



This course looks at real-life conversations between Jesus Christ and different kinds of people. These conversations with Jesus produced some remarkable transformations in people's lives. Look closely at some meetings between Jesus and people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Course Outline:

1. When Jesus met some fishermen: Mark 1:14-20
2. When Jesus met a disabled man: Luke 5:17-26
3. When Jesus met an immoral woman: Luke 7:36-50
4. When Jesus met a foreign soldier: Matthew 8:5-13
5. When Jesus met a lawyer: Luke 10:25-37
6. When Jesus met a rich young ruler: Luke 18:18-30
7. When Jesus met a tax man: Luke 19:1-10
8. When Jesus met a foreign woman: John 4:4-26, 39-42
9. When Jesus fed a hungry crowd: John 6:1-3, 5-15, 24-29, 33-35, 51
10. When Jesus challenged ambitious followers: Mark 10:32-45
11. When Jesus missed a friend's funeral: John 11:1-6, 17, 20-27, 32-40, 43-44
12. When Jesus met the Roman governor: Mark 15:1-15
13. When Jesus spoke to a dying criminal: Luke 23:32-46
14. When Jesus gave faith to a doubting friend: John 20:24-31

Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

Does social networking lead to personal relationships?



In the 21st century, we have developed new and quick ways to communicate with other people. Internet technology makes it possible to send electronic mail (e-mail) instead of using paper, pen, ink, and postage to write to someone. We don't need to wait for days or weeks to communicate with someone. We can "Skype" or do "instant messaging" with our friends and family.

Do you send short text messages (SMS) or instant messages (IM) from your cell phone? Do you use online business and social networking websites?

You may have added your profile to LinkedIn® - the online business network that helps you to find jobs or expand your professional contacts through personal references.

You may also use an online social network to connect with the people you know, to upload your photos, to share links and videos, and to learn more about new people that you meet. Facebook® was created by Harvard students in 2004. In only one year, there were more than 1 million users. People of all ages and all around the world now use Facebook® to connect with people invited to be their online "friends."

More recently, people have started to use Twitter® - a service that combines social networking with an ability to post short messages limited to 140 characters. These are called "tweets." You can receive a "tweet" on your mobile device or on your personal web page. These short messages can be viewed by people who choose to become your "followers."



Who are your real friends and followers?

Online forms of connecting make conversations with other people fast and brief. We easily connect with hundreds or thousands of other people - almost instantly. But we now have new meanings for some important old words:

"FRIEND":

- **Old meaning:** a person you know, like, and trust. Someone who encourages you and who supports your work or your cause. You may only have a small number of trusted friends.
- **New meaning:** a person you decide to add or "friend" to your social networking website. You share two-way communications and photos even if you cannot spend time with them.

"FOLLOWER":

- **Old meaning:** someone who is loyal to someone's teaching or cause. A devotee, a student, or a disciple who follows a master-teacher.
- **New meaning:** a person who wants to read your 140-character "tweets" or status updates.

Has social networking changed your life? Is it more important to have hundreds of online friends, or "real life" friends? When did you recently "friend" someone by spending hours with them - to share thoughts, worries, and dreams?

What does it mean to "follow" someone? Do you only want to know where they shop, what they think, or what they plan to eat? Do you "follow" someone who can teach you about life?

In the first century, there was no internet and no social networking. Life was not very efficient. But, when Jesus Christ communicated with people, many became his friends and followers. Over the next weeks, we will look at real life-changing conversations with Jesus - that led to remarkable transformations in people's lives.

Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

Historical background:

During the life time of Jesus, a large part of the world was ruled by the Roman Empire. Jesus' home nation, Israel (the land of the Jews) was ruled by this hated foreign empire. Many Jews hoped and prayed for God to give them a king ("messiah") to save them from the power of Rome.

good news of God:

for most Jews, good news ("gospel") would be for God's king to overthrow Rome's emperor (Caesar). Jesus had a different message.

kingdom of God:

most Jews hoped for the nation Israel to be restored as God's kingdom on earth. But Jesus had a different, world-wide idea - God's kingdom was to benefit all the nations of the world.

repent: to enter God's kingdom, you must turn away from only serving other people or serving yourself, so that you can serve God.

casting: to throw nets into the water to catch fish.

Galilee: border area between Israel and the other nations. Jesus grew up in Judea and Nazareth. But Jesus began his work in Galilee - with a message for the whole world.



From the Bible: Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ ... Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," [Jesus] said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, [Jesus] saw Simon and [Simon's] brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." ¹⁸ At once [Simon and Andrew] left their nets and followed him [Jesus].

¹⁹ When [Jesus] had gone a little farther, he [Jesus] saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay [Jesus] called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed [Jesus].

Discuss



1. Verse 14: Where did Jesus spread his message? Why was this area important? (see the Notes).
2. Verse 14: What did Jesus proclaim (announce)? How is spreading "good news" different than teaching law, religious ceremonies, or ancient legends?
3. Verse 15: What "time" did the people hope for? (see the Notes)
4. Verse 15: If Rome was still in control, how was God's kingdom "near"?
5. Verse 15: How should people respond to the good news? _____ and _____.
6. Verse 16: What were Simon and Andrew doing? What was their job?
7. Verse 17: What did Jesus tell them to do? What did Jesus promise to them?
8. Verse 17: How did Jesus change Simon's and Andrew's lives? How would they "fish" in the future? What do you think is the meaning of a "fisher of men"?
9. Verse 18: How did Simon and Andrew respond to Jesus? How do Simon and Andrew illustrate what it means to "repent" and "believe"?
10. Verses 19-20: What did Jesus do with James and John?
11. What do you think it means to follow Jesus?

Chapter Summary



Today, to be a "friend" or a "follower" can mean that you are only a "fan" or that you get "status updates" from people you know or want to know.

In Jesus' time, to be a follower was to become a disciple - a student - of a master. Those invited to be Jesus' followers had to believe the good news Jesus announced - that you can become a citizen of God's world-wide kingdom.

When you answer the call of your master, it will become a life-changing experience.

Your highest loyalty becomes God's kingdom. You don't become a "fan" of Jesus. You don't just get short text messages from God. You become a friend and follower.

Life-Changing Conversations

What is the most serious human problem?



When we look at the world today, we see many kinds of pain and human suffering. Nations and families face problems like AIDS, the H1N1 flu, cancer, and different forms of diseases. People die in natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis. Babies may be born with genetic birth defects. If you are in a car accident, you can injure your body or become disabled. All of these are forms of human suffering.

How should we approach the problem of human disease and suffering? We can consider suffering to be evil, or an illusion. We can try to cure cancer, or say suffering is “just part of life.”

Does suffering come from evil? Different philosophies and religions give different answers about the origin and nature of evil. The way you interpret the problem of evil and suffering will determine your understanding of the meaning of life. Here are some general examples:

- Forms of pantheism claim that there may be many gods, but God is the ultimate reality behind all natural things. Evil is not ultimately real, but is an illusion. Suffering comes from spiritual ignorance. And suffering enters our lives through the laws of karma. We see this view in Buddhism and in some (but not all) forms of Hindu thought.
- In dualism, good and evil represent two equal, eternal, and rival principles. Good did not create evil. And evil did not create good. Both good and evil are constantly at work in life. We see this view in an ancient Persian religion - Zoroastrianism.
- In monotheism, there is only one ultimate God. God is a separate Being from humans. God made all things, but God did not make evil. In Islam, evil comes from failing to submit to God’s will. In Christianity, evil has a personal identity (the devil), a powerful spiritual creature who fell from his original good standing when he rebelled against God. This evil one tempted humans to rebel against God. To rebel against or to dishonor God is called sin. Evil is powerful, but evil is not ultimate. God will overcome evil with good.

Why did Jesus do “miracles”?



In the Bible’s New Testament, we see Jesus “proclaiming the good news (or gospel) of God’s kingdom”. Jesus brings us good news: God has begun to save our broken world - to restore us into the kingdom of God. Jesus promises that all evil, pain, and suffering will be defeated and removed from this world by God’s power and love. This is good news.

Jesus brings this good news in both words and actions. Jesus demonstrated God’s love and God’s restoring power in works that restore human life. Our word “miracle” is not the best way to describe Jesus’ healing people. “Miracle” describes the difference between “natural” and “supernatural.” But Jesus’ deeds or works of healing are “signs” that point us to God’s work to remove pain, disease, and suffering from the world. Jesus described his work like this:

“The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.” (Luke 7:22)

Who is Jesus Christ?

According to the Bible, evil, sin, and suffering are not illusions that can be avoided or ignored. Evil attacked, infected, and polluted the good world that God had made. God does not ignore sin and suffering. God’s plan is to defeat evil, forgive sin, and heal suffering. Jesus shows and tells us about God’s plan to restore the world. Is Jesus more than a teacher and healer?

Notes:

tsunamis: large, flooding, tidal waves.

Illusion: a wrong perception. Something that is “not real.”

pantheism: “God is all (“pan”) - and all is God.” Belief and worship of all gods.

karma: in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religions, the actions of people (good or bad) determine their fate or future destiny.

dualism: there are two equal and opposite forces. The idea that the world is ruled by two opposing forces - good and evil.

monotheism: there is only one true God.

rebel: to refuse to be loyal, to oppose.

leprosy: a skin disease caused by a bacterial infection. Also called Hansen’s disease. This disease can disfigure your body.

Week 2: When Jesus met a disabled man
Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

Pharisees and teachers of the law: the Jewish religious leaders.

power of the Lord: the Holy Spirit.

paralytic: disabled man. The man's legs (and maybe the man's arms) could not move.

roof: top cover on a house.

mat: a cushion or mattress, a bed.

tiles: baked clay roofing material.

blasphemy: to speak words that dishonor God.

Son of Man: one of Jesus' favorite ways to describe himself. In the Old Testament book of Daniel, God gave the Son of Man God's authority to rule and to judge all peoples.

filled with awe: to experience a combination of fear and wonder.

remarkable: something that is hard to explain, incredible, or unbelievable.

The original Greek word in the New Testament is related to the English word "paradox."

From the Bible: Luke 5:17-26



¹⁷ One day as [Jesus] was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for [Jesus] to heal the sick. ¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take [their paralyzed friend] into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹ When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered [their friend] on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

²⁰ When Jesus saw their faith, [Jesus] said [to the paralyzed man], "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

²¹ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

²² Jesus knew what [the religious leaders] were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?' ²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." [Jesus] said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Discuss



1. Verse 17: Who was observing Jesus' words and actions?
2. Verse 18: Who was on a mat? What did his friends try to do?
3. When the men carried their paralyzed friend to see Jesus, what did they expect?
4. Verse 19: What problem did these men have? How did they solve their problem?
5. Verse 20: What did Jesus "see"? What motivated the actions of these men?
6. Verse 20: What did Jesus say to the paralyzed man?
7. Verse 21: The religious leaders think that Jesus' words are blasphemy. What is the meaning of blasphemy (see the note)?
8. Verse 21: Why did the religious leaders think that Jesus had dishonored God?
9. Verses 22-23: How would you answer the question Jesus asked in verse 23?
10. Why is it easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" than to say, "Get up and walk"? Which words are easier to prove?
11. According to verse 24, why (for what purpose) did Jesus heal the disabled man? What did Jesus claim the authority to do?
12. Verses 25-26: Describe everyone's reactions to the actions of Jesus. What is your response to Jesus' words and deeds?

Chapter Summary



The greatest problem in the world is sin, not just disease. What we need the most is forgiveness, not just physical healing. We must not think that God punishes a sin by making a person sick. But sickness and suffering are a picture of a broken world that needs total restoration - both spiritual and physical healing. The disabled man needed his friends to help him. He was paralyzed and could not move himself. And we need God's help to restore us. Only God can forgive our sins. So, what must we think when Jesus heals people and claims to forgive sins?

Life-Changing Conversations

“Good” and “Bad” People



In every culture and human society, there are certain kinds of people who are judged as “unworthy” or “bad people.” These people are not respected, they are devalued and are avoided. They are often criticized, and judged by the “good people”.

In many cultures, lower classes of people, those who are poor, those who are uneducated, and those who are immoral are considered bad for society. In our most recent discussions, the Bible has introduced us to ordinary fishermen and to a corrupt and dishonest government official who over-charged for taxes.

There are other citizens who obey the laws, keep the rules, visit temples or religious shrines, give to charity, and have successful careers. These are the people that society most respects. They are the “good” people, who own their own homes and who maintain their family values.

This week, we meet a woman who had a bad reputation because of her immoral behavior. This woman was probably a prostitute - she made money by selling the use of her body. Suddenly, this dishonorable woman enters the home of a respectable and wealthy man.



Why did Jesus offend good, religious people?

In almost all cultures, “good people should stay with good people and should avoid bad people.” People who are wealthy, respectable, moral, and religious should never want to invite a prostitute - a “bad woman” - into their homes.

But repeatedly, Jesus made social contact with “bad” people. Jesus entered the home of a dishonest tax collector. When invited into a “good home,” Jesus did not avoid direct contact with a well-known prostitute. Why was Jesus not concerned about “losing face” in society? Didn’t Jesus care about his reputation? Jesus became known as the “friend of sinners.”

Jesus offends people who think they are good - who think they are better than other people. To quote a wise saying, people who think they are better than other people have too much “altitude” - they look down on other people. People who are “right” by their own estimation will judge and disqualify people who are “below” them.

Look closely at the life and career of Jesus, and you will discover something very unexpected. Jesus’ biggest enemies were those who were “self-righteous”. Good, respectable, and moral religious conservatives - traditional people - were offended by Jesus.

The people who were most attracted to Jesus were outsiders, social outcasts and rejects, the “bad” people who knew that their lives were not “approved” by either God or by society.

Why did Jesus forgive bad, sinful people?

There is a new dimension to the “life-changing conversation” that we will discuss this week. Jesus does more than make personal contact with a social outcast. Jesus actually *for*gives.

The idea and concept of “sin” can be complicated. In many western cultures, sin is often just “rule-breaking.” If you break human laws, you are a criminal. If you break God’s laws, you are a sinner. But that is too limited a definition. According to Jesus Christ, sin is like debt. We *owe* God our honor, respect, and our ultimate loyalty. So, when we dishonor or disrespect God, we become debtors. Either *we must pay* our debts, or *God must cancel* our debts.

But how can Jesus cancel and forgive all the debts that we owe to God? Let’s discuss!

Notes:

corrupt: rotten, bad, dishonest.

shrines: holy places.

charity: actions or organizations that give free gifts to needy people.

behavior: a person’s actions.

prostitute: someone who sells their body for sex.

quote: to repeat the words of someone.

wise: describes the practical application of knowledge to real life situations.

altitude: height. To be “above” other people.

disqualify: to exclude someone as not competent.

self-righteous: to think of yourself as always right - and others as wrong.

offended: get angry about someone.

social outcasts: the people excluded from society.

debt: what you owe to someone.

Week 3: When Jesus met an immoral woman Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

The Pharisees were traditional, moral, and conservative religious people. Pharisees wanted to make sure that all God's laws were observed properly. Pharisees believed that, if you kept all of God's rules, and avoided bad people, you were right with God. Obeying God's laws made you "righteous." The Pharisees acted like "religious police."

recline at table:

during Jesus' time, people did not sit in chairs at meal times. They sat on the floor and leaned (or reclined) over low tables.

lived a sinful life:

this woman was well known in this town for her immorality - she was probably a prostitute.

alabaster jar: an expensive stone container.

prophet: a person who speaks and teaches the words of God to others.

denarii: a unit of currency. Each denarius was a Roman silver coin - approximately one day's wage for a common worker.

canceled debts:

to forgive what a person owes.

From the Bible: Luke 7:36-50



³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so [Jesus] went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸ and as she stood behind [Jesus] at his feet weeping, she began to wet [Jesus'] feet with her tears. Then she wiped [Jesus' feet] with her hair, kissed [Jesus' feet] and poured perfume on [Jesus' feet].

³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited [Jesus] saw this, he said to himself, "If this man [Jesus] were a prophet, [Jesus] would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰ Jesus answered [the Pharisee], "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," [Simon the Pharisee] said.

⁴¹ "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty denarii. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay [the moneylender] back, so [the lender] canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then [Jesus] turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to [the woman], "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Discuss



1. verse 36: What was Jesus invited to do? Why do you think the Pharisee wanted Jesus to come to his home for dinner?
2. verses 37-38: What made an immoral woman, who had no invitation, come into this respectable and religious house? What did the woman do? How do you think the Pharisee felt about this woman's behavior?
3. verse 39: Why did the Pharisee criticize and disqualify Jesus as a true prophet?
4. verses 41-42: Jesus tells a story to Simon the Pharisee. How is debt like sin or moral failure? How is canceled someone's debt like forgiving that person?
5. verse 43: How did Simon answer Jesus' question, "Which will love him more?" What is the connection between love and debt cancellation (forgiveness)?
6. verses 44-47: How did the woman and Simon reveal their true beliefs about Jesus?
7. verses 48-49: What did Jesus say to the woman? Why was this controversial?
8. verse 50: Which came first - the woman's faith in Jesus, or love for Jesus?

Chapter Summary



These are two different kinds of people. The woman was a "bad person." Simon seemed moral, religious, and respectable - to himself and to society.

The Pharisee judged the woman and judged Jesus. But the woman had a better understanding - both of herself and of Jesus Christ. Jesus forgave her sins.

Life-Changing Conversations

Does God accept people that society rejects?



In most nations and cultures, some citizens are “acceptable” but other people are “unacceptable” or “unworthy” of honor. People who are rich, well-connected, and who do good things for others are considered “model citizens” of their countries.

But the Bible describes a strange pattern in the life of Jesus. Often, the “bad people” who are rejected by “good society” are the people who are welcomed by Jesus. In many nations, the “top students” are invited to study under the best professors. But Jesus invited ordinary fishermen to become his disciples.

Tax collectors are not popular in any country. When a government official over-charges you, or when a politician accepts secret payments or bribes, that is a bad influence in any society. Citizens of all countries - north, south, east, or west - don't want politicians who are dishonest. But Jesus went into the home of a tax man who over-charged and kept the extra for himself.

Prostitutes, who sell sex for money, work in the dark corners of a good society. Prostitutes hide from the sight of respectable citizens, and they do their business in secret. But Jesus allowed an immoral woman to bow down and kiss his feet. When Jesus accepted and welcomed such unworthy people, the respectable people rejected Jesus.

This week, we meet a military officer. The Bible does not give us the name of this soldier. Israel was under Roman military occupation, so most citizens might not want to know him. But this military captain searched for Jesus and asked Jesus for help. What did Jesus do?

The Mindset of the Military



People in the military are sometimes criticized for their strict or rigid behavior.

That is because men and women who serve in the armed forces must be careful to “do what they are told.” This is sometimes called the military’s “chain of command.”

Orders are given along lines of authority and responsibility. Orders are passed down the chain of command. Higher ranks of military officers give orders to the lower ranks of soldiers. You can only give orders to the soldiers who are directly below you in the chain of command. You only receive and follow the orders of the military officers who are directly above you. Authority comes down from “above” - from the top to the bottom. You must follow your orders.

Why did Jesus talk to a foreign soldier?

Once again, we read how Jesus Christ welcomed a person that good citizens might reject. The Romans had conquered Israel. The armies of Rome were the military occupiers of Israel. Was the soldier who came to Jesus a “foreign devil”? Why did Jesus accept this foreigner?

Not all foreign soldiers were wicked. This soldier knew Jesus would be criticized for friendship with a Roman. Foreign soldiers lived in separate housing, to reduce contact with local people. The Jews wanted a savior from their foreign enemies. But Jesus cared for a foreign soldier.

Jesus welcomes people who are rejected by the world. Jesus had life-changing conversations with fishermen, tax men, immoral women, and foreign soldiers. The words and actions of Jesus were forgiving, accepting, restoring, and healing. Jesus had good news for bad people!

Jesus declared that “God’s kingdom is near” for all who “repent and believe the good news.” Jesus invited people who are rejected by the world to enter and to enjoy God’s kingdom. The only requirement is to be honest about your need and to believe in the authority of Jesus. We now meet a foreign soldier who had a big need. This soldier believed in Jesus’ authority.

Notes:

disciple: a learner, a student who follows a master. Chinese: mén tú or shēng tú.

mindset: a way of thinking, a mental attitude that guides how you respond to real life situations.

repent and believe: you cannot qualify or disqualify yourself from God’s kingdom by what you do or have done. You must turn from serving yourself, and then turn to God - trusting (that is, believing) God’s promise to forgive and to accept you.

Week 4: When Jesus met a foreign soldier Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

Capernaum: a Jewish lake-side city on the Lake of Galilee, near a political border. The city had a customs office and a Roman military outpost.

centurion: Roman army officer, who commanded about 100 men, a "military captain." The Roman army was considered a "foreign occupier" in Israel.

paralyzed: disabled

I do not deserve: I am not worthy.

under authority: to serve under a commanding officer - to be accountable to a person over you.

astonished: amazed, surprised.

the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: a picture of heaven: to eat with Israel's "founding fathers."

subjects: citizens. Israel was God's nation. But when Israel rejected God, then God rejected them.

gnashing of teeth: to grind your teeth in despair. Those who reject God will be angry because they refused to believe the Lord's word.

From the Bible: Matthew 8:5-13



⁵ When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.

⁶ "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering."

⁷ Jesus said to [the centurion], "I will go and heal [your servant]." ⁸ The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, [Jesus] was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹ I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And [the centurion's] servant was healed at that very hour.

Discuss



1. verse 5: Who came to see Jesus? Why would a Roman soldier be in the Jewish city of Capernaum (see notes)?
2. How do you think the Jewish people felt about the Roman soldiers who were sent to "occupy" their home country?
3. Verses 5-6: Why did the centurion come to Jesus and ask Jesus for help?
4. Verse 7: How did Jesus respond to the foreign military captain? What does this show about Jesus' view of "foreigners"?
5. Verse 8: How did the Roman soldier show his respect and honor to Jesus?
6. Verses 8: What is the only thing required to heal the soldier's servant?
7. Verse 9: What does it mean to have authority? What did the centurion realize about the authority of Jesus?
8. Verse 10: What made Jesus astonished? How did Jesus compare this Roman soldier with his fellow citizens of Israel?
9. Verses 11-12: At the feast of God's kingdom, where will the guests come from? What is required to get into heaven - to enjoy God's feast? What did the "foreign" soldier have that many "subjects" (citizens of Israel) did not have?
10. Verse 13: What does the healing show about Jesus and about God's kingdom?

Chapter Summary



Jesus breaks down social, moral, and cultural barriers. For example, Jesus went into the home of a tax man - a person who was considered to be a traitor.

Jesus was invited to the home of a respected religious leader. The homeowner did not show respect or welcome Jesus. But Jesus accepted the respect of an immoral woman.

Roman soldiers were not welcome in Israel. They were foreign occupiers. But anyone with belief (faith) in Jesus' authority can enter heaven and enjoy God's kingdom feast.

"Sinful", "immoral" and "foreign" people can be rejected or not welcomed in our world. Jesus accepts and welcomes anyone who believes in his authority to heal and forgive.

Life-Changing Conversations

Natives and foreigners



In many cultures and nations there are the “majority” peoples and the “minority” peoples. For example, for many years, “white people” were considered the majority in the U.S. and African-Americans and Hispanics were called minority groups. But this is rapidly changing as diverse groups of people have immigrated to the United States.

There are similar situations in other countries. In China, the Han people are a majority, but there are many minority groups. In India, there are many diverse cultural and religious groups - the northern and southern Indian, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, etc.

The Hmong (or Miao) peoples who live in the mountain regions of southern China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand have sometimes suffered as a minority. In the U.S., when new groups immigrate (for example, the Irish, the Polish, and Germans) there have been social changes. The self-sacrifice and hard work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others achieved the civil rights of African-American citizens in the United States.

The important question, of course, is “How do the majority people treat the minority peoples?” Do the majority people treat minority neighbors with equal justice and respect? And do the minority peoples enjoy the civil rights and protections provided by the constitution and laws?



How big is your neighborhood?

What groups should be allowed to come into your country? What groups should be kept out of your nation? What cultural groups should receive your welcome? What what minorities are unwelcome? What should be the immigration policy of your nation? These questions provide historical background for our discussion this week.

The Samaritan people were brought to northern Israel to replace the native Jewish people. When citizens of Israel were forced to leave their homes for Assyria, these foreigners took their place. So the Samaritans were not welcomed into the lives or religion of native Jews.

But God gave Israel a special immigration policy. The Jews were a small nation in the world. They had been slaves, and mistreated in Egypt. So the LORD God commanded the people of ancient Israel, “Do not oppress an alien; you know how it feels to be aliens...” (Exodus 23:9) The LORD also said, “The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:34)

To “love your neighbor as yourself” is one way to honor God and to keep God’s commands. But who is your neighbor? Are there people outside your neighborhood? Are there some people - minorities and foreigners like the Samaritans - you are not required to love?

Jesus liked to teach with parables.

This week we will discuss a famous part of the Bible. This Bible section is sometimes called “The Parable of the Good Samaritan.” Parables (see the note) were one way that Jesus Christ taught important truth. What is God really like? What does God require? Jesus said, “Let me tell you a story.”

Parables are stories, narratives, or accounts that illustrate truth. Jesus challenged a man who claimed to be a law-expert, a lawyer or professional who had studied God’s laws. Parables are stories that capture your interest and your curiosity. Prepare to be surprised by Jesus!

Notes:

immigrate: when you leave your native land and then settle in a new land.

sacrifice: to give up something - your money, your time, or your life - for the good of another person.

Samaritans: a “mixed race” in northern Israel. The Assyrian empire removed the Jews from northern Israel and replaced them with new people from a foreign place. So the people of Samaria were a minority group. And the majority Jewish people did not accept their citizenship or their religion.

alien: foreigner.

parables: Jesus told many short and descriptive stories to teach a key point, or to illustrate a single truth, or to answer one single question. In all cultures, “Let me tell you a story” causes you to listen.

Notes:

expert in the law: professional who studied God's laws - a lawyer.

inherit: to receive a gift of great value, something not earned, most often when a loved one dies. The lawyer thinks he must "do" something.

justify himself: to make or prove yourself right with God and with other people.

fell into: the man was trapped by robbers. Today, we would say that this traveler was "robbed."

priest: a religious professional who taught and prayed for people.

Levite: a non-professional religious worker in God's temple.

Samaritans: a "mixed race" of people in northern Israel who came from Assyria. They were a minority in Israel.

inn: a small hotel.

reimburse: to pay back, repay.

likewise: to do the same thing. "Go and treat people the same way the Samaritan treated the injured man."

From the Bible: Luke 10:25-37



²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" [Jesus] replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ [The lawyer] answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But [the lawyer] wanted to justify himself, so [the lawyer] asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when [the priest] saw the man, [the priest] passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw [the injured man], passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the [injured man] was; and when [the Samaritan] saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then [the Samaritan] put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day [the Samaritan] took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told [the lawyer], "Go and do likewise."

Discuss



1. Verse 25: Who asked Jesus a question? What question did the man ask? Why did the expert ask this question?
2. Verse 26: How did Jesus "reverse" the lawyer's question? Who is now tested?
3. Verse 27: How did the lawyer sum up all of the ways we should honor God?
4. Verse 28: What did Jesus say that God requires - more than correct answers?
5. Do you think that anyone can do all of these things in a complete, perfect way?
6. Verse 29: What did the lawyer next ask? Why did the lawyer ask Jesus this?
7. What does it mean to "justify yourself"? (See note. Put this in your own words.)
8. Verse 30: In the parable, what happened to the man who traveled on the road?
9. Verses 31-32: When the two Jewish men saw the injured man, what did they do?
10. Verses 33-35: How did the Samaritan treat the injured man?
11. Compare verses 29 and 36: How did Jesus "reverse" the lawyer's question?
12. Verse 37: Who did the lawyer say was a good neighbor? Why did he say this?

Chapter Summary



You cannot define who is your neighbor. You can only be a good neighbor.

Jesus teaches that you must not put a limit on your neighborhood. We must not limit our love for other people. The "good Samaritan" points us to Jesus. By his own native people, Jesus was rejected like a foreigner. But Jesus came to care for us and to bring us God's compassion. God's love comes at Jesus' own expense.

Life-Changing Conversations

God and Good Things



An Oxford and Cambridge scholar, C. S. Lewis, observed that when good gifts become our gods, they will become our devils. This happens when we misuse, abuse, or inflate the value of any good thing in our lives.

The Bible says, “everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanks.” (1 Timothy 4:4). Your career, your car, your house, your friends, your family - these are all good gifts. You should enjoy and value these things. The Bible says that all these good gifts come from God. So you should thank God for all the good things in your life.

But what if good things become your false gods? What if a finite thing (your possessions, your professional work, or relationships) become your ultimate thing? If you start to live for something that is not God, then you risk losing the source of all the good things in life. When you substitute some good thing for God, or if you replace God as your ultimate goal in life, then you can destroy your life. When your gifts become (false) gods, they become devils.

If your job, family, or possessions become your ultimate goal or purpose in life, then you have started to worship gifts instead of the ultimate giver - the God who gives all good gifts.



The gift of money can become your god. Money is needed to purchase things. Your ability to make money, or “to make a living”, is also a gift from God. But what happens if you begin to seek money more than you seek God? If that happens in your life, then money has become your “ultimate good” and your “false god.” Money is necessary to live your life, but money cannot give you ultimate meaning and security for your life.

Materialism motivates many people today. Many people live to “run after the almighty dollar.” Having possessions can become your ultimate goal - a religious search. The most important thing in life becomes your material welfare, your financial security, not your spiritual meaning. But what can give you meaning and security - God or money?

Materialism is common in Western culture. Business author Robyn Meredith has observed that in our time, “The U. S. is the buyer to the world, and China is the factory to the world.” But consumer-culture is world-wide. Perhaps in your country, material success and financial security are the most important thing.

What is your ultimate goal?

The way you spend your money reveals what is most important in your life. If you cannot let go of your money, that shows something about your priorities. What do you buy for yourself? What must you absolutely have: Retirement security? A world-class degree? A nice home?

Jesus taught his followers: When you “seek God’s kingdom” as your top #1 priority, God will give all that you need to live. But material things can become your rival to God. Money and possessions can become your goal of life.

Jesus once had a conversation with a man who had many good gifts in his life. The man was young, rich, and religious. But what was the most important thing in the man’s life? When he was forced to choose, did the man choose God’s kingdom? Or, did the man seek other things as the source of meaning and purpose in life? Let’s observe and discuss!

Notes:

gifts: good things that come to you, but not because you bought or earned them.

gods: the wrong sources of your life’s purpose or meaning.

devils: harmful or controlling forces in your life.

misuse: to use something in the wrong way.

inflate: when you increase something more than it is worth.

finite thing: something with limited value.

ultimate thing: highest value, most important priority.

Materialism: the belief that life’s meaning and purpose come from physical, material things.

consumer: a person defined by what they purchase, a buyer.

rival: something or someone that competes for the loyalty of your heart.

Week 6: When Jesus met a rich young ruler
Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

ruler: probably a ruler in a Jewish place of worship.

do ... inherit: to receive something as a gift when a loved one dies. Notice: you don't do anything when you inherit.

commandments: The Ten Commandments, which summarize God's moral law.

adultery: breaking your marriage promises by having sex with another person.

camel ... eye of a needle: a word picture to describe something that is not possible.

this age: the world as we know it.

the age to come: a future world in which evil and death do not exist and in which God's rule will be welcomed by all.

Jim Elliot, who was a Christian messenger to the Auca people of Ecuador, was killed because he was a Christian. He once said (words simplified): "You are not a fool if you give up what you cannot keep - to gain what you cannot lose."

From the Bible: Luke 18:18-30



18 A certain ruler asked [Jesus], "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.

20 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," [the young ruler] said. 22 When Jesus heard this, [Jesus] said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

23 When [the young ruler] heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at [the young ruler] and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

28 Peter said to [Jesus], "We have left all we had to follow you!"

29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Discuss



1. Verses 18-20: What does the ruler want to learn from Jesus? What does Jesus tell the young ruler?
2. Verse 21: How does the ruler think he "measures up" to God's commandments?
3. Verse 22: What added demand does Jesus give to the young ruler? Do you think this is reasonable to ask?
4. Verse 23: How does the ruler respond to Jesus' instruction?
5. What does this reveal about the young ruler's highest priority and loyalty?
6. In your life, what do you think you are most committed to - your highest priority?
7. If you decided to follow Jesus, is there a commitment or loyalty you would have to give up?
8. Verse 25: What does Jesus' saying about a "camel" going through the "eye of a needle" mean? Why is this so shocking?
9. Verses 26-27: How can what is "impossible" become "possible"?
10. Verses 28-29: What does Jesus promise to those who choose to follow him - in exchange for what they may give up?
11. Look at the Jim Elliot quote (on the left). What kind of person is a real fool?

Chapter Summary



People say, "Money makes the world go around." That is not literally true.

But many people act as if life and happiness depend on having money. This attitude of the heart describes the rich young ruler who met Jesus. The man thought he could earn eternal life by doing good things. But Jesus showed him that under his "outward goodness" was his inner and ultimate love for money. Money ruled his heart - not love for God. Sadly, the young man was not willing to exchange his top priority to experience the love and ultimate security that Jesus promised in God's kingdom. Only Jesus can ask you for everything, and still give you more.

Life-Changing Conversations

Do you avoid some people?



There are always some people who pass through your life that you do not want to have as a friend, a fan, or a follower.

There are some people you try to avoid. You really try to stay away from them. Why? Because some people are annoying. Other people make demands on your life and on your time. Have you ever seen a person coming your way - and you tried to run away, so the person does not see you?

Of course, it is wise to keep away from dangerous people, or from those who may cause you trouble. But do you also try to avoid people who are socially undesirable?

Do you only like “to see and be seen” with popular people? In all cultures, people like to stay “connected” to rich, famous, or powerful people. But do you avoid other classes of people? What about the poor? The unattractive? They do not attract you - they repel you! We like to watch TV shows about famous movie stars or successful and wealthy executives. But what about people who are not well educated? Are you a friend of the salesperson at the food market? Are you a fan of the man who cleans and sweeps your work place?

There are certain kinds of people who always seem unpopular. Corrupt government officials are feared by citizens. But do they have real friends? Money can buy cars, houses, and land. But money will not buy personal popularity or social acceptance.

This week, we meet a government official who collects taxes. In fact, he is the supervisor of many government agents who collect taxes. This man is rich and powerful. But his wealth cannot buy him acceptance with either God or with other people. “Good people” in society purposely avoided him, and stayed away from him. This “tax man” was a corrupt official who worked for a foreign government. That government allowed the tax man to overcharge for taxes and to keep the extra for himself. The religious, nice, and good people despised him.

But Jesus purposed to see this tax man. In fact, Jesus made a special effort to find him.

corrupt: rotten or dishonest.

Why did Jesus seek friends like these?



Most societies are divided into “good” and “bad people.” The “respected” and “religious” citizens are not the “immoral” or the “despised” citizens. But, for Jesus, there are only two kinds of people - proud people and humble people.

Jesus made it his purpose to spend time with people who were not socially acceptable - like corrupt tax men, or working class fishermen, or the diseased people, or immoral prostitutes. Jesus seemed to offer acceptance to the types of people who are rejected by nice society.

The message of Jesus is called “good news.” And the words and actions of Jesus show why: blind people get to see again, sick people are healed, guilty people are forgiven, and those rejected by respectable society are welcomed and offered acceptance into God’s kingdom.

“Good”, intelligent, hard-working, and moral people always expect to receive what they have worked for - what they think they deserve. But when the poor and needy - or an unpopular tax man - receives Jesus’ love and acceptance - that kind of person “welcomes him gladly.”

This week, we continue to look at real life-changing conversations with Jesus - encounters that led to remarkable transformations in people’s lives.

Notes:

Review of historical background: At this time, large parts of the world were ruled by Rome. Jesus' nation had been invaded by a hated foreign empire. Many Jews prayed for God to give them a savior to rescue them from Rome. So, for many Jews, salvation was to be rescued politically, and not spiritually.

chief tax collector: Zacchaeus was a Jew but made his money collecting taxes for Rome. So he was treated as a traitor - he worked for enemy invaders.

sycamore-fig tree: a heavy tree with large, low branches.

mutter: to complain or grumble in a low voice so that others cannot hear you.

sinner: The Bible says we all sin and dishonor God. But here, sinner is a social criticism. Zacchaeus is called a "bad man."

amount: a quantity.

salvation: not saved politically from Rome, but restored to a relationship with God.

Abraham: father of the Jewish nation.

Son of Man: Jesus' favorite description of himself. Jesus also claimed to be God's Son, but most often called himself the "Man sent from heaven."

From the Bible: Luke 19:1-10



- ¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; [Zacchaeus] was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.
- ³ [Zacchaeus] wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴ So [Zacchaeus] ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see [Jesus], since Jesus was coming that way.
- ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, [Jesus] looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So [Zacchaeus] came down at once and welcomed [Jesus] gladly.
- ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "[Jesus] has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"
- ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."
- ⁹ Jesus said to [Zacchaeus], "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Discuss



1. Verse 1: What is Jesus doing? Does it appear that the town of Jericho was Jesus' final destination?
2. Verse 2: What do you learn about the man named Zacchaeus?
3. Verse 3: What did Zacchaeus **want** to do?
4. Verses 3-4: Why was it hard for Zacchaeus to see Jesus? What made it possible?
5. Verse 5: Which person, Jesus or Zacchaeus, saw the other one in the crowd?
6. Verses 5-6: What "must" Jesus do? How did Zacchaeus respond to Jesus?
7. Notice: Zacchaeus "wanted" to do something, but Jesus "had" to do something. What is the difference between a **desire** ("want to") and a **necessity** ("must")?
8. Verse 1 says that Jesus was "passing through" Jericho. But, in verse 5, Jesus says "I **must** stay." What made Jesus decide to stay - a place or a person?
9. Jesus said the way into God's kingdom is "to repent and believe the good news." In verse 6, how does Zacchaeus "believe good news"?
10. Verse 7: How did people react to Jesus' decision to go to Zacchaeus' house?
11. In verse 8, how do we see Zacchaeus repent (turn from serving himself)?
12. Verse 9: What does Jesus say has happened to Zacchaeus?
13. Verse 10: Why did Jesus "come" to Jericho and into our world?
14. In this situation, how did Jesus both **seek** and **save** Zacchaeus?

Chapter Summary



Many of us are like Zacchaeus. And we want to "see who Jesus was." Jesus taught and did remarkable things. So Jesus makes you curious.

Zacchaeus was ready to climb up a tree to observe Jesus - from a distance.

But Jesus is the real Seeker. Jesus did not come to only "pass through" your life. Jesus came to "seek and to save." Jesus' purpose is to come into our lives, our houses, and our work places. Jesus seeks us - to restore our relationship to God. We become more than observers when Jesus comes into our lives.

Week 8: When Jesus met a foreign woman

Life-Changing Conversations



All people get thirsty

We have discussed some universal human needs. If we want to live, we must eat to receive strength and energy. All people must eat some bread (or rice, yams, or other staple food). Jesus taught that our need for physical food illustrates our deeper, spiritual need. Do we get hungry for our daily bread? Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life ... the bread of God ... who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:33, 35) We work for food that will spoil and perish. But God offers us the bread of life - that gives life forever.

Food is needed to keep us alive. But water is a much more basic and urgent need. You will die from thirst quicker than you will die from hunger. People who walk, run, or cycle for long distances must have water. Travelers on trains and airplanes may take a bottle of water. Medical professionals tell you to drink enough water so that your muscles will not cramp. Without water, you can faint, collapse, or even die from thirst.

Tell the international friends at your table about some time when you felt really thirsty.

Did you ever pass out from thirst? How do you make sure to drink enough water?

In this week's discussion, Jesus teaches that our physical thirst illustrates and points to a deeper spiritual thirst. We need living water, God's life-giving water, the water of life.

All people in the world hunger for food and thirst for water. Jesus offers God's gift to all people - the bread of life for our spiritual hunger, and the water of life for our spiritual thirst. And we should observe that Jesus was physically in the world. Jesus experienced our human thirst. Jesus shared our human needs for the purpose of sharing God's gifts with us. Jesus came to connect with us, so that we can connect with God.



If all people share the same basic needs - like hunger for bread and thirst for water - what divides us? All people, in all nations and places, need the same things to live.

But we speak different languages and we come from different cultures. If one race or nation thinks its culture is better than your culture, that divides people. **Culture can cause division.**

All people, in all places, experience a **spiritual hunger** and thirst. But people will practice different religions. Wars have been fought because of people's religious differences.

Some people think that religion is a social problem, because **religion can divide people**.

In some places, women do not receive the dignity, value, and respect that is given to men.

There are **gender barriers**. In some places, men have better opportunities than women.

In the time of Jesus, religious teachers usually did not accept women as their students.

The Jews did not accept Samaritans. The Jewish people would travel many extra miles, and take alternative roads and highways, to avoid contact with Samaritan people. The Jewish people thought there was only one place where people should worship the one true God - in the Jewish temple, at their capitol city of Jerusalem. The Samaritan people set up their own place of worship, on a mountain in an area of northern Israel known as Samaria.

Jesus removes the spiritual, cultural, and gender barriers that divide us from one another.

This week, we see Jesus ask a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. When Jesus did this, **Jesus broke down three walls at the same time: gender, culture, and religion.**

Jesus did not just come to break down the walls that separate people from other people.

Jesus also came to break down the barrier that separates us from the one, true, living God.

Notes:

yams: tropical vines with starchy roots eaten as food.

staple: a basic food item in your daily diet - like flour, rice, or corn.

spoil and perish: when food goes bad, decays, or becomes rotten.

cramp: when your muscle contracts and causes severe pain.

faint: to lose consciousness, to "pass out."

dignity: worthy of respect.

Samaritans: the Assyrian empire invaded northern Israel (Samaria) and inter-married with local Jews. So, the Jews thought that the Samaritans were a "mixed race", people who practiced an inferior form of religion.

Week 8: When Jesus met a foreign woman Life-Changing Conversations



Notes:

the sixth hour: In Jewish time, this was about 12 noon - the hottest part of mid-day.

Samarita, Samaritan: see note on the previous page.

flocks and herds: groups of sheep and cattle.

the gift of God: God's gift, the gift God gives.

Jacob: forefathers of Israel: "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". God gave Jacob a new name, "Israel."

prophet: a person who knows and tells God's Word.

worshiped: give to God honor, praise, and devotion.

salvation: saved by God. God rescues people from their sin and dishonoring God. The gift of salvation includes forgiveness, adoption into God's family and eternal life with God.

the Father: God the Father of Jesus.

Messiah: in Old Testament Hebrew, this means "anointed one" or "chosen king". The word is translated Christ in the New Testament Greek. This is Jesus' title, not a family name.

Savior of the world: Jesus did not just come to save Jews.

From the Bible: John 4:4-26, 39-42

4... Now he had to go through Samarita.⁵ So he came to a town in Samarita called Sychar ...

⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as [Jesus] was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I [Jesus will] give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I [Jesus] give him will become in [the person who receives this gift from Jesus] a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ [Jesus] told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," [the woman] replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband.

¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said [to Jesus] "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and [God's] worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I [Jesus] who speak to you am he [the Messiah]" ...

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony, "[Jesus] told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to [Jesus], they urged [Jesus] to stay with them, and [Jesus] stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of [Jesus'] words many more became believers. ⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Discuss



1. Verse 4: What did Jesus "have" to do?
2. Verse 6: How did Jesus feel? What time was it? (See the note.)
3. Verses 7-9: What did Jesus ask the woman? Why was the woman surprised?
4. Verse 10: What did Jesus offer to give the woman? What is the "gift of God"?
5. Verses 13-14: What is the difference between "living" and natural water?
6. Verse 15: What did the woman ask Jesus? What did the woman hope to avoid?
7. Verses 16-18: What did Jesus ask the woman to do? How did Jesus expose and reveal the woman's deeper needs - that she needed more than water?
8. What kind of "thirst" pushes people into multiple marriages or bad relationships?
9. Verse 19: Since the woman did not want to talk about her private and personal life, she asks about religion. How did religion divide the Jews from the Samaritans?
10. Verses 21-24: How did Jesus describe true worship of God?
11. Verses 25-26: Who is coming? Who is the Messiah?
12. Verses 39-42: What news did the woman tell to the people who lived in her town? What did the Samaritans decide about Jesus?

Chapter Summary



Jesus, the Christ, came to break down the walls and barriers that separate people from one another, and that separate all people from God.

Life-Changing Conversations



What are the most basic human needs?

Throughout the world, people have the same basic needs. There are some things you must have to live and not die. "Bread and water" are the most basic necessities in our lives. The human body is composed of about 65 percent water. People can survive for some time without food. But, if you go without water for only one day, that can be very dangerous. You can go without food for a month or more. But you cannot live without water for very long.

The most basic form of food is bread. Bread comes in many varieties. Bread may be baked, steamed, or fried. Bread is prepared from local grains like wheat, rye, barley, or rice. In Western countries, a friend may ask you to "break bread" (or, "share a meal"). But in China, you will be invited to "eat rice." East Asian societies prefer wheat noodles, steamed bread, and rice. But bread (whether wheat or rice) is a "necessity of life."

Different world cultures are known for their famous breads:

- Italians like **pasta** in many different shapes - sheets, ribbons, tubes, and other forms - like spaghetti and macaroni. Pasta may actually have come to Europe from Asia - with the Mongol invasions of the 13th century.
- Indians enjoy **naan** - a leavened wholewheat bread that is baked in a tandoor or clay oven. Another Indian bread is **paratha** - a flat-bread made by pan-frying whole wheat flour.
- In China, **mantou** is a steamed or deep fried bun made from wheat or rice. It looks similar to western white bread, but it is not baked. So, it does not have a brown outer crust. When filled with meat or vegetables, it is called **baozi**. Chinese dumplings are **jiaozi**.
- Jewish people love **challah** - a woven egg bread with a thin, hard crust and soft center.
- The French people are famous for **baguettes** - hard rolls or breads with a thick crust and large air bubbles inside. Baguettes are often sold unwrapped to keep the crust crisp.

Tell the international friends at your table about the bread in your home country and culture.

What is your favorite kind of bread? What bread is your country most famous for?



Is life more than bread?

When your body needs bread or water, you will feel hunger or thirst. That is good! Your body is sending you a reminder. Your appetite tells you to take care of yourself!

Do you work to eat? Or, do you eat to work? If you only focus on your daily needs, you may forget to think about the meaning and purpose of life. You can have an appetite for life's necessities - but you may also have a desire for some of life's luxuries. But physical things - even expensive things - cannot satisfy your deepest hungers.

Jesus once said, "Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." (Luke 12:23) What more is there in life than our necessities? Is life more than water, food, and clothing?

We desire something to satisfy us at the core of who we are. Oxford and Cambridge scholar C. S. Lewis noted, "most people ... know that they do want ... something that cannot be had in this world." Which means that spiritual desires cannot be fulfilled by physical things.

The Bible teaches that we were made to be satisfied by God. Real life is experienced in a relationship with God. This week, we will see how Jesus could feed a large crowd of people. But Jesus did not stop with physical bread. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life." Jesus wants to fulfill our deepest needs - the deep spiritual hunger that is inside each one of us.

Notes:

leavened: made with yeast, that causes dough to rise through fermentation.

appetite: a strong desire or urge to have something - like food, drink, sex, or learning.

necessities: things you must have to live: food, shelter, water, clothing.

luxuries: things you don't need, but really want: an expensive car, fine jewelry, or a big house.

A necessity is something you need. A luxury is something you want.

Notes:

Sea of Galilee: a freshwater lake in N.E. Israel where Jesus spent much of his time.

miraculous signs: Jesus's works that point to God.

disciples: people who believe, follow and learn from a master.

wages: paycheck.

5,000: refers to men. There may have been as many as 20,000 in the crowd.

twelve baskets: Jesus had 12 disciples, so each had one basket of leftovers.

Prophet - the older part of the Bible predicted a prophet to come in the future.

make him king: the crowd hoped God would send them a political king - to free them from the Roman empire. Jesus can provide bread for a big army!

Son of Man: This was Jesus' favorite way to describe himself. Jesus also claimed to be God's Son, but Jesus most often called himself the "Man sent from heaven."

flesh: a person's physical body.

From the Bible: John 6:1-3, 5-15, 24-29, 33-35, 51



¹... Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee ... ² and a great crowd of people followed [Jesus] because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples ...

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, [Jesus] said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ [Jesus] asked this only to test [Philip], for [Jesus] already had in mind what [Jesus] was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" ⁸ Another of [Jesus]' disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many [people]?"

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about 5,000 of them. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. [Jesus] did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, [the people] began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

²⁴ [The next day] the crowd ... went ... in search of Jesus. ²⁵ When they found [Jesus] ...

²⁶ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you ...

²⁸ Then they asked [Jesus], "What must we do to do the works God requires?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one [God] has sent ... ³³ ... the bread of God is [the one] who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," [the crowd] said, "From now on give us this bread." ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. [Anyone] who comes to me will never go hungry, and [anyone] who believes in me will never be thirsty." ... ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Discuss



1. Verses 1-3: Why did the crowd follow Jesus?
2. Verses 5-6: How did Jesus test the faith of Philip?
3. Verses 7-9: Do the disciples think there is enough to feed the crowd?
4. Verses 10-11: What did Jesus do with the food that was available?
5. Verses 12-13: How much food was left over after the crowd of people ate?
6. Verses 14-15: How did the crowd react? What did Jesus decide to do?
7. Verses 24-26: Why were the people looking for Jesus?
8. Verse 27: What kind of food did Jesus challenge the people to work for?
9. Verse 28: What did the people ask Jesus? How did Jesus answer the people?
10. Verse 29: What "work" does God require? How is "believe" different than "work"?
11. Verse 35: Who is the "bread of life"? What promise does Jesus make?
12. Verse 51: Jesus promises to "give his flesh for the life of the world". The crowd were confused and offended by Jesus' words. What do you think Jesus meant?

Chapter Summary



To live, you need bread and water. These are the most basic needs in life. But where can you find bread that will last forever? Jesus claims to be the "bread of life" - the true source of life, our only true satisfaction in life.

Life-Changing Conversations



What is a leader?

Look around you on campus, and in our world today. Who are the best leaders? What qualities do you expect in a leader? What kind of person would you choose to be *your* leader?

All around us, we see people who are called “boss”, or C.E.O., or president, or dean, or provost. But having an official title does not make you a good leader. It is possible for people to only “appear to be” leaders, or “seem to be” leaders - because they have the titles or positions. But are they good leaders?

Official leaders function from the “top down” - they give orders or directions. Officials expect people “below” them to follow orders and directions. Bosses are on top, and employees are “under” them.

But there is another form of leadership that we can call “bottom up”. Do you know someone without an official title or elected position - but a person who really influences your group? These people are not official leaders. They do not *demand* loyalty because they are over you. These are people who *attract* your loyalty and respect, because of how they treat you.

Some people try to be leaders by making demands, using force, or threatening punishment. You may fear bosses like that. But there are other leaders you respect and want to follow - because you know they make hard choices and do difficult things - to benefit you and others.

A Servant-Leader

Many nations, especially governments with parliaments, have “prime ministers.” This is an interesting term for a leader, and the title may be derived from the Bible.

The prime minister is the “first minister” or the “chief minister” who is appointed by a ruler - by a king, queen, or president. In our Bible discussion this week, Jesus describes himself as a “prime minister” - or the chief servant of God’s kingdom. God has given the Son of Man, Jesus Christ his Son, all the power and authority in the kingdom of God. But how did Jesus demonstrate and use that power from heaven?

No one has been more influential in history than Jesus. Not many people will make a big difference in the world in a life time. But the life and death of Jesus has changed the world. Jesus did not win fame or influence in the usual ways. Most leaders demand loyalty from followers. But Jesus has won followers in every culture and nation by servant-leadership.

In God’s sight, Jesus is the standard of greatness. No one is greater in the kingdom of God. Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man. This title comes from a great vision in the Bible’s Old Testament. “There before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.” (Daniel 7:13) The One with the most God-given authority, God’s Son from heaven, came to serve others. Jesus reverses all of our human ideas about greatness. Jesus came in weakness. Jesus came to sacrifice. Jesus came to serve others, and not to make himself rich or powerful.



What is your ambition?

Before we discuss a section of the Bible, ask the international friends at your table:

- How would you describe your “dream job”? What position would you like to have?
- Can you be honored for serving other people - and not only personal achievement?
- Do you know any organization that gives recognition to people who serve others?

Notes:

Week 10: When Jesus challenged ambitious followers Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

disciples: people who follow Jesus' teaching and life.

astonished: amazed

the Twelve: Jesus' twelve disciples.

Son of Man: This was Jesus' favorite way to describe himself. Jesus is God's Son, but often described himself as the "Man sent from heaven."

Gentiles: not Jews. Jesus predicted that his own people would have him arrested by Rome.

mock: to ridicule or to treat with contempt.

flog: to beat severely with a rod or a whip.

cup, baptism: refer to Jesus' death. Jesus "drank the cup" of judgment and was "baptized" into death. For Christians today, the cup and baptism are signs of God's *blessing*. So, Jesus was *cursed* - so that we may be *blessed* by God.

the ten: the other disciples of Jesus.

indignant: mad about something.

regarded: to be viewed as, to be considered.

ransom: to free or release a prisoner or a hostage by paying the price that is demanded for their freedom. To buy someone's freedom.

From the Bible: Mark 10:32-45



³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again [Jesus] took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to [Jesus]. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" [Jesus] asked. ³⁷ [James and John] replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Discuss



1. Verse 32: Where was Jesus leading the disciples?
2. What caused the people to be astonished or afraid?
3. Verses 32-34: What did Jesus say would happen at Jerusalem?
4. Verses 35-37: What was the most important thing for James and John?
5. Verse 37: What did the brothers believe that Jesus would have in the future? What did they want Jesus to give them now?
6. Verse 38: How did Jesus answer? What did James and John not understand?
7. Verses 38-39: The cup and baptism (see the note) are symbols of connecting - sharing in the life and the death of Jesus. What do James and John want Jesus to share with them?
8. Verse 41: What made the the ten mad? Were they better than the two brothers?
9. Verse 42: How does Jesus describe the world's rulers?
10. Verses 43-44: How does Jesus define being "great" in God's kingdom?
11. Verses 45: Why is Jesus the greatest of all in God's kingdom?

Chapter Summary



Disciples are people who follow and learn from Jesus. Ultimately, Jesus will lead his disciples to the glory of God's kingdom. But first, Jesus leads his followers to serve and to give themselves - to benefit other people.

God's Son did not come to earth the first time to be a boss, to "lord it over" people. Jesus *has* come to serve, sacrifice, and buy our freedom. Jesus gave his life for others. Some future day, Jesus *will* come as Lord and King, in the glory of God's kingdom. Only people who follow Jesus in serving *now* will share in God's glory *then*.

Life-Changing Conversations

Jesus was very human



This week, we observe Jesus from two different perspectives. First, Jesus showed love for friends, feelings of compassion, and deep grief about losses that we must all face in our lives - like the death of our loved ones. Second, Jesus also reveals the power and glory of God's victory over suffering and death.

The Bible section we will discuss includes the shortest verse in the Bible. The verse contains only two words: "Jesus wept." As the Old Testament predicted, Jesus was "a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering (who) carried our sorrows." (Isaiah 53:3-4)

Like all of us, Jesus needed real friends and enjoyed meaningful human relationships. Of course, Jesus had twelve disciples. They learned from Jesus' teaching and followed Jesus' example. But - like all relationships - Jesus' disciples were not always wise, loyal, or helpful. Jesus sometimes needed to relax away from the challenges of work. There was one place Jesus went to have his energy restored - a small village called Bethany. At the end of Jesus' life, he went and taught among crowds and faced hateful enemies in Jerusalem, the capital. After that, Jesus left the challenges of the city and went to the village of Bethany, at the foot of a mountain, near but outside the city limits of Jerusalem.

- **Where** is a place that you like to go - to rest from your work and to recover your energy?

Jesus was renewed and refreshed by the friendship and hospitality of a family at Bethany. We know the names of two sisters - Mary and Martha, and one brother - Lazarus. These three people became close friends for Jesus. They believed in Jesus. But they were more than disciples. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were true friends. Jesus could trust them!

- **Who** are some people that you can trust, count on, and rely on - as true friends?

But could Mary, Martha, and Lazarus trust Jesus? That was a big question for them. Your friends are people who care for you, who are with you to support you in times of need. But what about you? If you want to have good friends, you must also be a good friend. Are you a true friend to other people when they have needs? Or, are you a "fair weather friend"? Are you only "there" when times are easy? In our Bible discussion, it looks like Jesus did not come when his good friend was sick. It appears that Jesus missed his good friend's funeral!

- Are there **reasons** or **times** when you should **not go** to be with your needy friend?

But Jesus was more than a man ...

Does Jesus not care about our human suffering? In our Bible discussion, we will note a connection between Jesus waiting and Jesus loving his friends. When we experience suffering or grieving in our own lives, we might ask the same question that Martha and Mary asked Jesus: "Where were you Lord?" We cannot understand God's reasons for allowing suffering or death to come into our lives.

- Did you ever **doubt God's existence** or **feel God's absence** in a painful time?

We may never know God's **reasons** for allowing certain experiences of pain and suffering. But, after a period of time, if we wait, we may discover that God has **purposes** for us in our times of difficulty, loss, or suffering.

In this week's discussion, we learn two important things:

- Jesus wants to reveal the glory of God to us.
- Jesus promises more than health and healing. Jesus promises new life, victory over death.

Notes:

perspectives: ways of looking at something. Different points of view.

wept: Jesus shed tears.

disciples: Jesus' followers or Jesus' students.

capital: the primary or head city, the center of government.

"fair weather friend": a person who is only your friend in "good weather" - when your situation or circumstances are good.



Week 11: When Jesus missed a friend's funeral Life-Changing Conversations

Notes:

poured perfume: Mary showed her love for Jesus by pouring fragrant oil on Jesus' feet (see John 12).

glorified: honored as the Son of God.

resurrection: when a person is raised - both in spirit and in body - from death.

I am: In the Bible's Old Testament, God was revealed as "I AM". In the New Testament book of John, Jesus makes seven "I AM" claims - all point to who Jesus is. In this section, Jesus claims to be God - the only One who wins victory over death and who gives new life from the dead.

Christ: God's chosen King.

odor: bad smell, from the decaying body of Lazarus.

From the Bible: John 11:1-6, 17, 20-27, 32-40, 43-44



¹ Now a man named Lazarus was sick. [Lazarus] was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." ⁴ When [Jesus] heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister [Mary] and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when [Jesus] heard that Lazarus was sick, [Jesus] stayed where he was two more days ... ¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days ... ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, [Martha] went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know [my brother] will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. [Anyone] who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," [Martha] told [Jesus], "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, [Mary] fell at [Jesus'] feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who had come along with [Mary] also weeping, [Jesus] was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid [Lazarus]?" [Jesus] asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how [Jesus] loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not [Jesus] who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," [Jesus] said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ... ⁴³ When [Jesus] had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Discuss



1. Verses 1-6: What things do we learn about these sisters and their brother? Describe Jesus' relationship with this family.
2. Verses 4-6: If Jesus loved this family, why did Jesus wait to help Lazarus?
3. Verse 17: What happened to Lazarus while Jesus delayed to come?
4. Verses 20-21, 32: What words did both sisters - Martha and Mary - say to Jesus?
5. Verses 23-26: What did Jesus say to Martha? What did Jesus say about himself?
6. Verse 27: What did Martha believe about Jesus?
7. Verses 33-37: Describe how Jesus felt - about Lazarus and about death.
8. Verses 38-39: What did Jesus tell the people to do?
9. Compare verses 4, 40: For what purpose did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?
10. Verses 43-44: How did people "see the glory of God"?

Chapter Summary



Jesus' miraculous signs point people to the glory of God's Son and the reality of God's kingdom. Jesus offers us forgiveness, healing, and new life from the dead. "If you believe you will see the glory of God." This was Jesus' greatest sign - raising Lazarus from the dead. The great sign proved Jesus' great claim, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Life-Changing Conversations



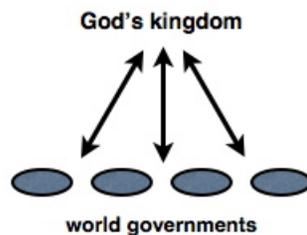
Religion and politics

People often say that “religion and politics do not mix.” Some people want religion and politics to stay apart. They want to keep religious activities separate from politics and government. Religion makes it difficult for leaders to act with honor in political debates. Religion makes absolute claims. But politics requires compromise. Religious leaders may not tolerate people who have different viewpoints - who disagree with their religion.

It is also true that politics can damage the moral goals of religion. Some politicians will try to use religion to cover up and hide their bad or dishonest behavior. Politicians can claim to believe in God, but use money to buy influence. And religious leaders can try to use political or military power to force their beliefs on other people.

History is filled with examples of nations or governments that claimed, “God is on our side.” But when any politician, local official, or government leader claims to act like God or a god, the result is often disaster. When rulers claim absolute power, great harm is done to citizens.

According to the Bible, no human government should claim to be God’s kingdom on earth. The kingdom of God is not political, but spiritual. Jesus claimed to be God’s chosen king - the king of God’s kingdom. But God’s kingdom is ever-lasting, international, and multi-cultural. “The LORD has established his throne in heaven; his kingdom rules over all.” (Psalm 103:19)



God’s kingdom rules over all. No human government can claim to rule other people for God. No presidents, prime ministers, or kings can enforce God’s rule. All the nations of the world must answer to God. The LORD is the “king above all kings” and “the LORD above all lords.”

Jesus was rejected by all people

- In this week’s discussion, we see **religious leaders who act like politicians**.

The Jewish leaders - the priests, elders, and religious teachers - rejected Jesus. The God of Israel sent Jesus Christ to spread the good news that God’s kingdom was near. Jesus taught, healed, and gained influence among the Jewish people. So the Jewish leaders were filled with envy. They considered Jesus a rival to their own religious authority.

The Jewish leaders arrested Jesus and met together as a court of judgment - the Sanhedrin. In the middle of the night, in an illegal trial, Jesus was condemned by his own people.

- This week, we also observe **a political leader who does not understand religion**.

At this time, the Roman Empire occupied the land of the Jews. The Roman Emperor, Caesar, appointed a governor to make sure that the Jews did not start a revolution against Rome. Pontius Pilate was the governor. Pilate enforced the power of Rome over the Jewish people.

After an a late night trial, the Jewish rulers brought Jesus to the Roman governor. If Jesus Christ claimed to be God’s chosen king, that will sound like rebellion or disloyalty to Caesar. And Pilate will consider Jesus is a threat to Rome. In our Bible discussion this week, the power of heaven meets the power of Rome. What will happen?

Notes:

debates: to dispute or argue opposite view points.

compromise: to settle an argument by giving up something that you wanted.

throne: the seat of power and authority - place where the ruler sits to govern.

rival: a competitor or person who tries to equal or surpass another person.

Sanhedrin: the Jews’ highest court. The Roman Empire permitted this court to judge civil, moral, and religious cases. But only the Roman government had the authority to execute a criminal. So, the Sanhedrin had to turn over Jesus to Pilate to crucify him.

Notes:

Sanhedrin: see the note on previous page.

Pilate: He was Rome's Imperial governor (called the "procurator") in the time of Jesus. Pilate had control of the Roman army occupying Israel.

accused: to charge someone with a crime.

Feast: Passover, the most important Jewish holiday.

insurrectionists: people who rebel against the state or a government.

envy: to resent or be jealous of someone - because they have qualities you don't have.

crucify: the Roman empire executed criminals in a way to cause great pain and public shame - by hanging them on a cross. Roman citizens were not crucified but were beheaded - a less painful death.

satisfy: Pilate wanted to "save face" and please the crowd.

released: set free.

flogged: to beat with a rod or whip.

Week 12: When Jesus met the Roman governor Life-Changing Conversations

From the Bible: Mark 15:1-15



¹ Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

² "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

³ The chief priests accused [Jesus] of many things. ⁴ So again Pilate asked [Jesus], "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." ⁵ But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested.

⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.

¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

¹³ "Crucify him [Jesus]!" they shouted.

¹⁴ "Why? What crime has [Jesus] committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. [Pilate] had Jesus flogged, and handed [Jesus] over to be crucified.

Discuss



1. The Jewish authorities had already arrested Jesus. And Jesus was first examined by the highest Jewish court - called the Sanhedrin.
2. Verse 1: What did the Sanhedrin decide to do?
3. Verse 1: Why did the Sanhedrin want to hand over (or "turn in") Jesus to Pilate?
4. Verse 2: What question did Pilate ask Jesus? How did Jesus answer Pilate?
5. What was more important to Pilate: religion or politics?
6. What do you think Jesus meant - "king of the Jews"? Was Jesus a political king?
7. Verses 3-5: When Jesus was accused in front of Pilate, how did Jesus respond? How did Pilate react? Did Jesus try to change the outcome of the trial?
8. Verses 6, 8: What did Roman governors do for the Jews at their Passover Feast?
9. Verse 10: What did Pilate realize about the motives of the Jewish court?
10. Verses 7-9: Jesus and Barabbas were both under arrest. How were these two men different? Which man was a greater danger to Rome: Jesus or Barabbas?
11. Verses 11-13: What did the crowd demand from Pilate?
12. Verses 14-15: If Pilate knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong, why did Pilate release Barabbas instead of Jesus, and crucify Jesus instead of the rebel?

Chapter Summary



Jesus is the king of God's kingdom. In the history of Israel, Jesus was the only "king of the Jews" who never did wrong. "Christ" means "God's chosen king."

God's kingdom is not political. But Jesus was rejected by the Jews and executed by Rome - for political reasons. The Jewish leaders were motivated by politics - they envied Jesus. The Roman governor was also motivated by politics - Pilate feared and followed the crowd.

So Jesus - the perfectly innocent king - was judged and crucified instead of a rebel. Today, Christians identify with Barabbas. Jesus died in the place of people who rebel against God.

Life-Changing Conversations



Unjust Jewish and Roman Courts

The Jewish priests, elders, and teachers all rejected Jesus. They thought Jesus was a rival to their own religious authority. The leaders of the Jews arrested Jesus and met together as a court of judgment. There was an illegal night time trial. Jesus was rejected, charged, and condemned by his own people.

But the Jewish court did not have the authority to execute Jesus. The armies of the Roman Empire occupied the land of the Jews.

So the Jewish court handed Jesus over to the Roman governor for a second trial. Pontius Pilate had to make sure that the Jews did not rebel against the rule of the Roman Empire. The Jews charged Jesus as “the King of the Jews.” Jesus did not deny that charge, because Jesus was truly God’s promised Christ (the “Messiah”, or “chosen king” of God’s Kingdom).

But Pilate did not think Jesus could rival Rome’s Emperor, or threaten the Roman Empire. Jesus said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews ... my kingdom is from another place.” (John 18:36). Jesus is God’s true king. But God’s kingdom spreads by truth and love, not by political or military force.

But the crowds demanded the execution of Jesus. People kept shouting, “Take Jesus away! Crucify him!” Pilate asked, “Shall I crucify your king?” The crowds shouted, “We have no king but Caesar.” That was a problem for Pilate. If there was a riot, the Roman governor would be responsible for the social disturbance. So Pilate agreed to execute Jesus like a criminal.

The crime charged against Jesus was placed above his head on a cross: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Jesus’ hands were nailed to the cross-beam (x-axis) of the cross. Jesus’ feet were nailed to the vertical beam (y-axis). A crucified person died very slowly, starving for air. To get enough air to breathe, the executed man had to push down on the nails in his feet. This was a most painful form of execution. Jesus suffered judgment in the worst way.

Jesus died - the righteous for the unrighteous

People argue about “who killed Jesus?” Some people have blamed the Jews. Other people have blamed the Romans for crucifying this innocent man, who did not deserve punishment.



According to the Bible, Jesus did not go to the cross because of Jewish or Roman injustice. The Bible teaches that human sinfulness put Jesus on the cross. Jesus never broke the Law that God gave to the Jewish nation. But we do. Jesus did not lead a rebellion against Rome. But we have all revolted against the rule of God’s Kingdom. Jesus was not crucified *because* the Jews were not righteous and the Romans were not just. According to the Bible, all people are unrighteous and unjust. “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus did not die *because* of wrongs *some* people do, but *for* wrongs that *all* people do. God’s perfectly righteous King died for unrighteous rebels.

In this week’s Bible discussion, we will observe that:

- Jesus was a perfectly just and righteous person. But Jesus was executed like a criminal.
- The crowds insulted and scorned Jesus - calling Jesus a fake king and a false savior.
- But one criminal confessed “I deserve to die - I have done wrong - I am justly punished.”
- Jesus promised to take to heaven the man who confessed his wrongs.
- Jesus “got what we deserve” - God’s judgment came down on Jesus instead of on us.
- Jesus’ death on the cross opened the way into God’s presence and acceptance.

Notes:



crucify: the Roman empire executed criminals in a way to cause the greatest pain and public shame - by hanging them on a cross. When you saw a man hanging on a cross, the clear message was: “This will happen to you if you rebel against Rome, or break Roman law.”

It is amazing that the cross became the symbol of the Christian faith. Other religions use peaceful symbols - the lotus, a star, or the crescent moon. But Christianity is symbolized by an image of death and execution - like an electric chair, or a hanging rope.

Week 13: When Jesus spoke to a dying criminal Life-Changing Conversations

From the Bible: Luke 23:32-46



- ³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with [Jesus] to be executed.
- ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified [Jesus], along with the criminals — one on [Jesus'] right [side], the other on [Jesus'] left [side]. ³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And [the Roman soldiers] divided up [Jesus'] clothes by casting lots.
- ³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at [Jesus]. They said, "[Jesus] saved others; let [Jesus] save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One."
- ³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked [Jesus]. They offered [Jesus] wine vinegar
- ³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."
- ³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.
- ³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"
- ⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked [the first criminal]. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man [Jesus] has done nothing wrong."
- ⁴² Then [the criminal] said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."
- ⁴³ Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
- ⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.
- ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When [Jesus] had said this, [Jesus] breathed his last."

Notes:

lots: dice. The Roman soldiers gambled for Jesus' clothing.

sneered: scorn and words of contempt.

the Christ: God's king.

hurled insults: threw offensive words.

the same sentence: also condemned.

paradise: another name for heaven.

the sixth hour: on the Jewish clock, 12 noon.

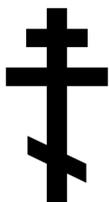
darkness: Not an eclipse, because it lasted three hours; darkness is a symbol of God's judgment.

As Jesus hung on the cross, God's favor did not shine on Jesus.

Jesus received God's judgment and was condemned in the place of sinful people.

curtain of the temple: Like a "no entrance" barrier between the pure, holy God and the sinful people.

The Russian cross has 3 cross-beams:



On the top beam was written the charge: "King of the Jews". The middle beam was where Jesus' arms were nailed. The bottom may represent unbalanced "scales of justice" - but raised to the left, to show that one criminal believed in Jesus and went up to heaven.

Discuss



1. Verses 32-33: Describe the two men executed with Jesus.
2. Verse 34: What did Jesus ask God while he hung from the cross?
3. Verse 35: What did the Jews say and do?
4. Verses 36-37: What did the Roman soldiers say and do?
5. Verse 38: What was the charge against Jesus? Is it true? In what way?
6. Verse 39: What did the first criminal say? What did this man want?
7. Verses 40-41: What is different about the second criminal? How does this man describe himself? What does the second criminal say about Jesus?
8. Verse 42: What does the second criminal say to Jesus? How is this a prayer?
9. Verse 43: What does Jesus promise?
10. Verses 44-45: What unusual things happened when Jesus was dying?
11. What is the meaning of the darkness that fell on the cross? (see note).
12. Verse 45: What is the meaning of the tearing of the temple curtain? (see note).

Chapter Summary



We want to blame other people. We never want to blame ourselves. Some people blame the Jews for executing Jesus. Other people blame the Romans. The Bible says that Jesus died because we all deserve the blame - God's judgment. We have all failed. We all dishonor God. We don't want to serve God's kingdom. God's judgment - punishment which we all deserve - fell on Jesus. As a result, the curtain was torn, the barrier was lifted, and the way into God's favor and presence was opened. Jesus lived the life we should live. Jesus died the death we deserve. One criminal understood this. Do we?

Life-Changing Conversations



What makes people doubt?

This week, we meet Thomas - one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Thomas listened to Jesus' teaching and watched Jesus healing. Thomas followed Jesus for over three years. But Thomas was slow to believe that Jesus was really the Son of God.

Thomas appears to be a skeptic. Thomas often disagreed with his friends. Thomas asked questions about what people claim. And Thomas often had doubts about what other people believed.

When Jesus decided to go back to a place where people wanted to kill him, Thomas said to the other disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with [Jesus]." (John 11:16). Jesus taught the disciples about going to heaven. Jesus Christ would return to heaven, to prepare a place for all who believe in him. Jesus said his friends could follow him. But Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5)

Some people call Thomas "doubting Thomas." But that is unfair. It is more accurate to call this uncertain disciple, "tangible Thomas." Like a scientist or engineer, Thomas needed proof, facts, and some tangible evidence that Jesus Christ had risen from the grave.

What proof do you need?

What makes it difficult for people to believe? Are you a skeptic?

- Some people experience difficulties in life, which make it hard to believe in God.
- Other people have intellectual doubts about the existence of a Supreme Being.
- Still other people cannot believe that a good God can allow a world filled with human pain, physical suffering, evil people, serious diseases, and final death.
- Some people are like Thomas. They believe in physical evidence, but not spiritual things. They can believe in scientific evidence. But they cannot believe words about God.
- How about you? What are your doubts?



What happened to Thomas?

Thomas demanded physical proof that Jesus had been raised from the dead. After Thomas touched Jesus' wounds, "tangible Thomas" became a believer. Thomas was the first person to openly testify that Jesus is truly God: "My Lord and my God."

Jesus Christ promised to bless people who cannot "see", but still believe, based on testimony. Thomas began to testify in many places that Jesus is Lord, God, and the Savior of the world.

There is some uncertainty about Thomas in later history. Thomas may have testified to the good news of Jesus' resurrection as far as southwest India. Christians in India claim to have learned about Jesus from Thomas. The church of Kerala has a tradition that Thomas traveled there to spread the Christian faith. The Apostle Thomas may have been killed and buried at Mylapore in southern Chennai. An ancient cross of stone marks the place.

Thomas, who was slow to believe, was the only Apostle to travel outside the Roman Empire. Thomas spread the good news about Christ - perhaps in both the Persian Empire and India.

Today, no one can physically see Jesus. But God blesses people in all the world. Jesus Christ offers you the hope of heaven, forgiveness of your sins, and new life. But how can you believe without seeing Jesus? We must all listen to the testimony of the apostles. Thomas and the other apostles were eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. We can read and hear the apostles' testimony in the Bible. Faith does not come from seeing, but from hearing.

Notes:

disciples: followers of Jesus, his students and learners.

skeptic: a person who doubts and questions things.

tangible: something physical or material that you can touch.

testify, testimony: to declare that something is true. To be a witness to the truth.

Notes:

first day of the week: it was a Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

disciples: followers of Jesus: his students and learners.

sent, sending: to send for a special purpose or mission. The word "apostle" comes from this word. Jesus sent the disciples as eye-witnesses to Jesus' rising from the dead. God the Father sent Jesus into the world from heaven as the king of God's kingdom. Now Jesus sends the apostles into the world as messengers and ambassadors of God's kingdom.

breathed ... receive the Holy Spirit: In the Bible book of Genesis, the Lord made man "from the dust of the ground and breathed into [the man's lungs] the breath of life..." (Genesis 2:7) Here, Jesus (as the Lord) breathes new life into people - God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

Didymus: the Greek word for "twin." Was Thomas a twin?

blessed: God's favor.

in this book: the Bible book of John.

In his [Jesus] Name: If you believe in Jesus, you will receive God's gift of new life, because of the value of who Jesus is, and what Jesus did. So, "in his Name" means "because of Jesus."

Week 14: When Jesus gave faith to a doubting friend Life-Changing Conversations

From the Bible: John 20:19-31



¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After [Jesus] said this, [Jesus] showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As [God] the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that [Jesus] breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But [Thomas] said to [the other disciples], "Unless I see the nail marks in [Jesus'] hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into [Jesus'] side, I will not believe it."

²⁶ A week later [Jesus'] disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to [Jesus], "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told [Thomas], "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these [miraculous signs that Jesus did] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his [Jesus] Name.

Discuss



1. Verse 19: When did this happen? Why did the disciples meet in a locked room? Who entered into this closed room?
2. Verse 19: What did Jesus say to the disciples?
3. Verse 20: What did Jesus *show* to the disciples? How did the disciples respond?
4. Verses 21-23: Who had sent Jesus into the world? Who sends the apostles? What power and authority did Jesus give to the apostles?
5. Verses 24-25: What had Thomas missed? What did the others say to Thomas? What proof did Thomas demand - in addition to what Thomas' friends told him?
6. Verse 26: When did this happen? Why do you think Jesus came again?
7. Verses 27-28: What did Jesus say to Thomas? How did Thomas respond?
8. Verse 29: Who does Jesus bless? Is it wrong to say, "If I see, I can believe"?
9. Can you directly observe (be an eyewitness) to the resurrection of Jesus Christ? If you cannot see Jesus, then how can you believe in Jesus?
10. Verse 30: What is *not* written down in this book - the Bible book of John?
11. Verse 31: For what purpose did John (one of the Apostles) write this book?
12. What would you need - in addition to the Bible - to believe in Jesus?

Chapter Summary



In academic work, people require evidence, data, and proof to believe your thesis. But in your spiritual search, you cannot see proof that Jesus rose from the dead.

The Bible says that "faith comes from *hearing*" - not from *seeing*. The Bible is a written record from direct observers, people who directly saw Jesus win the victory over death.