owed a small amount. The creditor

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canceled both debts. Jesus asked His host which man would love the creditor the most. Of course, it would have been the man who had the larger debt (Luke 7:40-43). Jesus then characterized the sinful woman's generous act as an expression of great love. He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). His final words to her were: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). The power of forgiveness was demonstrated in this situation. The woman was profoundly changed. Because of Jesus' forgiveness, the woman was moved to acts of love and caring. She received from Jesus the divine blessing of peace. Jesus' forgiveness changed her. But the host who thought he was already good, heard no such good news.

Question: How did Jesus show forgiveness?

Question: Why should we believe Jesus has forgiven us?

B. Jesus Taught Forgiveness.

One of Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach the disciples to pray (Luke 11:1). The disciples had observed Jesus in prayer. Jesus responded by teaching them what has been called the Lord's prayer (Luke 11:2-4).

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation."

The third petition of the prayer is "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." In this prayer Jesus emphasized human beings' need for the forgiveness of God. He also recognized the need for human beings to express forgiveness to one another. For disciples, being forgiven by God makes it necessary to be forgiving of one another.

At another time, Jesus taught the disciples about the extent of the love they must show to others. He spoke to them for a long time about how and whom they must love (Luke 6:27-36). His followers must love their enemies, just as God loves His enemies. They must do good to those who hate them, just as God does good to those who turn against Him. They must bless those who curse them. They must pray for those who abuse them. Jesus commanded His followers to go out of their way in working to overcome evil with good. Doing so will demonstrate they are children of God (Luke 6:35). They are to show mercy just as God the Father shows mercy (Luke 6:36). Their actions and attitudes should come from a transformed character.

Question: Why are we supposed to forgive and love our enemies?

Question: What are some practical instances in life that call for forgiveness?

C. God Provided Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

Jesus spoke for God when He forgave sins. He taught with God's authority when He commanded His disciples to love and forgive. God was the focus of all that Jesus said and did. Jesus revealed God's character and nature through His human life and ministry. The earliest disciples understood that Jesus expressed and revealed God's mercy and grace. It was God himself who forgave and loved in the very person of Jesus. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God presented His offer of forgiveness to all persons.

Another word for describing God's action of providing forgiveness in Jesus is the term reconciliation. Reconciliation means "bringing enemies together as friends." Early followers of Jesus understood that God had acted in Jesus to do just that. Sin had made human beings enemies of God. Jesus was God's way of overcoming the separation between humanity and himself. Through Jesus, God changes human beings from enemies to friends (see Romans 5:8-11). This was the clear demonstration of God's immeasurable love. God's love in Jesus overcame the power of humanity's sinful separation from God. God made clear that people could be restored to relation with Him. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Question: What does reconciliation mean?

Question: How can people be reconciled with their enemies?

D. Disciples Share Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Jesus called His disciples to love their enemies. He called them to receive forgiveness and to be forgiving. When followers of Jesus accept His forgiveness, they can then forgive others. They become living examples of the transforming power of God's forgiving and reconciling love. They participate in the forgiving and reconciling work of God in the world. God has committed to them the "message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Followers of Jesus, by their own lives, become ambassadors for Christ. God makes His appeal to the world through them: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Disciples are commissioned to share the joy of bringing peace, restoration, and transformation, in accordance with God's purpose and plan.

God's reconciling work in Jesus revealed His goal for all things, "whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:20). The final goal is to bring all the reconciled ones into the very presence of God. God will present them "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22).

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Question: How do love and forgiveness go together?

Question: Why should Jesus' disciples receive forgiveness?

E. Christian Baptism Is a Sign of Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

One of the most important ways that followers of Jesus show their radical commitment to Him is by being baptized. Jesus set the example for His disciples when He was baptized by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21-22). John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The meaning of Jesus' baptism is that He showed His total willingness to obey His Heavenly Father. This event happened in public so all could see His commitment.

All Christians should be baptized. They are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In baptism Christians show they have repented of their sins. Their old lives have been crucified with Christ. The old is gone. In baptism they are buried with Him. In baptism they show that Christ has given them new life. They now live in Him. Baptism means a person identifies with Christ. Baptism should happen only if we are repentant and earnestly seek to do Christ's will. In Baptism Christians also show their identification with Christ's Church.

Sometimes an infant is baptized. When this happens, it means that the parents intentionally place the infant in the care of God's grace. They show they intend to be instruments of God's grace in raising their child. The Church recognizes its responsibility to nurture the child in Christian faith, even as the Holy Spirit nurtured the child Jesus. Parents also recognize their responsibility to nurture the child in Christian faith, so he or she will grow up to accept Christ. He or she will then fully own the meaning of baptism.

Most Christian churches practice the sacrament of baptism. (A sacrament is a special act Christians do as a sign of grace. It is an outward sign of an inward grace given by Christ to Christians.) The sacrament of baptism is a sign and seal of saving grace. It is a symbol that God has made the sinner clean. It is a public testimony that a person has received Christ as His Savior.

When Jesus was leaving the world, He told His followers to make other disciples. As a sign, the new Christians were to be baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). This is a sign that they are now one of Jesus' followers.

Conclusion

One time Jesus talked with an expert in the Jewish law. Jesus said that the command to love God and to love one's neighbor are the most important commandments (Luke 10:25-28). Then the law expert asked Jesus to tell him who his "neighbor" was. In response, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). Jesus then asked the law expert, "Which of these three do you think

was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” (Luke 10:36). The law expert replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus said, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

The power of God’s reconciling grace in Christ enables those who are human enemies to be reconciled to one another. Being restored to relation with God must lead followers of Jesus to restore and renew human relationships within their families and other relationships. Peace with God spills over into peace with other persons.

Activity: Think about all the things for which God has forgiven you. Say a prayer of thanks to God.

Activity: Pray for your enemies this week.

Activity: Memorize the Lord’s Prayer. (See the lesson for the “Lord’s Prayer.”)

Activity: If you haven’t been baptized, seek Christian baptism by a Christian minister. You should obey God by giving a public testimony of your decision to follow Christ.

Lesson 6: What Is Repentance?

Introduction

Just as Jesus called people to be His followers when He lived on earth, so He does today. All followers of Jesus have repented. They live humble lives. They live in ways that are pleasing to Him. They live in fellowship with other followers. To signify their following Him in fellowship with others, they are baptized.

A. John the Baptist Called People to Repentance.

Before Jesus started His ministry, His cousin, John the Baptist told people to “repent,” and God would forgive them. To hear John, crowds came to the desert where he lived and preached. He criticized them. He called them “snakes” (Luke 3:7). Yet they still came to hear him. They knew that He spoke the truth about them. Many of the people became John’s followers.

Some people believed because they were Jews they would not be punished. They thought because they were children of Abraham God would not punish them. So they could do anything. John told them that being a descendant of Abraham would not protect them. If they did something they knew was wrong they would be punished for their sins. It did not matter they were Jews (Luke 3:8). Here are some examples in the Book of Luke.

1. Some rich people began to feel guilty. They had two tunics (coats) while other people did not have any. John told them to repent and to give away one of their tunics (Luke 3:11).
2. Some tax collectors came to John. They had cheated others. They knew they had done wrong. John told them to repent and collect only the right amount (Luke 3:12-13).
3. Some soldiers began to feel guilty also. They had taken money from people they were supposed to protect. Sometimes they had accused people of doing things they knew they had not done. John told them to repent and to be content with whatever salary they were paid (Luke 3:14).

Wherever people repented, John the Baptist told them they needed to produce “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8-9). That is, their lives needed to be different. Repentance was not simply what they did one time. Neither was it just being dipped in the water. Now that they had repented and been baptized, they could no longer do the hurtful things they once did.

John was not afraid to criticize the rich and powerful. He even told Herod the King he should repent. Herod was living with his brother’s wife. He did many other evil things. Herod refused to re-

pent. He knew he would have to change his life if he repented. He hated John the Baptist and put him in prison (Luke 3:19-20).

John the Baptist's message prepared the way for Jesus (Luke 3:4). John told people that they were sinners. Unless people recognized they are sinners, they would not realize their need for a Savior. Repentance was necessary to receive Christ as Savior.

John the Baptist could not offer salvation. He was only a man. He could baptize with water. The water symbolized a person was repentant and was determined to change his or her behavior. But Jesus Christ the Savior was God. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). The Holy Spirit would bring a kind of fire in the hearts of people. The Holy Spirit would change the inner character of people. Then, they would have the power to live holy lives. (See also Acts 15:8-9).

Question: Who should repent?

Question: Look at the sidebar about repentance. What are three things a person must do to repent?

B. Dinner with Simon the Pharisee

One time Jesus was eating dinner with a man named Simon. He was a Pharisee. In the eyes of his religion, Simon was a very good man. He did not associate with sinful people. (See Luke 7:36-50.)

Simon and his guests were reclining around a low table. While they were eating, a woman came in. Everyone knew she was a sinful woman. She was probably a prostitute in the town. She had a jar of expensive perfume. She began to weep. Her tears fell on Jesus' feet. She wiped Jesus' feet with her long hair. Then she poured expensive perfume on His feet and kissed them.

Simon criticized Jesus. Simon thought it was not good for Jesus to have anything to do with a sinful woman. It was not proper to have someone like this woman touching Jesus.

Jesus spoke up. In fact, He told a short story.

Two men owed money. One owed much, and one just a little. Neither had money to repay what they owed. But the moneylender canceled the debt of both men. "Which one," Jesus asked, "will love the money lender more?"

The one who owed more would love the moneylender more, Simon realized. He had more debt to be canceled.

What was Jesus' point? Simon had not thought it necessary to repent of his sins. He thought he had little to repent of. But this woman felt sorry for her sins. She knew she had much to be forgiven for. So she loved Jesus more.

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The sinful woman expressed to Jesus how sorry she was for her sins. Jesus said to her: “Your sins are forgiven.”

This disturbed the other guests. “Who is Jesus to forgive sins?” they asked.

Then Jesus told the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Like this woman, followers of Jesus have said they are sorry for their sins. They come humbly to him. They grieve over the sins they have done. They repent. Sometimes, like this woman, they can hardly begin to count all of their sins. But their humility, their grief, their attitudes, and their behavior prove they are sorry. When people are truly sorry for their sins, Jesus forgives them, just like He forgave this woman.

Jesus saw faith in this woman. She knew Jesus is holy and she was unholy. She knew Jesus had the power to forgive. Christ is the Redeemer. Because she repented, and because she had faith in Jesus, He not only forgave her, but He saved or changed her. Probably she had not had much peace in her life, but Jesus told her to go in peace.

Followers of Jesus have turned from their lives of sin. It does not matter how many sins they have committed. It does not matter about their reputation in the town. God can change anybody. He can forgive, save, and transform all people. Then, they can turn away from the old habits or patterns of their sinful life.

Humility is an essential part of repentance. The woman in the Bible story was willing to humble and even shame herself so she could be forgiven.

Jesus told a short story about two men praying in the temple (Luke 18:9-14). One is a self-righteous Pharisee. A tax collector was present also. The Pharisee prays, “God I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.” Like all good Pharisees, this man fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of his income to the temple. And he was proud of it. To him, it meant that he was a righteous man whom God surely would save.

But he is not the hero of Jesus’ story. Instead, the hero is the hated tax collector who stood at the rear of the Temple. The prayer of the tax collector is very different. It showed that he was both humble and repentant. He prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This man, not the Pharisee, is the one that Jesus said would be saved. Repentance is necessary for all followers of Jesus.

Followers of Jesus remain humble. They know they are worthy only of God’s anger. They know there is nothing good in themselves. They remember they are nothing without the mercy of God in their lives.

At the same time, followers of Jesus are living in new ways. They obey God rather than their own selfish desires. They accept God's rule over them. Christ is their King. Even though they are still living in this world, they are living like people of Christ's Kingdom should live. They are generous with what they have. They give to the poor. In their work, they do not take advantage of their bosses or the people they work with. They do not take money that is not theirs. They do not cheat other people. They treat other people with kindness and respect, including their families. In their sexual practices, they are pure.

Followers of Jesus are able to live as He wants them to only through His power. It is not by their personal strength. In Jesus' death and resurrection God has defeated evil forces. He can defeat sin in His followers.

Living as a follower of Christ means "taking up the cross." Followers may suffer for their faith. Life as a follower of Christ may be hard. Followers give generously to others. Sometimes they have little for themselves. A follower of Jesus knows that the most important things in life are not material. They are spiritual.

Followers of Jesus are able to live as He wants them to because of the Holy Spirit in them. Throughout their lives, the Holy Spirit is there to enable disciples to choose what is good. Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus, is still living in the middle of His Church. The Spirit of Jesus gives power to His followers around the world to live as He lived. Sometimes, Jesus' followers even need His power to die as He died.

Followers of Jesus are able to live as He wants them to because of what God has done in Christ. They have the presence of the Holy Spirit, and they are now part of a group of believers, the Church. From the time of Jesus until now, there have been those who have followed Him. When we as followers of Christ feel discouraged or alone, our friends in Christ are there to support us. We pray for each other. Fellow followers give us guidance and strength. We are part of a local group of believers that cares for us. A follower of Jesus is never alone.

Being part of a fellowship like this—the Church—is a great privilege. We watch over each other. Each person is an example for the others.

But sometime even followers of Christ fail to follow Him as they should. This even happened to Peter when he denied he was Jesus' disciple (Luke 22:54-62). Like Peter, sometimes Jesus' disciples sin against their Lord and their neighbors. When this happens, disciples need to confess their sins to Christ and make things right as soon as possible (1 John 1:5-10). Telling other disciples when we have problems, when we are tempted, and when we sin can be helpful. We do not give up caring

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and loving each other just because there are problems, temptations, and sins. We encourage one another to keep following Christ.

Question: What does it mean to live as a follower of Christ?

Question: How do we take up the cross of Christ?

Conclusion:

Some people who heard Jesus teach thought they had no reasons to repent. They were already proud of their religious accomplishments. They showed scorn for sinners. They believed they were very different than sinners. But Jesus said they were like blind people.

Only those who were willing to confess their sins had hope for the eternal life that Jesus gives. The hopeless people received Jesus gladly and received forgiveness. They loved Him much and wanted to follow Him.

Activity: In your discipleship group, talk about how to help others turn to Jesus. Talk about how we can rely on Jesus for help every day. Talk about how to confess when we fail to follow Christ as we should.

Lesson 7: What Is the Church?

Introduction

One time Jesus asked His disciples some interesting questions. “What are the crowds saying about Me?” The disciples told Him some things people were saying. Then Jesus turned the question to the disciples. “Who do you say I am?” Peter spoke for the group. “The Christ of God” (Luke 9:20). Peter recognized that Jesus was the Messiah.

A. Jesus Christ Is the Head of the Church.

The disciples did not know what would happen as a result of their answers to Jesus. They did not know following Jesus Christ would cost some of them their lives. Nor did they know their allegiance to Jesus Christ would be the foundation for His Church.

Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God. The Book of Matthew in the New Testament gives more information about Jesus’ response to Peter. Jesus told him God had shown Peter that He (Jesus) is the Messiah. Peter had not reached that conclusion by himself (Matthew 13:20).

1. What makes the Church?

Jesus said He would build His Church on the statement that Peter made. The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of people who believe Jesus is the Christ of God. It is composed of people who receive Jesus as their Savior and who then faithfully follow Him. The Church is the community of those who believe that Jesus is the Lord. They have trusted Him for salvation.

Jesus creates the Church by miraculously creating faith in His followers. The Church is His new creation. He builds the Church through the Holy Spirit who lives in the Church. As the people of God, the Church does Christ’s work in the world. The Church brings together people who once had nothing in common. Now because of Christ they become a family of sisters and brothers in the Lord. What unites the Church into one is the presence of Christ among them. The Lord’s Supper, also called Communion, is a sign of the presence of Christ with His people.

2. Who are members of the Church?

All who name Jesus as the Christ of God and who have received Him in their lives are part of Christ’s Church. The Church exists wherever the Gospel is preached and received in faith. The Church exists wherever the Holy Spirit creates the new community of Jesus. The Church also exists where Christian baptism and the Lord’s Supper are practiced.

3. What does the Church do?

a. The most important thing the Church does is to worship God. He is the Creator and our Redeemer. Worship is the reverence, honor, and service we show to God. Worshiping God is what Christians do when they come together. They worship one God. They worship in the name of Jesus in whom they meet God.

Christians worship God through songs, praying, and hearing the Word of God. Christians worship God through the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christians recognize the presence of Christ among them. His presence enables Christians to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).

b. Empowered by their worship, Christians go out of their fellowship and into the world to witness to Christ. They gather for worship and fellowship. Then they "go into" the world with Jesus' presence renewed within them. Christians witness for Jesus in many different ways. Their entire lives are given in service and obedience to Him. Through His presence and power they live Christlike lives. They witness to Jesus' transforming presence through words and deeds.

As a whole community, the church is a witness to Christ. Its existence as a community of faith and love and its service to others multiplies its strength and witness to Christ. The Church's compassionate ministries in the world come out of Christlike love. Followers of Christ can do no other than love others, even those very different from themselves. A spirit of hate or prejudice is opposite to the community of followers that Christ creates.

At the same time, Christ allows us to witness by speaking directly to others about His transforming grace. We can lead others to be followers of Christ. As a united community, we also proclaim Him. Collectively, we are better able to witness to others, even to those far from us. We share the Good News of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and the new life we may have in Him. The new community constantly and creatively reaches out to others. It is always attempting to draw a large circle of love around people.

While still in His resurrected presence, Jesus told His disciples that the Gospel would be preached "to all nations" (Luke 24:47). He told them: "You are witnesses of these things." He told them to wait in the town of Jerusalem until being "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:48). This referred to their being filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover. The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus' followers to be witnesses for Him. They witnessed in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4).

c. The Church is also a unique fellowship of redemption that only Christ can create. The Christian fellowship first of all means that Christ has brought us into fellowship with God. Fellowship

also means that the Holy Spirit unites us to each other in a way that only He can do. The Church isn't composed of people who are just alike, as God doesn't qualify people according to caste, tribe, nation, color or wealth. It exists because of the creative and redeeming presence of Christ in the Church.

d. As members of the Church, all Christians are accountable to Christ. He is their Master, and they are His disciples. But Christians are also accountable to each other in many ways. One Christian must help another to live as Jesus' disciple. Members of Christ's Church must care and pray for each other. They must be willing to die for each other if necessary. People outside the early Church were impressed by the love the Christians had for each other.

In the power of the Holy Spirit the Church of Jesus continues to live in Christ. It faithfully witnesses to Him by works and by words. This is the Church's life and ongoing mission.

Question: Who or what is the Church?

Question: What are two things your congregation can do to be the Church of Christ?

B. Christ Is Present with Us in the Lord's Supper.

Jesus taught people wherever He went. One morning He was teaching several thousand people outside a town called Bethsaida (Luke 9:10-17). It was a remote place. He was teaching about the kingdom of God. He also healed many people.

As His teaching and healing went on and the people stayed, it became lunchtime. They were hungry. None of them had brought anything to eat. Jesus' followers encouraged Him to send the people into the town to get some food.

But Jesus told His disciples: "You give them something to eat" (Luke 9:13). The disciples wondered: "Us? How can we possibly feed that many?" A quick search of the crowd found only one boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish (John 6:9). In no way would that feed the 5,000 men in the large crowd, along with all the women and children. So how did Jesus expect the disciples to feed so many people with so little food?

Jesus took the five loaves of bread and two fish, looked up to heaven, and broke them. Then the disciples began to distribute it. As they did so, the bread and fish were multiplied. After everyone had eaten, there were still 12 baskets full of broken pieces of food. It was a miracle!

There are many meanings in this story. But one important meaning is related to Jesus' own death. The bread symbolizes Jesus' body that was "broken" for the world. The bread at Bethsaida fed all of those present. Likewise, the "bread" of Christ's body has fed millions of His followers over 20 centuries. That bread continues to feed His followers today. It gives them spiritual life.

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The bread symbolizes the presence of Christ with us. We participate in the life of Christ when we take the “Lord’s Supper,” also called “Communion” and “Eucharist” (or thanksgiving).

Jesus himself started the Lord’s Supper right before His death. It was the time of the Passover, which was a feast celebrated by the Jews. On that night Jesus broke bread and gave it to His disciples. He passed to them a cup of wine. He said that this meal was the sign of a “new covenant” (Luke 22:20). This was a new covenant or agreement that God was making with us in Jesus.

To understand this new covenant, we should look back at the old covenant that the Passover represented.

During the yearly Passover feast, the Jews remembered and thought about their liberation from Egypt (see Exodus 12:7-14, 29-51). God was and is concerned for the political, social, and economic bondage of His people. After centuries of suffering, God had raised up Moses to shake the Hebrews free from slavery in Egypt. God sent nine calamities upon the Egyptians. Still the Pharaoh or ruler of Egypt would not let the Hebrew people go. The 10th calamity was the most severe. God told Moses He would send death upon all of the firstborn Egyptians, including the firstborn animals.

“This is it,” Moses told the people. “Get ready to go.” Moses told the people to prepare one last meal in Egypt before departing into the wilderness. The Hebrews were to kill a one-year-old, unblemished lamb or goat-kid. It was not to be an old one that would be tough and take long to cook. Some of the animal’s blood had to be sprinkled on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses. If the blood was sprinkled there, death would not come to that house.

On that fateful night, death “passed over” the Hebrews, those who sprinkled blood on their doorposts. The blood kept the Hebrews safe. While the Egyptians suffered death, the Hebrews did not. The blood made the difference.

The last meal in Egypt included unleavened bread, to remind the Hebrews of the haste of their deliverance. There was no time for bread with yeast. Yeast would have represented a lack of trust in God. Using yeast would have meant the people did not believe that God was really going to rescue His people. The Passover was called the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.

Deliverance came. God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. God chose a liberator, Moses. God worked through Moses to change the condition of His people. However, Moses was unable to do anything for future generations of Hebrews. He certainly was not able to do anything about their unbelief and disobedience. Nevertheless, God led His people to the land He had promised their ancestor Abraham.

The Jews celebrated the Passover yearly. They remembered God’s great act on their behalf. Each year the priests killed lambs or goats the people brought. The priests sprinkled the blood on the altars

of the Temple. When the people ate the lambs or goats they remembered the salvation God provided. They read Deuteronomy 26:5 and sang Psalms 113 and 114. It was a time of collective joy for the people of God. No one celebrated the Passover alone. It was a time for God's people to unite as one and to remember the salvation history they shared. It was a feast only for those who were people of God (Exodus 12:43).

Jesus called His disciples together for the Passover. Jesus told them He had "eagerly desired" to eat this meal with them before His final suffering (Luke 22:15). The Passover represented the last meal of the Hebrews in Egypt. It was also the last supper Jesus shared with His disciples. They ate the lamb, the bitter herbs (that reminded them of their ancestors' bondage in Egypt), and the unleavened bread. At the supper Jesus took wine and gave thanks for it.

After the supper, Jesus also took some of the unleavened bread. He gave thanks and broke it. He gave it to His disciples. Jesus said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Then He took the wine again and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:17-20). Jesus was beginning a new covenant or agreement between God and human beings. It was no longer based on the blood of the Passover lamb. His is the blood of the new covenant. He initiated the Lord's Supper to replace the Passover. He is our "Passover" sacrifice.

Ever since that time, Jesus' followers have reenacted the Lord's Supper, just as the Hebrews did the Passover. Just like the Passover feast, the Lord's Supper is a celebration of the covenant between God and human beings. Just like the Passover feast, it is for the people of God. Just like the Passover, the Lord's Supper (and all Christian worship) includes the reading of Scripture and a song.

The New Covenant that God made with us through Jesus Christ creates a new community. The Lord's Supper seals the fellowship. God's people receive bread and wine (or grape juice), the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. God's people come to the Lord's Supper as one united fellowship of Christ's followers. The Lord's Supper is also called the Eucharist, which is a Greek word meaning "giving thanks."

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we not only celebrate what Jesus has done for us. But we also celebrate His grace and presence with us now. Through the bread and wine, Christ comes to us again.

Our resurrected Lord is present with us now like He was with His first disciples. When the minister offers the Lord's Supper, Jesus really is present. He comes in and through the bread and wine to dine with His people. When we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are accepting His presence into our lives. His life becomes a part of us. Our faith is renewed. The Church is renewed. As we remember His suffering and death and recognize His presence, we are transformed. As a sacrament, the Lord's Supper is an outward sign of the inward grace that Christ gives to us.

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When Jesus began the Lord's Supper, He talked to His disciples. He said that they would not eat together again quite like this until the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God (Luke 22:16). That great banquet will be something like the feeding of the crowds at Bethsaida. When all of His followers get to heaven, they will all eat together with Jesus. It will be a great celebration.

Question: What is the Lord's Supper?

Question: Why is the Lord's Supper so important to followers of Christ?

Conclusion:

Anyone who becomes a Christian also becomes a part of the Body of Christ, which is His Church. The Church is most visible in congregations of Christians that come together to worship the risen Christ. We call these gatherings of Christians churches. In congregations, or churches, Christians learn what it means to live as Christians. They learn how to worship God alone and how to love justice and mercy. They learn how to pray and rejoice in the Lord. All Christians will long to become a part of a congregation of Christians that are faithful to the resurrected Lord. Christ gives all of us gifts we can use to enrich our sisters and brothers in the Lord.

One of the most important signs of Christ's presence in His Church is the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament ordained by Jesus Christ. It reminds believers of Jesus' death as a sacrifice for sin. It reminds us of new life and salvation through His death. It reminds us of the spiritual blessings Jesus has promised.

The Lord's Supper is for all of Jesus' disciples. They should eat the Lord's Supper only when they know what it means. They should understand that Communion represents Jesus' death. Each time they eat the Lord's Supper, they should remember that Jesus will return. Only persons who have faith in Jesus to save them, and who will love other believers should eat the Lord's Supper.

Activity: Talk with your discipleship group what it means to be part of the Body of Christ.

Activity: Become an active part of a local church or congregation.

Activity: Participate in a Communion service with your congregation.

Lesson 8: How Does Jesus Rule over the Powers of Evil Today?

Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus reveals the power of God over all powers of the world—including evil powers. In Jesus’ own ministry He cast out demons. He proved His power over all evil forces. He shows us that we do not need to fear demons or evil forces. Jesus is Master of them. He has defeated them all, and He will defeat them in our lives.

A. Jesus Cast Out Demons.

Jesus sailed with His disciples across a lake. While they were on the lake, Jesus took a nap. Meanwhile, a great storm came. Jesus continued to sleep. The disciples were afraid. They woke Jesus: “Master, Master,” they told Him, “we’re going to drown!” Jesus was disappointed they did not have more faith in Him. He got up and rebuked the wind and the water, and the storm stopped. “Where is your faith?” He asked the disciples. (Luke 8:22-25).

They were amazed that Jesus had so much power. Even the winds and the water obeyed Him! (Luke 8:25). If He was strong enough to do this, who was He?

Soon Jesus and the disciples reached the other side of the lake. As soon as Jesus stepped off the boat, a demon-possessed man met Him. A demon is an evil spirit. Demons work for the cause of evil and for the devil. They oppose the good purposes of God. They oppose the ministry of Jesus. Demon possession is the control of people by demons.

The demon-possessed man was naked. Many times the evil spirit had seized him. The people put chains on the man—both on his hands and his feet. But the demon-possessed man had broken his chains. The demons forced him to go to remote places, where the man was alone. For a long time he had not lived in a house. Instead, he lived among the tombs (Luke 8:26-29).

The demons had almost destroyed this man’s life. His life was ruined. He could not live with other people. He could not control himself. He could not control his actions. There was nothing he could do about his condition. Other people could not control him. There was nothing they could do. The demons controlled everything about him. We do not know how the demons took control of this man’s life.

The evil spirit inside the man knew who Jesus was. “What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God?” the demon-possessed man shouted. When Jesus spoke, He did so with the

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authority of God. Jesus commanded the evil spirits to come out of the man. “Don’t torture me!” the man said. Perhaps he was afraid that Jesus would harm him (Luke 8:28).

Jesus asked the man, “What is your name?” The man replied “Many,” because many demons had gone into the man. The demons begged Jesus not to send them into a deep pit. (Maybe if Jesus had sent them there they would have been able to get inside some other person!) So Jesus sent them into a herd of pigs on the hillside. When the demons got into the pigs, the herd rushed down a steep hill into the lake. They drowned (Luke 8:30-33).

Jesus showed He was Master over demons and evil spirits. He did not fear them. Jesus freed people who were controlled by demons. His power over demons was a sign that the Kingdom of God had come—in Him. It showed that the devil was a defeated enemy.

The owners of the pigs were not happy when their pigs ran into the lake! They told the people in town. Many people came to see what had happened. When they came, they saw the man. He was sitting at Jesus’ feet. He had clothes on. He was in his right mind. The demons were gone. He was cured. This made the people afraid. They thought that Jesus must be very powerful. If Jesus could do this, who was He? He was even more powerful than the demons that had possessed the man for so long. The people asked Jesus to leave them. So Jesus got into the boat to leave (Luke 8:34-37).

The man whom Jesus healed wanted to go with Jesus. He begged Jesus to allow him to go along. But Jesus wanted him to stay. He wanted the man to tell the people how much God had done for him. So, wherever the man went, he told the people what Jesus had done for him (Luke 8:38-39).

(Other places in Luke where it is mentioned that Jesus cast out demons are Luke 4:31-37 and Luke 9:37-43.)

Question: How did Jesus show power over evil spirits?

Question: What did the man do after Jesus cast out the demons?

B. Jesus Defeated the Devil.

Demons follow and serve evil purposes. A demon is an evil spirit. Demons work for the cause of evil and Satan. They oppose the good purpose of God. They especially opposed the ministry of Jesus. But He showed that He was Master over them.

The devil is the chief of demons. He is the enemy of God. He opposes everything that God does. He slanders God and falsely accuses His followers. In the Bible the devil is called Satan. In the Hebrew language, Satan means “the accuser.” Satan is an evil creature. Some illnesses are due to him. But he is limited in his knowledge and power. He is not supreme. Only God is supreme and all-powerful. Jesus Christ showed His authority over Satan in all His ministry. Jesus defeated Satan on the Cross

and in the Resurrection. He will completely destroy Satan when He completes His Kingdom. Satan cannot force people to obey him and disobey God. But he tries to persuade them to disobey God. He tempts them to do evil.

Satan even tempted Jesus (Luke 4:1-13). At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus went into the desert. The devil tempted Him for 40 days. When Jesus became hungry, the devil tempted Him to change a stone into bread. Jesus refused. Every time the devil tempted Him, Jesus answered with a Bible verse. “Man does not live on bread alone,” Jesus told the devil. (It was taken from Deuteronomy 8:3). Then the devil led Jesus to a high place and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. All these could be Jesus’ to rule—if Jesus would worship him, the devil promised. Jesus answered, “Worship the Lord God and serve him only” (from Deuteronomy 6:13). Then the devil took Him to Jerusalem and put Him on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” the devil said, “throw yourself down.” The devil even quoted a Bible verse: “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully” (Psalm 91:11-12). Jesus answered, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” (Deuteronomy 6:16).

If Jesus was tempted, certainly we also will be tempted. One of the reasons for knowing Scripture well is to be able to answer the devil. (But the devil also knows the Scripture!) Jesus did not yield to temptation. The devil did not give up. He only waited for other moments to tempt Jesus (Luke 4:13).

Instead of yielding to temptation, Jesus was obedient to God His Heavenly Father. In everything, Jesus was obedient. Because He was obedient, He defeated the devil again and again. Because Jesus was obedient, the Heavenly Father raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus also gives His power to His followers.

One time, Jesus sent out 72 of His followers. (See Luke 10:1-20.) “Go,” He said. “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. He gave them clear instructions. They went from town to town and house to house. Sometimes they were rejected. But they saw many miracles take place. When they returned, they reported: “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Luke 10:17). Just as in that time, today Christ gives His followers power over the demons. In that way, Jesus and His followers defeat the demons and Satan. Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). That happens because, when Jesus’ followers rely on His power and on His Word, they are more powerful than the forces of Satan. We have nothing to fear as long as we are faithful followers of Jesus.

One of Jesus’ disciples was not faithful. Judas disagreed with things that Jesus did. He was the treasurer of the group of disciples. He was tempted by money. He was willing to betray Jesus for money. Because of his unfaithfulness, Satan entered Judas (Luke 22:3). Judas showed the temple

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guard where Jesus was so that they could capture him. That led to Jesus' trial and, finally, to His crucifixion (see Luke 22:1-6, 47-48).

It seemed that Satan had won. Jesus was dead and buried. It seemed like evil had triumphed. But it did not. God raised Jesus from the grave. Jesus was victorious over sin, death, and Satan. Though Satan still is present in this world, though there are still demons, we can conquer them. This is “resurrection power.”

There is no reason for us to fall to temptation like Judas did. Paul wrote to Jesus' disciples living in Rome they were “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). Christians need not be fearful about anything that threatens God's care for them: “neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

Similarly, Paul told the followers of Jesus at Ephesus: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” They should be spiritually prepared. “Put on the full armor of God,” he told them, “so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Ephesians 6:10-11).

Question: How did Jesus defeat the devil?

Question: How can you defeat the devil in your life?

Question: What do you think the full armor of God is?

C. Jesus Gives Victory over all Evil Powers.

One of the devil's schemes is for us to be fearful about demons and evil spirits. We must remember that God alone is the Creator and the Redeemer. Through His power in us, we need not be afraid. God (not Satan) has created mountains, trees, rivers, animals—all that is. He, not Satan, is the absolute ruler of this world and Lord over all creation. None of these things are evil in themselves.

If we are following Jesus, “greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world.” By Jesus' life and by His death and resurrection, Jesus is Lord of all. Satan and all of his demons and spirits are defeated foes. They have power only when we ascribe it to them. They have power only when we yield it to them.

We must claim the victory now. By being faithful and obedient followers of Jesus, everyday we are defeating Satan and his demons. Every time we say “no” to evil and temptation, we defeat Satan and his demons. Every time we worship God, we defeat Satan and his demons. Every time we pray, we defeat Satan and his demons. Every time we do good to others in Jesus' name, we defeat Satan and his demons.

Followers of Jesus reject any form of witchcraft that attempts to use spiritual powers to manipulate either God or other people. Witchcraft uses sorcery and magic. Because witchcraft deals with the spirit world apart from Jesus, it is evil. It is wrong to use it to bring injury or for protection. All that Jesus' disciples need for protection is faith in Jesus and obedience to Him. Witchcraft is part of the old life. It has no place in the new community that Jesus is building. (See Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Samuel 15:23, 28:3-14; 2 Kings 9:22; Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4; Galatians 5:20.)

Many times across the centuries, Christians have faced demons in the countries in which they have lived. They have taken the power of God in Christ Jesus with them. Followers of Jesus have defeated witch doctors, spirits in trees and termite mound hills, and spirits in the crows that kept farmers from their fields. As a result, Christians around the world have prospered. Their neighbors are enslaved to fear. But followers of Christ are conquerors. Jesus is victorious. Through Him, so are His followers.

Question: Why should followers of Christ reject all types of witchcraft?

Question: Jesus is victorious. How can you be victorious as a Christian?

Conclusion

The Bible tells us God created the world, and He provides life for all living creatures. But the Bible also tells us that, surprisingly, even in God's creation some of God's creatures reject their Creator. They don't want God to be God in His own creation. So they rebel against God's righteous and merciful rule. They try foolishly to challenge God's power. And they make a lot of noise by doing so. The Bible contains many stories about this rebellion.

In the crucifixion of Jesus, the foolish powers of darkness tried to silence Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. They tried to defeat and destroy Him. For three days, as Jesus lay in the tomb, many thought the powers of evil had conquered the Heavenly Father and His only begotten Son.

Then on the third day, Easter morning, the eternal Creator removed all doubts by bringing His Son from death to life. The powers of evil had done all they could do. They were totally defeated and routed. Jesus Christ alone is the resurrected and reigning Lord. He has the first and the last word. And it is a word of light, not darkness; a word of joy, not sorrow; a word of hope, not despair. No Christian should ever live in fear of the powers of evil that claim to have control.

Jesus Christ has forever shown just how empty God's opponents really are. He did this by putting all evil powers to flight when He healed the sick, cured the blind, and raised the dead. All of these were signs that the Kingdom of God had come. Christ has nailed to the Cross all of our sins. He has done the same with the guilt that binds us by giving up his life for us so that we may have eternal life! We no longer have to feel guilty because we don't have to pay the price! Christians live confidently

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and victoriously, not in their own strength, but in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. They live victoriously and triumphantly over the powers of darkness because Christians are grounded in the resurrected and coming Christ. He makes all things new. He exposes darkness, evil, and fear for what they are. They are defeated in Jesus' name. And Christ's victory is made triumphantly available to all His sisters and brothers who are in Him by faith. In the Christian walk there is no place for fear. Instead, there is plenty of place for joy and victory.

Activity: Pray that the evil power of Satan will be defeated in your life and community.

Activity: Talk with you pastor or teacher about how Satan's power can be defeated in your community.

Following Jesus

Following Jesus is a discipleship program that asks and answers two questions: “Who is Jesus?” and “What does it mean to be His disciple?” *Following Jesus* shows the new Christian just how costly following Jesus will be. It openly presents the radical nature of discipleship. The program is divided into three books:

BOOK ONE. The entry book introduces new Christians to the basic elements of Christian faith and Christian life. Completion of this book should prepare a person for baptism and for receiving the Lord’s Supper.

BOOK TWO. With this book, the young Christians will advance to a higher level of understanding their new faith in Christ. They will learn what it means to be a part of the Church. They will learn what it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And they will learn the importance of Christian service.

BOOK THREE. The third book helps new Christians get an overall picture of the biblical story. It introduces them to some of the most important parts of Christian history that affect Christian belief and practice. The three books together help prepare a person for church membership.

BOOK ONE: Who is Jesus and What does it Mean to Follow Him?

Lesson 1 | Who Is Jesus?

Lesson 2 | What Is Important About Jesus’ Crucifixion and Resurrection?

Lesson 3 | What Is the Kingdom of God?

Lesson 4 | How May Persons Have Peace with God?

Lesson 5 | Why Is Forgiveness Important?

Lesson 6 | What Is Repentance?

Lesson 7 | What Is the Church?

Lesson 8 | How Does Jesus Rule Over the Powers of Evil Today?

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