

The Beautiful Reversals

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The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 1 – From Being Rich to Becoming Poor and from Being Poor to Becoming Rich

Opening Questions

1. Why and how should we help those who are poor?
2. What are some differences in thoughts and behaviors between people who are very poor and those who are very rich?

Introduction

The Bible begins by teaching us that there is a Creator God who has created the universe and humankind. God has created us uniquely in his image for a personal and loving relationship with him. Our lives are most joyful and peaceful when we have a joyful and loving relationship with God. Because of our sins and rebellion against God, we are separated from him and are lost in this broken world. Our lives become filled with pain, troubles, stress, and unhappiness. Deep inside our hearts, there is a longing for a personal and loving relationship with God, but since we are lost, we do not know how to have it. We are blinded by our sins and continue to rebel against God because of our sinful nature.



To think about:

Would you be willing to spend one night in a smelly place that is used to keep animals? One of God's characteristics is love—pure, unconditional, and unchanging. Jesus came from heaven into this broken world and was born as a human being in a smelly place. He has come to save us from our sins.

From the Bible



Luke 2:8-20

⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock [of sheep] by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" ¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



Discussion Questions

1. What happened that night when shepherds were watching their flock (v.8-9)?
2. What did the angel say to them? Was the message bad or good? Why? Where would the Savior (the Christ, the Lord) be born (v.10-12)? What do you think about this?
3. What happened after the angel gave the news (v.13-14)?
4. What did the shepherds decide to do (v.15)? What did they find (v.16)?
5. What did the shepherds say, and how did the listeners react (v.17-19)?
6. How did the shepherds feel when they returned (v.20)?

Notes

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God. Sin is also a powerful evil force.

Sinful nature: the self-centered nature that we are born with.

Shepherd: a person who takes care of sheep.

Flock: a large group of animals.

Angel: a spiritual being, a messenger of God.

The Lord: the Creator God.

Glory: great honor and respect; praise; great beauty or magnificence.

The city of David or Bethlehem: a small town where Jesus was born.

Savior: a person who saves.

Christ: a title of Jesus which means *the promised Savior*.

Christ the Lord: Jesus is the true Lord (Master) because he is God himself. He is the Son of God who came to this world to save us by sacrificing himself.

Manger: an open box for animal food.

Haste: hurry.

Luke 16:19-31

[Jesus said to his disciples and some religious leaders] ¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Discussion Questions

1. What do we learn about the two characters in Jesus' parable (v.19-21)?
2. Where did they go after they died (v.22-23)?
3. What did the rich man ask Abraham and Lazarus to do for him, and how did Abraham respond (v.24-26)?
4. What else did the rich man ask Abraham to do for him, and what was Abraham's reply (v.27-31)? Why did the rich man keep asking for things?
5. How should knowing the reality of heaven and hell impact the way we live our lives?
6. How can we become *spiritually rich* before God? What can we do to help those who are in need? What should we do with the possessions that God has given us?



Closing Points

1. The rich man was nameless and had nothing in the end. Money was the love of his heart. He never desired a loving relationship with God but only wanted what God could give him. Those who choose to reject God in their lives will ultimately receive what they want: God will reject them forever and place them in hell. Those who choose to have a loving relationship with God in their lives will receive what they desire: a forever loving relationship with God in heaven.
2. The reality of hell teaches us that God is holy and just. God must punish all sin. If God did not completely punish sin, he would no longer be righteous. The reality of heaven teaches us that God is loving. Heaven is a place without evil, sin, corruption, suffering, or death. It is a perfect place that God has prepared for all His people.
3. Lazarus was poor, sick, abandoned, and rejected. He was a man of sorrow. In Jesus' parable, Lazarus points to Jesus Himself, who is the *true Lazarus—the One whom God helps*. Jesus was a man of sorrows and was rejected by people. He came from heaven and was born in a smelly manger in this world. He identified himself with us. We are spiritually dirty and unclean because of our sins. Jesus became poor for us so that we might become spiritually rich by receiving his righteousness (see 2 Corinthians 8:9). When we repent of our sins and trust our lives to Jesus, God forgives all our sins and unites us spiritually with Christ. We become part of God's family and heirs of heaven. In our union with Jesus, we are all *Lazarus—the ones whom God helps*.

Notes

Parable: a short allegorical story.

Feast: to eat a lot.

Sumptuously: luxuriously.

Lazarus: it means “the one whom God helps.”

Abraham's side: a metaphor for heaven.

Hades: hell; a place for people who do not want God in their lives; a place of God's judgment.

Anguish: suffering.

Chasm: a deep separation.

Torment: suffering.

Moses and the Prophets: represent the books of the Old Testament Bible (the Word of God). The Bible is sufficient for us to learn about God and his will for us.

Repent: to regret our wrongdoing and to turn our hearts to God.

2 Corinthians 8:9
For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 2 – From Evil Intentions to Good Outcomes

Opening Questions

1. What is one important thing that you have learned in the last ten years of your life?
2. Have you experienced the goodness of God during a difficult time?

Introduction

There is a beautiful story in the Bible about Joseph, one of the ancestors of the Jewish people. When he was seventeen years old, his older brothers, who did not like him, sold him as a slave. Joseph was taken to Egypt, where he worked as a slave for thirteen years. Yet God was with him and blessed his work. God also gave Joseph a special ability to interpret people's dreams by revealing their meanings to him. When Joseph was thirty years old, God gave the king of Egypt a dream and revealed its meaning to Joseph. The dream was about seven years of abundant harvest followed by seven years of severe famine. The king made Joseph the ruler (governor) over all the land of Egypt—second in command after the king—to manage the nation and prepare for the coming famine. Joseph, once a slave, became a ruler in a foreign land. Through him, God not only saved the Egyptians but also Joseph's own family from the famine.



To think about:

In this broken world, sin and evil are everywhere. However, God has promised to cleanse and renew this world from all sin, evil, and corruption. One day, God will make this world a beautiful and perfect place for his people. He has already begun this work by creating a new people for himself—renewing their hearts and minds from rebellion against him to love for him and from loving sin to loving righteousness.

From the Bible



Genesis 45:4-11

⁴So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.'

Discussion Questions

1. What did Joseph say to his brothers who had sold him to slavery? Did he blame his brothers for selling him as a slave to Egypt (v.4-5)?
2. What did Joseph say about the famine (v.6)?
3. What did Joseph say about God (v.7-8)? What do you think about this? What did Joseph understand about God's good and bigger plan through his suffering?
4. What did Joseph ask his brothers to do, and what was his plan (v.9-11)?



Notes

Harvest: to gather crops.

Severe: very great; intense.

Famine: extreme lack of food.

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God. Sin is also a powerful evil force.

Righteousness: the quality of being righteous—blameless or morally right with God.

The desire for God is closely linked to the desire for righteousness.

Plow: to turn over soil especially in preparing a seedbed.

Preserve: to maintain.

Remnant: a small remaining quantity of something.

Pharaoh: the king of ancient Egypt.

Tarry: delay.

Flock: a group of sheep.

Herd: a group of animals.

Poverty: the state of being extremely poor.

Genesis 50:15-21

[Joseph took care of his father and brothers' families in Egypt. They survived the famine and lived well in Egypt under Joseph's care. After living for seventeen years in Egypt, Joseph's father died at the age of 147.]

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Joseph's brothers feel after their father died, and why (v.15)?
2. What message did they send to Joseph, and how did Joseph react (v.16-17)?
3. What else did Joseph's brothers do (v.18)?
4. What did Joseph say to them (v.19-21)?
5. What do you think about Joseph's character? What had he learned about God that his brothers might not have learned?
6. Read Romans 8:28. Have you ever experienced something difficult in your life that God later turned into something good for you and/or others?



Closing Points

1. Joseph experienced God's love for him. Being sold as a slave by his brothers and imprisoned in Egypt taught him to trust God in all things. While in prison, he learned to care for the lives of many other prisoners. Later, he was appointed by the king of Egypt to be the governor of Egypt and to care for the lives of many Egyptians as well as his father, brothers, and their families.
2. When we have a close relationship with God, we become more like him. Spiritually speaking, we begin to see ourselves, our problems, other people, and the world's problems more clearly. We learn to see things as God sees them. God teaches us to see from his perspective when we study his Word (the Bible). God is never surprised by anything. He is eternal, all-knowing, and sovereign. He is in control of our past, present, and future. God works through all things—both good and bad—for the good of his people. He can turn bad things into good things for those who love him. Joseph learned to see his life and the lives of others from God's perspective, and it changed him. He became a savior—one who saves others.
3. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from heaven into this world. He was born as a man, experienced suffering, sacrificed himself, and died on the cross as our substitute, taking the punishment for all our sins against God. He is our true Savior. Through him, a close relationship with God becomes possible for us. When we trust our lives to him, we receive God's forgiveness, which transforms us from the inside out. We then grow in a close relationship with Jesus and are transformed to become more and more like him—one who saves and brings hope to others.
4. Jesus has promised that he will return and bring an end to all evil in this world. He will renew the world, making it free from sin, evil, and corruption. For now, he is giving people time to believe in him and to turn their hearts and trust their lives to him.

Notes

Transgression: wrongdoing; sin (thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God).

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Sovereign: having supreme power.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 3 – From Greed to Generosity and from Being Lost to Being Found

Opening Questions

1. Have you ever lost something valuable to you and made a great effort to find it?
2. Have you ever invited friends to your house for a special celebration?

Introduction

When we invite someone to our home for a meal, it shows our hospitality. Hospitality means welcome and friendship. We welcome our guests and build relationships with them. In the Bible, hospitality means more than welcome and friendship; it also includes acceptance, reconciliation, and celebration. Jesus says, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). Jesus knocks on the door of our hearts. If we open our hearts to him, he will come into our lives, save us, build a personal relationship with us, and transform our lives. When we trust our lives to him, he brings joy to us.



To think about:

If you lose something very valuable, such as your smartphone or wallet, you will make every effort to find it. You may feel stressed and spend a great deal of time and energy searching. In God’s eyes, we are far more valuable than a smartphone. We are lost because of our sins, which blind us and prevent us from understanding God and his will for our lives. Therefore, God must come to us in order to find and save us.

From the Bible



Luke 19:1-10

¹ He [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” ⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”



Discussion Questions

1. What do we know about Zacchaeus (v.2)?
2. What did he do, and why did he do it (v.3-4)? Was this conduct normal for a rich man?
3. Jesus supernaturally knew Zacchaeus’s name. What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus when he came to him (v.5)?
4. How did Zacchaeus react to this (v.6)? Why do you think he reacted that way?
5. How did the people react to Jesus going to stay at Zacchaeus’s house (v.7)?
6. What did Zacchaeus say to Jesus (v.8)? How does this show that his heart had changed because Jesus wanted to be with him while others rejected him?
7. What did Jesus say to him (v.9–10)? What significance might this have? Would you describe Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus as personal?

Notes

Jericho: a city near Jerusalem—the capital city of Israel.

Tax collector: a Jew who collects taxes from other Jewish people for the Roman government. Tax collectors were considered bad people or *sinners* because they cheated by collecting more money for themselves.

Stature: height.

Sinner: a person who sins—thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God.

Lord: a person who has authority; a master or a ruler.

Defraud: illegally get money by deception.

Salvation: deliverance from sin and darkness.

Abraham: the first Jew and the ancestor of the Jewish people.

The Son of Man: Jesus’ favorite title to emphasize his humanity and heavenly kingship.

The lost: a person who needs God’s forgiveness and to be saved from his/her sins against God.

Luke 15:1-10

³ So he [Jesus] told them this parable: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Discussion Questions

1. In Jesus’s first parable, what did the shepherd do when he lost one of his sheep (v.4)? If you were the shepherd, what challenges and dangers might you face while doing this?
2. What did the shepherd do to the lost sheep when he found it? Why do you think he did that? What was he feeling (v.5)?
3. What did he do when he returned home (v.6)?
4. What did Jesus say to his audience (v.7)? What do you think it means?
5. In the second parable, what did the woman do when she lost one of her coins (v.8)? If you were the woman, how would you “seek diligently” in a house with a dirt floor?
6. What did she do after she found it? What was she feeling (v.9)?
7. What did Jesus say to his audience (v.10)? What was Jesus’s main point in his teaching?
8. How do the man and the woman point to Jesus himself, who “sought diligently” and sacrificed himself to find and rescue us—his lost people?



Closing Points

1. The man (shepherd) would face danger and difficulty as he tried to find his lost sheep. The woman’s hands and feet would get dirty as she searched for her lost coin. Jesus was willing to leave heaven, come into this *filthy* world, and experience great suffering and pain. He was arrested, beaten, and crucified. He sacrificed himself to save us. He died on the cross to bear the punishment for all our sins as our substitute, so that he could save us and bring us to our true *home*—heaven—with him. When we repent of our sins and trust our lives to Jesus, there is great joy and celebration in heaven.
2. Jesus said, “I came to seek and save the lost.” His purpose in coming to this broken and sinful world was to seek and save us. Zacchaeus, though rich, was hated by the people and desperately wanted to see Jesus. He climbed a tree and did not care if others laughed at him. He did not know that Jesus had already planned to stay at his house. Jesus knew Zacchaeus’s name because he is God, and Zacchaeus was one of his lost sheep. While others rejected Zacchaeus, Jesus received him, and that changed him. He repented of his sins and became a generous person. He had been greedy for money, but now he became a giver. Money was no longer his ambition, and getting richer was no longer his purpose in life. Jesus became his new purpose and his new Lord.
3. By staying and sharing a meal with Zacchaeus, Jesus offered him personal friendship. Zacchaeus accepted the offer with joy. He gave his heart to Jesus and found joy in him. Jesus wants us to find our joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment in him. Only Jesus can change our lives and give us true joy. Like Zacchaeus, we need to repent and trust our lives to Jesus. When we do so, there is joy both in our hearts and in heaven.

Notes

Parable: a short allegorical story or a sentence of comparison or analogy.

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God.

Sinner: someone who sins against God; a law breaker.

Repent: to turn away from our sins and wrong doings with true regret and sorrow and to turn our hearts to God.

Repentance (noun).

Silver coin: was worth a fair salary for a full day of work.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 4 – From Being Lost to Being Found and from Shame to Honor

Opening Questions

1. What is one example of a shameful act? Have you ever been honored in some way?
2. Have you ever found something valuable that you once lost?

Introduction

In general, all parents want their children to honor them and bring them honor through good behavior. However, because of our sinful nature, we often behave shamefully when we are young, naïve, and immature. What we truly need in life is to be loved and guided by wise parents. Yet, there are no perfect parents in this world, since every person has a sinful nature and weaknesses. There are many good and loving parents, but none are perfect or able to love and guide us completely—except God, who is perfect, loving, wise, all-knowing, and in control of all things. When we have God as our heavenly Father, we always have someone who truly loves us and can guide us throughout our lives.



To think about:

Because of our sins and rebellion against God, we are lost and separated from him. Yet God loves us deeply. Jesus came from heaven to save us who are lost. He offers us a personal and loving relationship with God through himself. Jesus said, “I came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). *The One* who truly loves us has come for us. Will we believe in him?

From the Bible



Luke 15:11-19

¹¹ [Jesus was teaching people and telling a parable] And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’”

Discussion Questions

1. In Jesus’ parable, what did the younger son ask of his father? What did this request mean? Was it a polite request? What did the father do (v.11-12)?
2. When their neighbors hear about this, what would they think about the younger son?
3. Where did the younger son go, and what did he do there (v.13)?
What kind of person do you think he wanted to be? Can money truly give us happiness and a sense of identity?
4. What happened to him later, and what did he do then (v.14-15)?
5. Do you think he wanted that job? What happened to him there (v.16)?
6. What does “he came to himself” mean? What was he thinking he would do (v.17-19)?
7. Was there a change in his attitude? Why do some people change only after going through difficult situations in their lives?



Notes

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God.

Sinful nature: the self-centered nature that we are born with. Because of our sinful nature, we daily sin against God in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Parable: a short allegorical story.

Share of property: inheritance.
The younger son asked his father for an inheritance before his father died. In the culture at that time, an older son received two thirds of his father’s inheritance, and a younger son received one third of it. To give the younger son an inheritance, the father needed to sell one-third of his land and give the money to him.

Squander: to waste in a foolish manner.

Reckless: without thinking or caring about the consequences of an action.

Famine: lack of food; hunger.

Perish: to die.

Luke 15:20-32

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. ²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Discussion Questions

1. What did the father do when he saw his younger son at a distance? What do you think about the father's act (v.20)?
2. How did the son express his regret? Did the father question or rebuke him for what he had done? What did the father do for his son (v.21-22)?
3. What else did the father do for his son (v.23)? What significance would this have?
4. What did the father say about his son (v.24)? Why do you think he said that?
5. How did the older brother react to his father celebrating the return of his younger brother, and why (v.28-30)?
6. What did the father say to his older son (v.31-32)? What do you think about this?



Closing Point

1. Spiritually speaking, we are all lost in this broken world without a personal and loving relationship with God and are unable to see the truth of God. Many people, including religious people, try to attain heavenly blessings through their own efforts. In the parable, Jesus identified the Jewish religious leaders with the older brother. They believed they could inherit the kingdom of God by obeying their religious rules, just as the older brother obeyed his father's commands. Yet the older brother was just as lost as the younger brother. Both sons wanted their father's property, but only the younger son eventually came to desire his father's love and a loving relationship with him. The older son never wanted that. Likewise, the religious leaders did not seek a loving relationship with God but only what God could give them—a good life, blessings, or heaven. They were self-centered and spiritually lost, just like others.
2. Jesus wants us to be like the younger son, who recognized his sin and shame and humbly sought his father's forgiveness and love. Our sins and rebellion against God bring us guilt and shame. But unlike the older brother in the parable, Jesus is our good and perfect older brother. He came down from heaven to this world to find and save us. Jesus sacrificed himself and died on the cross as our substitute, taking the punishment for all our sins against God. He saved us at the cost of his own life. When we believe in Jesus and trust our lives to him, God forgives our sins and restores our relationship with him. God removes our shame, honors us, and makes us his children. We were lost, but Jesus has come to find us, save us, and bring us *home* with him.

Notes

Robe: a long, loose outer garment. It was an expensive piece of clothing.

Calf: a young cow. In that culture, only a big celebration had a **fattened calf**. It means neighbors were invited to celebrate. The father restored the honor and social status of his son, not only to his family, but also to the community.

Dead, lost, found: Jesus purposefully used these terms to describe that we are not just lost in this dark and corrupted world but also are *spiritually dead* because of our sins. We are separated from God. Jesus came to this world to find and save us from our sins by sacrificing himself. We are *spiritually lost* and cannot save ourselves, but we are *found* by Jesus who saves us.

Angry: the father's remaining property and wealth would be the older son's inheritance. He did not want to take his brother back and sacrifice any of his property.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 5 – From Hostility to Love

Opening Questions

1. What are some possible reasons why two groups of people do not like each other?
2. How does hatred become part of our hearts? How much hatred can we unleash from our hearts? Can we also unleash love to a similar degree? Which one is harder to do?

Introduction

Because we were born with a sinful and self-centered nature, we are capable of extreme hatred and violence. We can be good to others, but our goodness is limited and often corrupted by the desire for personal gain. Fundamentally, we can't love God on our own. We can only reject him and refuse to believe in him. We can't trust our lives to him unless he first changes our hearts. When we love God, we become able to truly love others.



To think about:

Loving other people out of love for God—and not for ourselves—is genuine love. But to do this, we must have a loving relationship with God. When we trust our lives to Jesus, God gives us Jesus' nature, enabling us to love him and others with the genuine love that comes from him.



From the Bible

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ ... a lawyer stood up to put him [Jesus] to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And he answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Discussion Questions

1. What did the lawyer ask Jesus, and how did Jesus respond to him (v.25-26)?
2. What was the lawyer's answer, and what did Jesus say to him (v.27-28)?
3. What did the lawyer ask Jesus, and why did he ask that (v.29)?
4. In Jesus' story, what happened to the man who was traveling (v.30)?
5. What might be some reasons that the priest and the Levite—both were religious workers—did not help the needy man (v.31-32)?
6. Who was the third person who saw the man, and what did he do (v.33-35)?
7. What did Jesus ask the lawyer, and what was his answer (v.36-37)?
8. Why do you think the lawyer did not directly say "the Samaritan"?
9. What did Jesus say to him (v.37)? Do you think he was able to do it?



Notes

Sinful nature: the self-centered nature that we are born with. Because of our sinful nature, we daily sin against God in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Inherit: to receive (as an heir).

Eternal life: In the true biblical meaning, it is to live *lovingly* with God in *holiness* forever.

Justify: to consider to be right.

Jerusalem, Jericho: Jerusalem was the capital city of Israel and was the center of religious activities. It is about 17 miles (27 km) from Jericho.

Levites: religious persons who helped the work of **priests** (religious leaders) in the temple of God.

Samaritans: were mixed raced people who lived in the northern part of Israel. They were Jews who had intermarried with foreigners. The Jews and the Samaritans hated each other.

Denarius (denarii—plural): an ancient Roman silver coin; a fair wage for a full day of work.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Romans 5:8-11

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Discussion Questions

1. What traditional teaching had the Jewish people received from their religious leaders about loving and hating others (Matthew 5:43)?
2. What does Jesus teach about this? What words did Jesus use (his unique statement) to show his authority in teaching and interpreting God’s command (v.44)?
3. Why does Jesus want his people to do this? What is his reason for saying that his followers, as God’s people, should be different than others? (v.45-48)?
4. Is loving all people possible for us to do? Is there significance in Jesus’ emphasis that God is “*your heavenly Father*” (v.45, 48)?
5. How does God show his love for us in the past, present, and future (Romans 5:8-11)?



Closing Point

1. Jesus taught the lawyer that simply knowing what God wanted him to do—loving God and loving other people—was not enough. He had to actually do what God commanded. To love God means to desire a personal and loving relationship with him, not merely to want the things he can give us. Like the priest and the Levite, the lawyer failed to love his neighbor. We all fail to love other people as we should. To love others means to show mercy to everyone, including strangers and foreigners. The Bible teaches that only when we truly love God and have a loving relationship with him can we truly love other people and have a right relationship with them.
2. Jesus identifies himself as the Good Samaritan in the story, and we are the person dying on the road. We need God to show mercy to us by saving us from our sins. We are separated from God and spiritually dead in our sins. Jesus came from heaven to this world to save us by sacrificing himself to die, bearing the punishment for all our sins on the cross as our substitute so that by believing in him and entrusting our lives to him, we can receive God’s forgiveness, be saved, and be reconciled to him. Jesus is the Good Samaritan who saves us at the cost of his own life. While we were sinners and enemies of God, Jesus died for us. In this way, he showed his love for us.
3. When we are reconciled to God, he makes us his children and implants Jesus’ nature within us, enabling us to grow and become like him. He spiritually unites us with Jesus and nurtures us. We will then be able to love others with genuine love, regardless of their backgrounds or differences from us. We will be able to do all things out of love for God and not for personal benefit. We will see ourselves as God’s lights in this world.

Notes

I say to you: Jesus’ unique statement.

Persecute: to harass persistently; to oppress.

Tax collectors: Jewish people who worked for the Roman government to collect taxes from other Jews. They often cheated and took more money to keep for themselves. They were hated and regarded as bad people by the Jewish community.

Brothers: here refers to blood relations (families and relatives) or close connections and friends.

Gentile: a non-Jewish person; a person with pagan beliefs who does not believe in the God of the Bible.

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God.

Sinner: a person who sins. We sin in our lives because we were born as sinners with a sinful nature.

Justify: to be made right with God; to be considered righteous.

Reconcile: to restore friendly relations.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 6 – From Blindness to Sight

Opening Questions

1. Do you personally know someone who was born with a disease?
2. Have you ever tried to help someone understand something, but it was difficult for that person to understand? What are the causes of our ignorance?

Introduction

It is heart-breaking to see people who were born with a disease. Life is full of struggles for them. God does not like our world that is full of diseases. In his life on earth, Jesus met many people who had diseases and healed many of them. He had compassion for them. He is planning to renew this world from the impacts of our sins, including diseases, when he returns. He will renew this world and make it a new home for all his people—heaven on earth—where there is no sin, disease, or death but only a joyful and everlasting life.



To think about:

What is spiritual blindness? While some people were born physically blind, according to the Bible, all people were born spiritually blind, unable to see *the truth of God*. Unless God heals our *spiritual eyes*, helping us to truly understand him, desire to have a personal relationship with him, regret our self-centered lifestyle, and trust our lives to him, we remain spiritually blind.

From the Bible



John 9:1-17 (selected)

¹ As he [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² ... his disciples asked ... “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ ... he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool ...” So he went and washed and came back seeing. ⁸ ... those who had seen him before ... were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ... ¹¹ ... “Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go ... and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” ... ¹³ They brought [him] to the Pharisees ... ¹⁴ ... it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees ... asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

Discussion Questions

1. Whom did Jesus see as he passed by? What did his disciples ask him (v.1-2)?
2. What was Jesus’ answer to them (v.3-5)? What do you think he means?
3. How did Jesus heal the man born blind (v.6-7)? On what day did Jesus heal him (v.14)?
4. What did some of the Pharisees think of Jesus healing the man on the Sabbath, and what did other Pharisees think about this (v.15-16)?
5. What did the blind man think of who Jesus is (v.17)?



Notes

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God.

Sinner: someone who sins against God; a law breaker.

Rabbi: a Jewish teacher.

Anoint: to rub with oil (or other substance), typically as part of a religious ceremony.

Pharisees: religious leaders of the Jewish community.

Sabbath: a holy day to worship God and to rest from work. Sabbath was observed on Saturday. Since Jesus’ resurrection, which was on Sunday, Christians have gathered to worship God on Sundays.

The Jewish religious leaders made many **Sabbath laws and regulations** that forbid people to do certain things on Sabbath day. Jesus often broke their Sabbath laws and was labeled as a sinner (a law breaker) by them. This caused many confrontations between Jesus and them.

Prophet: a messenger of God.

John 9:24-41 (selected)

²⁴ ... they ... said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ... ²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses." ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

Discussion Questions

1. How did the blind man reason with the Pharisees about who Jesus is (v.24-33)?
2. How did the Pharisees condemn him, and what did they do to him (v.34)?
3. Jesus proactively went to find him (v.35). How was this important to him personally?
4. What did Jesus ask him (v.35)? Did he believe in Jesus? Did he believe that Jesus is more than a prophet? What did he do immediately to show his belief (v.36-38)?
5. How does this show that Jesus has also healed his spiritual blindness, enabling him to understand who Jesus is and restoring his personal relationship with God?
6. What did Jesus say to him (v.39)? What did some of the Pharisees hearing this say to Jesus (v.40)? What was Jesus' reply to them (v.41)? What do you think he means?
7. How spiritually blind do you think some the Pharisees are? In what ways are we sometimes like them, unable to understand certain realities or truths?



Closing Points

1. Jesus' miracle of healing a man born blind reveals his divine power and identity. He is fully and truly God and fully and truly human. As *the Son of God*, who came from heaven, Jesus has power over diseases and death. He is worthy of our worship. As *the Son of Man*, Jesus sacrificed himself, bearing the punishment of all our sins against God, and died on the cross as our substitute. On earth, he lived and died for us.
2. Jesus says, "I am the Light of the world." He asked the blind man, "Do you believe in me?" The man believed and worshiped Jesus. Jesus asks the same question to us. He came to bring light and healing to those living in spiritual darkness and are unable to see the truth of God. He heals us from our spiritual blindness and rescues us from the darkness of our sin and this world. He restores our relationship with God. Jesus wants us to see and receive his divine light. He wants us to believe in him.
3. The physically blind man became a physically and spiritually seeing man. The physically seeing men (the Pharisees) were spiritually blind to the truth of God and refused to believe in Jesus. The blind man became a follower of Jesus and began to speak and act like Jesus, giving glory and honor to God and seeing the hypocrisy and blindness of the Pharisees. He also began to be treated like Jesus, rejected by the Pharisees. Followers of Jesus should speak and act like Jesus and expect to be rejected.

Notes

Glory: honor.
To "give glory or honor to God" here means to tell the truth.

The truth is the blind man was giving glory to God, but the Pharisees could not see that because of their spiritual blindness.

Revile: to speak or criticize abusively.

Moses: A great prophet of God, who led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. God gave his laws to the people of Israel through Moses. Moses gave and taught the law of God to them.

Cast: to throw.

The Son of Man: Jesus' favorite *messianic* title to emphasize his humanity and heavenly kingship. Jesus is *the Messiah* (the Promised Savior), whom God has promised to send to save his people from sin and evil.

Lord: a person who has authority; a master.
Jesus is *the Lord* because he is the only true Master.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 7 – From Anxiety to Peace

Opening Questions

1. What things in life make you worry? Does worrying get us anywhere?
2. In our societies, how is success generally measured? Do you feel pressured to meet this standard?

Introduction

What is faith? The dictionary defines faith as complete trust or confidence in someone or something. When we put our faith or trust in things other than God—such as money, career, or a particular organization—we become enslaved by them. This brings anxiety into our lives. But when we put our faith or trust in the right object—God—we are freed from anxiety and become the most joyful. Fundamentally, a lack of faith in God brings anxiety because our thoughts are consumed by the situations of this broken world. The Bible defines faith as “the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). God wants his people to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). He wants us to have faith in him and to trust our lives completely to his care as our loving heavenly Father. He wants us to know him well—his character, sovereignty, and love for us—so that we can be freed from anxiety and worry and live with joy.



To think about:

Sinclair Ferguson, a pastor from Scotland, says, “The secret of freedom from anxiety is freedom from ourselves.” He explains that when we become anxious about a particular thing, it begins to dominate our thinking, and we start to see everything through the lens of our anxiety. It seems as though everything depends on resolving that anxiety, so everything in our lives appears to be related to it. Jesus wants us to learn to see the whole of life as God sees it—the world, animals, plants, and our lives—and to understand God as our Creator, Sustainer, Provider, and heavenly Father. How far or how deeply do we understand this truth?

From the Bible



Matthew 6:25-27

²⁵ [Jesus was teaching] “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”

Discussion Questions

1. Why should we not be anxious about our lives? Does our happiness or joy depend on our food and clothing? Is life just about food and clothing (v.25)? What is your life about? What is the purpose of your life?
2. What example does Jesus use to teach that we are valuable in God’s eyes (v. 26)? Is there significance in Jesus’ emphasis on referring to God as “your heavenly Father” rather than as “your Creator,” “your King,” or simply “your God”?
3. Can we add a single hour to our lives by being anxious (v.27)? Why not? What is Jesus’ point in asking this rhetorical question?



Notes

Sovereignty: having supreme power or authority.

God’s sovereignty means that he is in control over all things.

Sow: to plant seed.

Reap: to gather a crop or harvest.

Span: the full extent of something from end to end.

Happiness vs. Joy: **Happiness** is an outward expression that comes because of pleasant circumstances.

Joy is an inner feeling that comes from trusting God, knowing him, and having a personal and close relationship with him.

Rhetorical question: a question that you ask without expecting an answer. The question might be one that does not have an answer. It might also be one that has an obvious answer, but you ask the question to make a point.

Matthew 6:28-34

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Discussion Questions

1. What is Jesus' point in asking us to consider the beauty and wonder of the lilies of the field in comparison with King Solomon's glory (v.28–30)? How will God clothe us and provide for our basic needs?
2. One of the fundamental realities that distinguishes God's people from the Gentiles is that God's people have God as their heavenly Father, who knows their needs and watches over their lives (v.31–32). Why are many of God's people still ignorant of this reality and continue to live with anxiety?
3. What does Jesus teach us to focus on in our lives (v.33)? What do you think this means?
4. What do you think Jesus means by his statement in verse 34? Does this mean that we should not work hard or plan for tomorrow and the future?



Closing Points

1. When we try to control our own lives, we find ourselves consumed by worry. However, when we trust our lives into the hands of our heavenly Father—who is sovereign and who loves and cares for us—we find peace and joy. Planning for tomorrow is time well spent; worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. We should not let worries about tomorrow affect our relationship with God today. Right priorities give us joy, but wrong priorities make us anxious.
2. Jesus commands us not to worry about our lives, food, drink, and clothing for several reasons: (1) God feeds the birds, even though they do not work, and we are more valuable than birds in God's eyes. (2) Worry is meaningless and does not add a single hour to our span of life. (3) God clothes the grass and makes wildflowers beautiful, so he will surely take care of our clothing. (4) God knows all our needs.
3. As our good heavenly Father, God always gives us what we need, though not always what we want. God always gives us good things. Our responsibility is to discern what is good in God's eyes for us. Romans 12:2 teaches us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."
4. Jesus commands his followers to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*. This means that we are to love God with all our hearts. Our lives should be devoted to God, his kingdom, and his righteousness—personally, communally, locally, nationally, and internationally. It also means that we are to pursue spiritual growth by spending time with God in daily prayer and Bible reading, and by serving God through serving the people around us so that they too may know Christ and be made righteous in him. We are to seek first to be righteous before God by trusting our lives to Christ, and all necessary things will be added to us by our heavenly Father.

Notes

Toil: to work very hard.

Spin: to turn or whirl around quickly.
Here it means that lilies don't make their own clothing.

Solomon: a great and very rich king of Israel.

Glory: great honor; great beauty or magnificence.

Array: to display.
Arrayed here means dressed.

Gentile: a non-Jewish person; a person with pagan beliefs who does not believe in the God of the Bible.

Seek: to attempt to find something.

Righteousness: the quality of being righteous—blameless or morally right with God.
The desire for God is closely linked to the desire for righteousness.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 8 – From Walking in Darkness to Living and Rejoicing in the Light

Opening Questions

1. In what ways do we and the world need the light of the sun?
2. Spiritually speaking, what do you think darkness is?

Introduction

Light is essential to our lives. We cannot live without light. Even plants and animals need the light of the sun in order to live. Without sufficient light, we cannot see well, and we may stumble when walking in the dark. Imagine not having electrical power for a week. Life would be very frustrating because we could not do what we want to do—we could not work, study, or even prepare our food. No one wants to live in darkness. Darkness is not a positive word in our minds; it often brings negative associations, especially when it relates to the power of evil. In contrast, light carries positive meanings. Light enables us to see and to live. It brings good feelings such as happiness, hope, and safety.



To think about:

We were born with a self-centered nature. That is why selfishness, pride, and other forms of self-centeredness appear in our thoughts, words, and actions. The Bible teaches that we are under the power of darkness. However, if we put our faith in Jesus and trust our lives to him, he will set us free.



From the Bible

John 1:1-4

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Discussion Questions

1. John explains the mystery of the Triune God in clear and concise sentences. He invites us to meditate on who Jesus Christ (the Son of God) truly is. What are some essential truths that John wants us to know about the Word (v.1–3)?
2. The Word is the agent through whom God the Father created the universe and everything in it. What else can we know about *the Word* [the Son of God] (v.4)? What do you think it means?
3. Life was in *the Word*. *The Word is the Life and the Light*. *The Word* is the source of all life and all light that enables us to live and to see. What can we learn about *the Word as the Light* (v.5)? What do you think it means?
4. What is the significance of the Word [the Son of God] being the true light to which all other lights, including the sun, point (v.9)?
5. What was the reality or tragedy that the Son of God faced when he came into this world as a human being [a man] (v.10–11)? Why do you think he was willing to experience this?
6. What does Jesus do for those who receive him and believe in him by faith (v.12–13)?



Notes

The Word (the Word of God): the Son of God or Jesus Christ; the second person of the Triune God.

The Triune God (the Trinity): one God in three distinct persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). They are in unity and are equal in substance, power, and glory.

God: a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

God describes himself in the Bible (the written word of God) as one God in three distinct persons.

Each person of the Triune God loves the other two perfectly and receives love from them from eternity. Love is a characteristic of God, and so are truth, light, and life. God says, "I am love. I am truth. I am light. I am life. I am *the ultimate* love, truth, light, and life."

John 3:16-21

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment [based on this fact]: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his [sinful] works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

John 8:12 (Jesus says) “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Discussion Questions

1. How does God prove his love for us? What will happen if we believe in Jesus (v.16)?
2. Why did God send Jesus to this world (v.17)?
3. What is the consequence if we do not believe in Jesus (v.18)?
4. What is the reason people do not believe in Jesus (v.19-20)?
5. Who will come to the light or believe in Jesus (v.21)?
6. What did Jesus say about himself? What will happen to those who become his followers (John 8:12)? What do you think this means?



Closing Points

1. Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Jesus is the Light of the entire world, not just the Light of a particular nation. He reveals the reality that each of us walks in spiritual darkness. We live in spiritual darkness, separated from God because of our sins, and we cannot see the light of God. Jesus came into this world to save us from our sins and from spiritual darkness. He came to bring us his light so that, by believing in and following him, we may have him (the Light of God) in our lives.
2. We sin against God daily in our thoughts, words, and actions and deserve his punishment. We are rebellious people who love darkness rather than God. We are not worthy to be saved by God, and God is not obligated to save us. God is a just God, and he must punish sin. However, God is also a loving God who desires to save us from darkness and from our own sins. Jesus came from heaven into this world to save us by sacrificing himself on the cross, bearing the punishment for all our sins as our substitute. By believing in him and trusting our lives to him, we can receive God’s forgiveness and be saved from his holy judgment.
3. When we believe in Jesus and trust our lives to him, God makes us new people in union with Jesus. The Bible teaches, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). God makes us his children and gives us new life—a personal and loving relationship with him through Jesus for eternity—and a new heart that enables us to truly love him. Jesus came to save us because he loves us. He took the punishment of death that we deserved so that we might have new and eternal life with him.
4. Being a follower of Jesus Christ means being set free from spiritual darkness and given new life in his light. He guides our lives in this broken and dark world with his light. He is always with us, and nothing can separate us from his love.

Notes

The Son of God: Jesus’ spiritual title to emphasize his divinity. He is fully and truly God.

People loved the darkness, their works were evil: similar in meaning; because we are sinful people, we reject God and do not believe in God. In our sinfulness, we prefer spiritual darkness and evil rather than believing in God.

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God. Sin is also a powerful evil force.

Wicked: evil or morally wrong.

Works have been carried out in God: the works of true believers or followers of Jesus are done out of love for God.

I am (AM) the light of the world: Jesus used a special expression “I AM.” In the Greek Bible, the phrase “ego eimi” means “I am” or “I exist,” indicating an eternal present (no past and no future). Jesus claims to be God himself who gives light and life to us.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 9 – From Hunger to Satisfaction

Opening Questions

1. What is the difference between contentment and happiness?
2. Can having a good relationship with someone bring true contentment and happiness? What can prevent a good relationship from developing?

Introduction

Physical hunger is when we are hungry for food for our bodies. Spiritual hunger occurs when we lack contentment and happiness in our hearts (souls). Many people try to find contentment and happiness in romantic relationships, parties, money, and other things in this world. The Bible teaches us that nothing in this world can give us true and everlasting contentment, happiness, and joy. Only God can give us these things. Only through a personal and close relationship with God can we be truly satisfied, regardless of whether our life circumstances are good or bad.



To think about:

God is our Creator. He has created and designed us for a close, personal, and communal relationship with him, in which he satisfies our souls with joy and contentment. When we refuse to have a close relationship with the true and living God, we suffer. Yet many people still prefer this way of life.



From the Bible

Psalm 42:1-2 (NLT) ¹As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God.

²I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?

Psalm 73:23-26

²³ ... I am continually with you [God]; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

John 6:28-34

²⁸ Then they [the crowd] said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Discussion Questions

1. How does the writer describe his desire for God (Psalm 42:1-2)?
2. How does the writer describe his life with God (Psalm 73-23-26)?
3. What question did the people ask Jesus, and what was his answer (John 6:28-29)?
4. What did the people ask Jesus to do to prove that he is *the promised Savior* sent from God (v.30-31)? What was his reply to them (v.32)?
5. What (or who) is "the bread of God," and what is its significance? How did Jesus compare physical bread and *spiritual bread* (v.33)?
6. How did the people respond to him (v.34)? Do you think they understood Jesus?



Notes

Contentment: a state of happiness and satisfaction.

Happiness vs. Joy: Happiness is an outward expression that comes because of pleasant circumstances. Joy is an inner feeling that comes from trusting God, knowing him, and having a personal and close relationship with him.

Long: to have a strong desire to have something.

Glory: eternal honor in heaven (God's dwelling place).

Flesh and heart: body and soul.

Manna: food miraculously supplied by God to the Israelites in the **wilderness** (desert) after Moses led them out of Egypt.

The Triune God (the Trinity): The Bible describes God as one God in three distinct persons (**God the Father**, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). They are in unity and are equal in substance, power, and glory.

John 6:35-40

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Matthew 5:6 [Jesus says] “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Discussion Questions

1. What did Jesus say about himself, and what will happen to those who come to and believe in him (v.35)? What do you think this means?
2. Why did Jesus come from heaven to this world (v.38)?
3. What will happen to those who come to Jesus, believe in him, and trust their lives to him (v.37, 39, 40)?
4. What do you think “hunger and thirst for *righteousness*” means? What does Jesus promise to those who hunger and thirst for *righteousness* (Matthew 5:6)?



Closing Points

1. The God of the Bible has no past or future, only an eternal present. He has no beginning or end. He is unchangeable, self-existent, and self-sufficient. He is the Creator of the universe, this world, and us. He has a purpose in creating us. He wants us to experience his love and goodness, which bring joy and contentment to our lives.
2. Because of our sins and self-centeredness, we prefer to rule our own lives rather than trust them to God. We reject God and do not want him in our lives. As a result, we are separated from God, and our lives are continually filled with anxiety, worry, and unhappiness.
3. Because God loves us, Jesus came from heaven to this world to save us from our sins, self-centeredness, and darkness. He is the Son of God who sacrificed Himself to bear the punishment for all our sins on the cross as our substitute. He took our punishment and death so that he could give us his righteousness when we believe in him and trust our lives to him. When we truly hunger and thirst for *righteousness*—for a right and close relationship with God—he promises to satisfy us. He is the *bread of life* who has come down from heaven to save and satisfy us.
4. Jesus also claims to be *the living water*. He says in his conversation with a woman about water, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13–14). If we believe in Jesus, trust our lives to him, and have a close relationship with him, we will never be spiritually thirsty again.

Notes

I am (AM) the bread of life: Jesus used a special expression “I AM.” In the Greek Bible, the phrase “ego eimi” means “I am” or “I exist,” indicating an eternal present (no past and no future). Jesus claims to be God himself who came from heaven to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst. We find true contentment and happiness in a personal and close relationship with him.

The last day: refers to the end of the world; the day Jesus will return to (a) judge the world, (b) renew this world, and (c) give a new heavenly body to all his people to live in a renewed world—heaven on earth.

Eternal life: a forever life with God in *holiness*.

Righteousness: the quality of being righteous—blameless or morally right with God.

The desire for God is closely linked to the desire for righteousness.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 10 – From Being a Condemned Sinner to Becoming a Righteous Child of God

Opening Questions

1. What are some privileges or benefits of having parents?
2. What are some benefits of forgiveness: (a) forgiving someone and (b) being forgiven?

Introduction

The Bible teaches us that because we are born as sinners with a sinful nature, we sin daily against God in our thoughts, words, and actions. We may have committed millions of sins against God. Our sins are countless. We are condemned sinners before the holy God. Each of us deserves to be punished by God with death, both physical and spiritual—a total separation from God and from all his goodness and grace. This is bad news for us.



To think about:

God is a just God, and therefore he must punish sin; otherwise, he would not be just. He is also a loving God and wants to save us from the penalty of our sins. How can God do both? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came from heaven to this world and was born as a man. He sacrificed himself to bear the punishment for all our sins on the cross. This is good news for us.

From the Bible



John 1:9-13

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Romans 8:1-2, 5-8 (NLT)

¹So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ²And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. ³... ⁴... ⁵Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. ⁷For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. ⁸That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of Jesus Christ being *the true light* to which all other lights, including the sun, point (John 1:9)?
2. What was the reality or tragedy that Jesus faced when he came into this world as a human being [a man] (v.10-11)? Why do you think he was willing to experience this?
3. What does Jesus do for those who receive him and believe in him by faith (v.12–13)?
4. What happens to us if we belong to Jesus? What is its significance (Romans 8:1-2)?
5. What happens to us if we are dominated or controlled by our sinful nature, and what happens if we are dominated or controlled by the Holy Spirit of God (v.5)?
6. What is the consequence if our minds are controlled by our sinful nature, and what is the consequence if our minds are controlled by the Holy Spirit of God (v.6)?
7. What do you think it means that “the sinful nature is always hostile to God” and “can never please God” (v.7-8)?



Notes

Condemn, condemnation (n): to pronounce someone guilty; to sentence someone to a particular punishment, especially death.

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God. Sin is also a powerful evil force.

Sinner: a person who sins.

Sinful nature: the corrupt nature that we are born with.

Righteous: being blameless or morally right with God.

The true light: refers to the Son of God. Jesus is the human name. Christ is his title which means the promised Savior.

The Triune God (the Trinity): one God in three distinct persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God **the Holy Spirit**, who is also called **the Spirit of God** and **the Spirit of Christ**). They are in unity and are equal in substance, power, and glory.

Romans 8:9-17 (NLT)

⁹ But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) ¹⁰ And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. ¹¹ The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. ¹² Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. ¹³ For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. ¹⁷ And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of having the Holy Spirit of God living in us (v.9)?
2. What else is the significance of having the Holy Spirit of God living in us (v.10-11)?
3. What should we do with our sinful nature (v.12-13)?
4. What is one proof that a person is a child of God (v.14)?
5. What are some of the things that the Holy Spirit does for us (v.15-16)?
6. What is one significance of being a child of God and being united with Christ (v.17)?



Closing Points

1. We were born with a sinful nature, and we reject God in our daily lives. We do not want God to rule over or interfere with our lives. We want to rule our own lives and desire only God's blessings, such as beautiful sunny days, wealth, and a good life. We reject God's will for our lives. In God's eyes, we are rebellious and condemned. God should have punished us and does not need to be patient with us.
2. However, the Bible tells us that God is patient with us and even loves us. "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This is the true love of God for us. Jesus Christ came from heaven with the purpose of saving us by sacrificing himself to bear the punishment for all our sins and rebellions against God as our substitute. On the cross, he was condemned as a great sinner in our place. "For our sake he [God the Father] made him [Jesus Christ, the Son of God] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [or in union with] him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we believe that Jesus died for us, repent of our sins, and trust our lives to him, his righteousness is credited to us, just as all our sins were credited to Jesus on the cross.
3. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1). When we trust our lives to Jesus, all our sins are forgiven, we are made righteous, and God adopts us as his children and gives his Holy Spirit to live in us and guide our lives. We can call God our heavenly Father in our prayers. Furthermore, in our union with Jesus, all that belongs to Jesus also belongs to us. God's kingdom belongs to us. We are co-heirs with Jesus. We are also made new people in the righteousness of Jesus through our union with him. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Notes

Christ lives within you: Christ lives within believers through the Holy Spirit.

Mortal bodies: because our physical bodies have been corrupted by sin, we will die physically. However, if we are in union with Jesus, we live eternally with God. When we die, our souls go to heaven to be with God and wait to be given a new physical, immortal body when Jesus returns to this world.

Dictate: an order or command that must be obeyed.

United with Jesus Christ: When we repent of our sins, believe in Jesus, and trust our lives to him, God forgives our sins, unites us with Jesus, and credits his righteousness to us. As a result, we become God's children and co-heirs of God's kingdom with Jesus through our union with him.

Repent: to regret of our wrongdoing and to turn our hearts to God.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 11 – From Perishability to Imperishability

Opening Questions

1. Do you prefer your phone to be made of cheap plastic or high-quality metal?
2. How do you feel when you get very sick? Do you wish you would never get sick?

Introduction

In the Bible, death is defined in two ways: physical and spiritual. Physical death occurs when our bodies die. Spiritual death is separation from God—having no personal and loving relationship with him. Adam was the first person created by God. When Adam sinned and rebelled against God, all human beings (his descendants) were born as sinners with a sinful and rebellious nature, without a personal and loving relationship with God. We were born spiritually dead in our sin. But when we believe in Jesus, trust in his sacrifice on the cross for us, and trust our lives to him, we are spiritually reborn. God forgives all our sins and makes us a new creation (person), giving us a personal and loving relationship with him. The Holy Spirit lives in us to guide our lives as God’s children. Our souls still live in our present sin-corrupted physical bodies with many weaknesses. We grow old and eventually die. However, physical death is not the end of our lives. When God’s people die, our souls go to heaven and are purified from the corruption of sin in the presence of the holy God, our heavenly Father. When Jesus returns to this world, he will give us a new heavenly body—like his—and unite each of our souls with this new body. There will be no sin left in us. We will be holy, as God is holy. Jesus will also destroy sin and all evil and renew this world, making it a holy and heavenly place where we will live with him forever.



To think about:

Have you ever thought of death as an enemy—an enemy you cannot defeat? Jesus has defeated death through his resurrection, and he will defeat death for us. Death cannot hold us. One day, death will be destroyed and will be no more. This is the promise of Jesus to all who believe in him.

From the Bible



1 Corinthians 15:17-25

¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.



Discussion Questions

1. What would be the consequences if Jesus Christ had not been resurrected (v.17-19)?
2. What is one major significance of the truth that Jesus has been resurrected (v.20)?
3. How is Jesus compared to Adam (v.21-22)?
4. When will the resurrection of those who belong to Jesus take place (v.23)?
5. What will happen after that (v.24-25)?
6. What is the last enemy to be destroyed (v.26)?

Notes

Sin: thought, word, or action that is dishonoring or disobedient to God. Sin is also a powerful evil force.

Faith: confidence or trust in someone or something.

Futile: useless; pointless; incapable of producing any useful result.

Perish: to die or be destroyed; to rot or decay.

Resurrection: coming back to life.

His coming: Jesus’ second coming. At his first coming, he came to sacrifice himself and to save his people. When he returns to this world (his second coming), he will: (1) judge all people, (2) renew this world and unite it with heaven (heaven on earth; the Kingdom of God) for his people, and (3) give a new heavenly body to his people.

The end: Jesus will bring an end to this world when he returns.

1 Corinthians 15:40-58

⁴⁰There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.



Discussion Questions

1. There is a difference between our current earthly bodies and our future, resurrected bodies. Our earthly bodies are corrupted by sin, but our resurrected bodies will be spiritual and heavenly (v.40). What is one illustration that explains this (v.41)?
2. What are some additional differences or contrasts between the two bodies (v.42-44)?
3. What are some differences or contrasts between Jesus and Adam (v.45-49)?
4. What is the mystery of the resurrection (v.50-53)?
5. How is death defeated by God for his people (v.54-57)?
6. Knowing our end, how should we live our lives now (v.58)?

Closing Points

1. The sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundation of Christianity. This is the Gospel (good news) for us. Jesus sacrificed himself to bear the punishment for all our sins against God. He died on the cross, bearing God’s judgment as our substitute. He was buried but rose again on the third day, defeating death for us. In Adam, we were born in sin. In Jesus, we can be spiritually born again, receiving a new life with him that never ends and a new heart that loves him who loved us first.
2. When we believe in Jesus and trust our lives to Him, we are justified by God. God gives us the righteousness of Jesus and treats us as righteous in his sight. He adopts us as his children, and his Holy Spirit lives in us. The Holy Spirit begins the work of renewing us and making us more and more like Jesus, sanctifying us daily as we obey him. When we die, our souls will go to heaven to be with Jesus and be purified in his holy presence. When Jesus returns, he will glorify us by giving our souls a new heavenly body. We will live with him in a renewed world—heaven on earth. We were born mortal and perishable, but in our union with Jesus, we become immortal and imperishable.

Notes

Glory: great honor and respect; praise; great beauty or magnificence.

Sow (sown—past participle): to plant.

Perishable: can decay or become bad.

Imperishable: cannot decay or go bad; permanent; enduring; eternal.

The Kingdom of God: refers to the completion of God’s kingdom when God unites heaven (the spiritual world) with the renewed earth (the physical world), heaven on earth.

Mortal: can die.

Immortal: cannot die.

Steadfast: loyal; faithful.

Abounding: plentiful; abundant.

Justify: to be made right with God; to be considered righteous.

Sanctify: to purify; to make holy and righteous.

Glorify: to give honor with praise or worship.

The Beautiful Reversals

Lesson 12 – From Intense Persecution to Courageous Perseverance

Opening Questions

1. Have you ever been mistreated? What are some reasons for mistreatment?
2. If the God of the Bible is the true and living God and the devil is God's enemy, what would the devil do to God's people?

Introduction

Jesus taught that his followers will be persecuted just as he was persecuted and killed. He says, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12). A mark of true Christians, who are in union with Jesus, is that we share in his suffering. The devil uses people to attack and persecute God's people.



To think about:

God is always with his people, guiding their lives and strengthening them. Jesus will return and destroy all sin and evil. He will bring judgment on the devil, all evil spirits, and all people who reject him. He will end all suffering for his people, glorify them with new heavenly bodies, and bring them into his kingdom. Make sure that we are his people and remain faithful to him.

From the Bible



Romans 5:1-5

¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

1 Peter 5:6-11

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

¹¹To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.



Discussion Questions

1. What happens when we repent of our sins and trust our lives to Jesus (Romans 5:1)?
2. Through whom and by what do we have access to this grace of God (v.2)?
3. What does our suffering in this world ultimately produce (v.3-4)?
4. Who has been given to us when we become God's children? What is the connection between him and our hope in this life and the life to come (v.5)?
5. Why is practicing and developing humility important for God's people (1 Peter 5:6)?
6. What comfort do we have knowing that we have a heavenly Father (v.7)?
7. Why should we be watchful for the devil (v.8-9)?
8. What will God do for us at the end of the world—when Jesus returns (v.10-11)?

Notes

Revile: to insult or criticize angrily.

Enemies of God's people: (1) the flesh—our sinful nature, (2) the world—this sinful and corrupted world, (3) **the devil** (Satan)—a rebellious angel who is the leader of evil spirits/demons.

Justify: to be made right with God; to be considered righteous. We are **justified by our faith in Jesus Christ** who has sacrificed himself and died for the punishment of all our sins as our substitute. Our sins separate us from God, but our justification brings **peace with God**.

Grace: an act of mercy, kindness, or blessing from God to us with no consideration of our good quality or worth.

Glory: great honor and respect; praise; great beauty or magnificence.

Sober-minded: stay alert; clear thinking.

Prowl: move around restlessly in search of prey.

Resist: fight back; stand against.

2 Corinthians 4:4-18

⁴ ... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.



Discussion Questions

1. What do you think are some of the ways the devil has tried to blind or prevent people from learning about Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross for our sins (v.4)?
2. Why is proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord important when sharing the gospel (v.5)?
3. Who can give light in the darkness of our hearts (v.6)?
4. We are "jars of clay," having a lot of weaknesses and are easily broken. Why does God put *his treasure* in us (v.7)?
5. How is God's power demonstrated in our lives (v.8-11)?
6. How did Paul's sacrifice for God's kingdom benefit other people (v.12)?
7. What was Paul confident about (v.13-14)?
8. What was the purpose of Paul's life and gospel ministry (v.15)?
9. What was Paul's vision that empowered him to sacrificially serve others (v.16-18)?

Closing Points

1. The devil (the god of this world) prevents people from understanding their sins, self-centeredness, and rebellion against God, as well as their need for God's forgiveness and saving grace. However, God helps us understand our need for Jesus. When we repent of our sins and trust our lives to Jesus by faith, we have peace with God and are justified. God adopts us as his children, and his Holy Spirit lives in us, guiding our lives.
2. The devil will tempt us to sin against God and may even use people in this world to persecute us, either physically, mentally, or both. If we try to bring people to Jesus by sharing the good news and teaching the Bible to them, we may experience even more serious persecution. We may feel intimidated. However, God will strengthen and guide us. His power will be demonstrated in our lives. Our suffering produces perseverance and great hope in Christ, and our work will not be in vain (see 1 Corinthians 15:58).
3. Jesus will return, end all his people's suffering in this world, and bring us into his glorious kingdom. If we die before his return, he will immediately bring our souls to him to experience heavenly blessings. As Paul says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Notes

The god of this world: the devil.

The *gospel*: the good news.

We: the Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter to the Corinthian church, and his team.

Treasure: referring to *the light of the gospel* or the good news of Jesus Christ.

Afflict (affliction-noun): to cause suffering or pain.

Perplex: to feel uncertain.

Manifest: to show or reveal.

Mortal flesh: our bodies that will die.

Our outer self is wasting away: our bodies are dying.

Inner self: spirit or soul.

Transient: not permanent.

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Resources

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