TIM

In 2009 I attended a course that teaches students to read and understand a Bible passage to the point where they can write and give a Bible talk on that passage. The talks were largely evaluated through peer critique. Here I present the talks which I gave, as well as the critique I received.

Apart from the TIM talks, I also present here the products of other studies and trainings. See Related Studies [1] for these studies.

- Add new comment [2]

Harvest Season

Introduction

This was my first TIM talk. For the first round of talks we were free to choose any passage we wanted to. Our only constraints we time and that it should be a gospel talk. For my passage I chose one of the many things that Jesus said in the gospel of Matthew which I find particularly powerful.

For my **intended audience** I chose Christian students. The talk was held on 18 March 2009.

The Talk

> [35]Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. [36]When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37]Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. [38]Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” – Matthew 9:35–38 (NIV)

As you may know, we are now in the middle of the harvest season, if only because of getting stuck behind tractors on the road moving along at 10km/h. I suppose most of us do not consider how our food—our bread and rice and fruit and wine—get to the stores from where we buy it. Do we ever to stop to think about the farmer—the sower and grow—and the concerns he has? Are you at all aware that we are experiencing a drought this year, and that South Africa will have to import an estimated 1 million tonnes of wheat? Perhaps you are or perhaps you aren’t, but does the gravity and reality of words like “drought” and “failed harvest” impress us? Not only do we always find food in our stores when we go out looking for it, but we are spoiled for choice. Earlier this week I was amazed to realize I was part of a peculiar group of people in a store. While others were milling about around us, we stood mesmerised in from of the bread section, like a group of strangers united in front of a TV watching a sports final. Cheap bread, expensive bread, low GI, whole wheat, white bread, toaster bread: so many choices! And none of us lifted a finger to get any of it there. Someone provided for us.

In Matthew 9:36-–38, Jesus speaks of people as a harvest: a crop which had been nurtured into ripeness and readiness. My question to you is this: are we as complacent about the harvest He speaks of as we are about the physical harvest?

When Jesus sees the crowd, He feels compassion for them. They are tired and troubled by the laws

and the heavy burdens that are lain on them. They are neglected and distracted by the very people who are suppose to lead and instruct them. And they were not alone. Today, the world is full of people like these: people longing for love, healing and forgiveness. But there is good news for these people: Christ Jesus came to Earth and without fault or sin was nailed to a cross so that He could die and take our sin away. And Jesus arose again, so that we can believe in Him and find the love, healing and forgiveness we were longing for. Yes, this is the Good News! And it is out there!

But who will deliver this news? Who will accurately and correctly teach of the salvation we have in Jesus? Jesus says “Ask the Lord to send out workers into his harvest field”. It is our responsibility to be concerned about the harvest. However, directly after Jesus said these words, in Matthew chapter 10, Jesus instructs His disciples to go out and spread the Good News! He repeats it again at the end of the book of Matthew, 28:18–20. This time Jesus gives them the Great Charge: “[19]Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”. The same people He instructed to pray for the work to be done, Jesus sends out to do that work. And what a wonderful mission isn’t it? Imagine the privilege of sharing the Good News of Christ. Imagine telling one’s stories of salvation and redemption. In John 4:38, Jesus says: “[38]I sent you to reap what you have not worked for.”. Jesus laid His life down for the people of the harvest and God prepares their hearts for the Good News. They planted the seeds and grew the crops. All that is necessary, is for someone to bring the harvest in.

But who is spreading this glorious news? Surely someone is? Surely it is the preachers and pastors and missionaries? Surely. After all, someone fed us and took care of us. It was not by our own instrument: someone provided for us. Surely someone will provide for the person down the street or in class? We find great joy and encouragement in seeing the fellow believers around us. But how often do we stop to think where they came from? How was this part of the harvest brought in? No, I don’t suppose we often stop to think about this question. All that matters, after all, is that the harvest does come in. We are not concerned by the hows.

But we should be. The reality is that the harvest is too great for few workers to bring in. How terrible a waste would it be to let the unharvested crop rot away? Jesus’ Great Charge is for all is followers and believers. We are charged to ask God to send people to work in the fields. We are then charged to go out into these fields and help bring in the harvest: to spread the gospel. Even if your calling is not in ministry, you can support and encourage those who do minister. Get involved in church initiatives and activities. After all, every part of the body of Christ works towards the same goal. But when the time comes to speak, regardless of where you think your gift lies, you must not shy away. Stand up when God answers your prayers through you yourself and let His Holy Spirit speak.

When you next see someone who is damaged by this world and is weary, and you are filled with compassion for them, what will you do? Will you trust that “someone” will provide? Or will you help with the harvest?

Critique

The talk was well received and apart from a couple of minor hitches, the delivery went well. The main point of criticism was that this wasn't a *gospel* talk. It therefore didn't contain anything for the unbeliever. I also had too many references to other Bible passages for a talk of this length. For a longer talk (approaching the length of a sermon), this would have been good.

- Add new comment [3]

A Worthy Example

Introduction

For the second round of TIM talks, we worked through the book of Titus. The previous three talks had been on Titus 1 and I was the first one to give a talk on Titus 2, although I opted to not do the entire chapter.

Again my **target audience** was students, although this time I aimed to prepare a proper gospel talk. The talk was presented on 6 May 2009.

The Talk

> [1]You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. [2]Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. [3] Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. [4]Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, [5]to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. [6] Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. [7]In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness [8]and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. [9]Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, [10]and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive. – Titus 2:1–10 (NIV)

We all know the figure of Mahatma Gandhi. By human standards, he was a remarkable man. In South Africa he became an advocate for racial equality through passive civil disobedience and non-violent protests. His efforts brought to the world's attention early the injustices Indians suffered in a racially segregated society. In India he supported the cause of Indian independence from Britain and, after independence in 1947, advocated peace between the Hindu and Islamic factions in India. While his beloved India was being torn apart by differences between Hindus and Muslims, Gandhi had read and, to some degree, reconciled for himself the religious text of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. He never relented his beliefs and ideals under any hardship or duress and was always prepared to die for the causes he supported. To the world he remains a striking example of pacifism, compassion and tolerance.

Gandhi was raised as a Hindu within the largest empire the world has ever seen. The British Empire was, therefore, very cosmopolitan. It was also, officially, Christian, and during his lifetime Gandhi came into contact with many people from different backgrounds who claimed to be Christian. As I mentioned, he was well read on several religious text. Of these, Jesus's Sermon on the Mount made a big impact on him. While he remained a Hindu, he believed that everyone would do well to keep to what Jesus preached on the mount. However, regarding Christians, he once said:

> "I like your Christ. I do not reject your Christ, I love your Christ. It is just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ."

It is clear that Gandhi had great admiration of Jesus, but when he looked out over the Christian religion, he mostly saw hollow men filled with materialism and greed: people who had heard, but had not listened; people who knew, but did not believe.

Many others beside Gandhi have looked at Christians and not seen anything they liked. The people they looked at could have committed gross atrocities in the name of the church or simply have been unspectacular and not different from anyone else. The examples (or lack thereof) of such people have been the fuel for many critics of the Christian faith. They saw lives they did not desire and

teachings taken in without meaning.

Paul recognised the dangers of not leading a life worthy of a follower of Christ. The people to who the passage was directed, lived amongst extreme hedonism. They were surrounded by all the temptations life can throw at a person. It was important for the people of that church to be encouraged by the good examples of their fellow Christians in their day-to-day lives. Are we that different today? Does the world not encourage us to seek the satisfaction of our own desires as quickly as possible? Is it not so that we can all do with a good example of a restrained yet fulfilled life? There is also the matter of the non-believer looking in. It is important to be a good example for them, so that they can see that the Gospel is alive and powerful and not merely a collection of empty words. Those hungry for meaning and fulfilment can then faithfully come and explore the promises of Jesus Christ. And those who scoff and ridicule will be quiet and lacking in arguments against those who profess to follow Christ.

But there is a much more important reason than those I have just mentioned for paying heed to Paul's instructions. Paul wants the people to be self-controlled, to be kind and loving, to serve others and to teach what is good and right. These are qualities of Jesus. Jesus did not give in to temptations. He taught with patience and kindness. He left His place in Heaven to become a servant on Earth. He loved the people of this world so much that He died for them.

To know and accept Jesus is to become like Him. How can one have a divine revelation and not be changed by it? How can you hear the best news in creation and not share it? How can you be shown mercy and kindness beyond what you deserve, and not show it yourself? Paul gives concrete instructions on how different groups of people should behave. But on closer inspection, we see that all these instructions are strung together by the same themes: those of self-control, those of being an example, those of servitude, and those of love and respect. See, it is not a matter of living according to a concrete set of rules. It is about being wholly and utterly transformed into someone through whom the image of Jesus shines.And this is the image Jesus gave us: He is King, but He came to serve. As God He was all powerful, but He was humble and gentle. We were blind and deaf to the truth, but He came to teach us so that our eyes and ears might finally be open. We hated and killed Him, and He loved us and defeated death so that we can one day enter the presence of God and have ultimate joy and rest.

If you are a Christian, I want to say to you that if you are not known for your deeds, you will be known by the deeds of those around you or those that came before you. Perhaps you have been accused of being someone you are not. If so, stand up, make your deeds, actions, service and self-control known, so that others can see the image of Christ shine though you. If you feel that your life is not a true reflection of Christ, remember that God is not the only one who sees our sins: the people around us also see them. The people to who we should be an example, see how we fail. And we fail them just as much as we fail God, if not more.

If you have not yet come to know Christ, I challenge you to go to the Bible and look at the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. Jesus commands us to be like Him. Is that not something you maybe long for? Is that not a picture of someone you might like to be? If you welcome Jesus into your life, you can start to get to know Him and how He wants you to live your life. I am not promising you a quick fix to anything, nor a short journey. There are going to be many stumbling blocks. But what Jesus promised is real, and alongside Him there is nothing that can keep you from everlasting love and peace.

Critique

The talk was generally well received and the delivery was acceptable.

The main problems lay with my introduction. The Gandhi reference was too long; I gave too much background information for such a well-known figure. On the other hand, one of the people in the group admitted to not having known who Gandhi was before the talk: he knew the name, but not who he was and what he did. For him, my introduction was too valuable. The Gandhi reference also was inappropriate: despite his claims, he did reject Jesus: he did not accept Jesus as the one and only

Saviour and the only path to salvation and righteousness. Him understanding of the Sermon on the Mount was also flawed, or else he would not have been able to so callously reject Jesus as the Messiah.

Finally, it was suggested that the talk might have been better rounded off if I had included the final few verses of Titus 2 in my talk.

- Add new comment [4]

Run Into the Arms of Love

For my third TIM talk, I was again given free reign to speak on any text I wished. I wanted to choose something which was of particularly strong importance to me at the time.

Again my **target audience** was Stellenbosch students. The talk was presented on 12 August 2009.

The Talk

> [11]Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. [12]As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance [13]and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”
> [14]When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.
> [15]One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. [16]He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.
> [17]Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? [18]Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” [19]Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” – Luke 17:11—19 (NIV)

I'm sure everyone here knows all too well of the current flu pandemic which is sweeping not only through Stellenbosch and the Cape, but indeed the entire world. Of particular concern is the H1N1 flu virus. The WHO has stopped giving out infection tallies, as they can no longer accurately track the spread of the virus. They are, in fact, stunned by how rapidly this virus has spread around the world.

I'm sure everyone here knows someone who has or recently had the H1N1 virus. There is great concern over it, especially after the announcement that Ruan Müller—an otherwise healthy fellow student—passed away from it. People who are identified as having the disease are sent home from rez to protect the others from it. That is what is happening here at Stellenbosch. When this is no longer a viable option, entire schools and universities close in an effort to eliminate contact between the infected and the healthy.

We have a natural understanding of infection and the need for isolation. There is strong evidence that in ancient times—long before the discovery of microbes and pathogens—people knew that it was necessary to separate the healthy from the unhealthy. In ancient times such isolation was not very forgiving, however. The sick were often left to their own devices and many times left to die. In such dire times, the sick would band together and help and encourage each other until either health or death came.
Turning to the Text

This is the situation we find in Luke 17. It is unlikely that the people had actual leprosy, because the Greek word translated as “leprosy” is terribly ambiguous and could refer to any number of infectious skin diseases. Many of these diseases were benign and did not pose significant threat to people's

health. But they were still put aside and isolated from society, because the concern here was no only with health, but with cleanliness. The Law given to Moses states (in Leviticus 13) that people with certain types of diseases are unclean and should be excluded from general society. This was not simply isolation, but also ostracism. They were excluded from society and sent to live outside the camp, town or city were the other unclean things were, like the garbage dumps and latrines.

In our passage, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He had been travelling through Galilee, Judea and and east of the Jordan river and did many miracles and taught people about the Kingdom of Heaven. He had acquired quite a following and reputation in this time. The lepers (as I shall call them) no doubt knew he was on his way through news reports from other travellers. They probably waited for them and hoped he would heal them. When they saw him, they knew he could save them from their sorry state and cried out to him.

Jesus characteristically responds calmly and with compassion, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”. It is worth noting the faith of the lepers here: they left and headed towards the town and only on the way were they healed. Had they entered the town still sick, the consequences no doubt would have been dire for them. But the word of Jesus is good and they are healed.

Of the ten, one man realises what happened and returns to praise God and thank Jesus for the mercy he had received. We are told he was a Samaritan. Due to the popularity of the parable of the Good Samaritan I believe many people think that Samaritans were mostly noble and honourable people. But there was much animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans: they often refused help or assistance to each other. But it is a Samaritan which returns to Jesus. Jesus is surprised by the fact that not only did only one return to thank him, but that this person was a “foreigner”, someone whom Jesus wasn't strictly sent to minister for (Mat 15:24). Jesus sends him on his way and assures him that his faith has healed him, although another translations can also be that his faith had saved him.

This story in the life of Jesus is very significant for us today. Living in this world, we are all saturated with sin. It is this sin, which is a rebellion towards God, which makes us truly unclean. Because of our sin towards God and towards one another, we deserve to be thrown out, cut off from this world and burnt with the garbage. This is how it is. We are all liars and thieves and adulterers. Most often the world does not know of these things; it is kept in our hearts, where it shapes who we are and eats away at our conscience and soul.

We deserve damnation. But this is not the message Jesus brings. Jesus brings a message of salvation. And to attain this salvation, we need only call out to him: “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”. There is no more than this that needs to be done, because Jesus already did what was required for sins to be atoned for: nails were put through his flesh, his blood ran down a wooden beam and his bones were broken. He died on the cross for me and for you. And to him was given life and glory so that he may forgive the sins of any who call on him.

If you struggle with your sin, if you are burdened and weighed down, come to him. Call out to him and receive his gift of grace. Become clean and enter the dwelling of the righteous.

But the story does not end there. The lepers cried out in agony and acted in faith. But only one returned to thank God. Jesus was more shocked by the lack of praise for God than he was impressed with the faith of the lepers. Indeed, he only recognised the faith of the one who returned.

If you have already welcomed Jesus as your saviour, I trust that you are in the habit of praying. I also trust that you are aware of your dependence on God in your daily life. We need God to sustain us in the little things and see us through the big things. It is therefore easy to get lost in requests in prayer. Requests not only to keep us safe in our day and grow us in our faith, but requests for our loved ones, the people around us and those who need our thoughts and our prayers. These are all good things to pray for. But we must not forget to turn around and thank Jesus for what he has done for us. We must praise God for who he is.

Percentage wise, how much time would you say do you devote of your daily prayers to thank God for who he is? Not only to thank him for what he has granted you, but just to praise him? To

acknowledge his majesty and his sovereignty? How often do you stop to think about God's works and plans, only to reach the point of being overwhelmed by the infinite immensity of it all and then to fall down, giving praise to God?

Come now. Turn around, and run into the arms of love.

Critique

The talk was well received and the delivery was acceptable.

Nothing was said to be "wrong" with the talk, but a couple of minor points for slight improvement were given. Firstly, I could have elaborated more on uncleanliness and why it was necessary for unclean people to be excluded from the camp (because God was present amongst His people there). Secondly, I could have emphasised the point that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, as this was the apex of His purpose on earth: to be crucified there.

- Add new comment [5]

Trust as a Foundation

This was my fourth and final TIM talk. We, as a group, were going through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and I was assigned to do a talk on Matthew 6:19—34. I struggled a bit with the passage and eventually decided to take as the main theme something which is very relevant to me at the moment: trusting God through my impatience in a personal matter.

The talk was presented on 16 September 2009.

The Talk

> [19]"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20]But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21]For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
> [22]"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. [23]But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
> [24]"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.
> [25]"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? [26]Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? [27]Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?
> [28]"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. [29]Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. [30]If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31]So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32]For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.
> [33]But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. [34]Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. – Matthew 6:19—34 (NIV)

How highly do you value your friends and loved ones whom you have trusted completely? People with whom you have shared your secrets, desires and ambitions. How would you feel if the secrets and feelings you shared with them were betrayed to other people? I'm sure that is more than an academic question: I am confident that everyone here has had an experience of being betrayed, has memories of the resulting hurt and a legacy of a resolve to not trust so easily again.

Trust is something which is terribly important to everyone: every person has the need to be able to trust. And the passage we are looking at today is all about trust.

We are continuing with our series of talks on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Previously we have seen that Jesus has shown that sin lies within our hearts and not within our deeds. He then went on to elaborate that we therefore cannot be saved by our good deeds, because even our apparent good deeds (and abstinence of bad deeds) are marred by selfish and wicked motives.

But in the part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount at which we are looking at today, a change of tone takes place. Jesus again points to weaknesses in the nature of all human beings—lack of trust and hope in God—but this time offers hope by extending an invitation to people to ultimately place their trust in God.

After having demonstrated to His audience that their salvation cannot possibly come to pass by their own actions, Jesus sets the tone for a new message: the message of salvation for which He was sent. And the first thing necessary to digest this new message is a little trust. Having shown that people aren't in control of their own salvation, they absolutely need to trust that God is.

Jesus starts off this part of His sermon by talking about treasures. Jesus is speaking in terms of earthly treasures, but the treasures He actually means is that of ultimate reward. v. 21: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be.” So, in other words, there were you trust your greatest reward will be (here on earth or only in heaven), for that cause you will work the hardest and care the most. When some people die, their “worth” is measured in accumulated wealth. But after they move on from this earth, their possessions remain behind. Others still are measured by their legacy of deeds. But eventually their works will be forgotten, or become moot when the world eventually passes away. But in heaven, where the presence of God will be forever, there one must seek your reward.

The next couple of verses, vv. 22—23, may seem a bit odd. But what Jesus is saying when He speaks of eyes, light and darkness is simply more about trust: if we trust in God, He will fill us up and we shall be able to walk in His light. But if we don't trust in Him, if we shut Him out, our spirits will be dark and desolate. Think for a moment how it would be to have all of your senses taken away from you: consider floating in a void, without anyone being able to communicate to you through the utter darkness. Or you to them. If you are like me, you would get panicky just by the thought of being in that position. Blind, deaf and mute: that is how we would be going through the world without trust in God. And that feeling of isolation won't come close to when the full implication of mistrusting God is revealed.

But mistrusting God is easy, because we have two important sources of strength: ourselves and others. We have the freedom to make up our own plans and seek comfort in other people. By our wisdom, we plug the holes in our souls with money, academics, romance, possessions and all sorts of painkillers. But one day our plans will fail us when they come to naught. This is what Jesus is speaking about in v. 24: we only able to serve Him, or someone or something else. We only have time to gather our treasures in one place, not the other. Heaven, or not in heaven.

But some people do not find their comfort in their private yachts or still their pain with leisurely pursuits: some people struggle just to survive, let alone thrive. Indeed, even if someone chooses a spartan lifestyle, they still have basic needs: food, clothes and shelter. For many people this becomes an obsession. People are taken over by fear of not being able to provide for themselves or their families. This fear can be paralysing. People therefore often allow themselves to be swallowed up by work. But Jesus says, in vv. 25—34 that this is not how it should be. God provides for the plants and animals in His creation. Surely, then, He will provide for us humans as well, whom He

holds is much higher regard. v. 27: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”. I have seen with my own eyes how a stroke can take away a person's life without killing him. Strokes and heart attacks are becoming more and more commonplace in our society. Trust that God is you Father and will provide for you as such, even in hardships.

Thankfully, a trusting, one-to-one relationship with God is possible. It is made possible by the same person who first spoke of it: by Jesus, through His death. He suffered and died for our lack of faith and trust so that we can rightfully call God our loving Father.

But looking at this passage, one must realise that it does not promise wealth and abundance here on earth. It does not promise that you will never suffer or go hungry. Indeed, Jesus says in v. 34 that everyday will have troubles. But he does promise that you have a Father in heaven (v. 32) who loves you and will care for you until He calls you home. We must also not, however, be ignorant and sit around and wait for food to miraculously come to us. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes in chapter 3 that people should work and earn their food. Indeed, God created man for work and to be stewards of creation.

But why then suffering at all? I do not have the answer for this, but I do know that, as humans, we have a very limited perspective. Looking back on my own life, I realise how I have learned from past hardships. And I am thankful to have known God to carry me through those times.

But why disappointment at all? Again: our rewards do not lie on earth. Our lives as we know them are not nearly the apex of our existence: we are heading to something much better. But before we get there, we have important work to do here on earth for the kingdom of God: hardships often accompany hard work.

So let us think for a moment: how trusting are we? In the beginning I asked you how you would feel if you were to be betrayed by someone you trusted. But have you ever betrayed someone's confidence, someone's trust? Do you trust all of the people who trust in you? Do you trust God completely, all of the time? Perhaps, for example, as a small child, your faith was shook when you didn't get what you prayer for for Christmas. Perhaps, in your early to mid 20's, you impatiently seek from God guidance in what you dramatically label the most critical decisions of your life. Whenever we ask but do not receive on demand, whenever we call out and are initially left to listen to our own echoes, we start to wonder, we start to doubt, even if just a little.

So what can we do not to doubt? What can we do to attain ultimate trust in God? Once again, as Jesus has said, it is not within us to achieve that. We may not be able to fully trust God all of the time as we should, but we are capable of making Him our foundation and our strength. Next time you are disappointed or are impatient for an answer (which will eventually come) , confess to God and tell Him that you love Him and that, despite your sin, you will never forsake Him. That way you will be gathering your treasure in a place where it matters. Because, unlike us, when we betray God's trust in our faithfulness, God does not shun us, but forgives us, and gives us another chance.

Critique

I had three weeks to prepare this talk, but I never found a angle that I was really happy with. That said, I am proud of this talk: when I finally sat down to write it, I was nearly able to write a hour plus sermon. Still, personally, it feels a bit choppy at places: probably because I know how much I moved various parts around.

Some points I were commended on:

- The illustrations were hard hitting and got people thinking.
- I worked systematically through the passage and had "good flow".
- The introduction and conclusion tied up nicely.
- Linking to 2 Thessalonians.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Some people struggled to see the connection between "treasures in heaven" and "trust in God" from the talk.
- Rewards ("treasures") are already mentioned in vv. 4 and 18. vv. 19—34 ties in with those verses and contrasts rewards attained from men (their praise and acknowledgement) with rewards attained from God.
- Picking up that v. 33 connects it all (see previous point).
- Perhaps I stretch the theme of trust a bit far in the talk. (I'll be the first to acknowledge this: when I decided to use trust as my main theme, I just grabbed it and ran with it.)
- I should not just have posed questions to my audience, but illustrated my points with relevant stories from my life.

All in all I feel good about the talk: I am happy with what I eventually produced and found the critique really helpful.

- Add new comment [6]

Related Studies

TODO: Explain the most common contexts of the following resources.

- Add new comment [7]

Bible Studies

A "Bible study" is an aid to help one or more (but usually a group) people to work through and understand a particular passage from the Bible. It may contain comments on the passage, but mostly consists of questions. These questions are meant to facilitate discussion within a group and serve as a guide to help people work through the passage by showing them what needs to be asked and understood.

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One Thing is for Sure...

Introduction

During MYC 2009 [9] I was part of a workshop that studied how to compile a Bible study for a passage in the New Testament. We were given Hebrews 12:18–29 and had three days to complete our Bible studies.

The **main idea** of this Bible study is: *Through Jesus, we do not need to fear condemnation, but can be sure of redemption if we follow Him closely*. The Bible study was presented on 19 July 2009.

The **target group** I wrote this passage for is students who are growing in their faith and who have at least a very basic knowledge of the Old Testament.

The Bible Study

> [18]You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; [19]to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, [20]because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." [21]The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."
> [22]But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23]to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24]to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.
> [25]See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from Him who warns us from heaven? [26]At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised: "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." [27]The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. [28]Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, [29]for our "God is a consuming fire." — Hebrews 12:18–29 (NIV)

1. Given a choice by a close friend to go on a blind date with either someone she knows to be kind, gentle, funny, upright and faithful, or with someone she briefly met in the Pick'n'Pay yesterday and who she says looks "sort of OK", who would you choose?
2. People often fear the unknown. vv. 18–21 are set against the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt as they came to Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). Why was the mountain so terrifying?
3. vv. 24–25 paint a very different picture than the first part of the passage. What does it mean to "come to Mount Zion"?
4. Who is the "firstborn" mentioned in v. 23 and what is the "church of the firstborn"?
5. By using the word "have" in vv. 22–23, the writer indicates the past tense. But these verses clearly speak of heaven and we are still on earth. How "have" we entered heaven?
6. Genesis 4:10–12 speaks of how Abel's blood cries out from the ground. Able was murdered by Cain for his righteousness, thus the blood of Abel symbolises a testimony against the unrighteous. What is the "better word" the blood in v. 24 speaks of?
7. Entering the new covenant is conditional, not universal. In what ways can people "refuse Him who speaks"?
8. What is the warning spoken of in v. 25?
9. Who will be affected by the shaking up of the earth and the heavens (v. 26)?
10. How do you think the shaking of the earth and the heavens will look like if you consider vv. 18–21? What will remain, based on vv. 22–24?
11. We have said that people often fear the unknown. Sometimes knowledge of something is much more terrifying. Do you think the fear for God of an unbeliever would be irrational?
12. Fire is mentioned at the start (v. 18) and end (v. 29) of our passage. In each case, which trait(s) of God does the fire symbolise?
13. Sometimes we allow things which would be beneficial for us to slip away from us, because of uncertainty, fear or just plain apathy. Is this something we can afford with heaven in light of the passage?
14. What/who makes it possible for us to approach Mount Zion while the Israelites could not approach Mount Zion?
15. Fear of God comes from not knowing Him and being under His judgement. To know God through understanding what Jesus has done for us on the cross and believing that our sins are thereby forgiven leads to joy and celebration. How do you show this celebration outwardly? How do you share this joy with other people?

16. Do you fear the perfect holiness of God? Is this fear different from that of the unbeliever?

Critique

The passage was well received by the group. Admittedly, I didn't have time to progress past a first draft. I was therefore expecting (and hoping for) some criticism, but didn't get any. I can, however, highlight some of the things which bothered me:

- I realised too late that the opening question can conceivable backfire for certain individuals, although probably unlikely. A different opening question with the same idea would be better.
- Question 13 doesn't seem to fit well with the flow of the rest of the questions. I'm am also unsure of the specific relevance of the question at this specific point. (But maybe that's just me.)

Addendum

We were strongly urged not to use any Bible commentaries or other study aids in writing our Bible studies. The idea was that we should wrestle with the passage ourselves and come to insights for ourselves. When I returned home after MYC, I was eager, however, to see what the NIV study Bible had to say about the passage. I was shocked when I learned that, in v. 23, "Firstborn cannot refer to Christ, since here the Greek word is plural. Now, I (as well as other members of my workshop group) had question 4, for which the intended answer was "Jesus". This again highlighted how careful one needs to be when compiling a Bible study. The NIV text makes an ambiguous effort to dispel what seems to be an obvious assumption: the word "firstborn" does not indicate singularity of plurality, but the phrase the "church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" uses "names" which indicates plurality. But does this mean that "firstborn" is plural, or does is refer to those who are within "the church (of the Firstborn)"?

The KJV/MKJV might also lead to confusion: "the general assembly and church of the firstborn"

The ESV and ISV are more helpful: "the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven". (This is also very close to what is in the 1983 Afrikaans translation.)

- Add new comment [10]

A Promise is a Promise

Introduction

This Bible study was composed as part of a workshop while attending Equip 2010 [11]. In that workshop, we looked at Old Testament passages with an understanding that the entire Old Testament points towards Yeshua. We were given Genesis 23 to study and looked at it over three days, presenting our final Bible study on the fourth.

The **main ideas** were

- in the immediate context, "*Abraham buying into the the land of Canaan, literally and figuratively*"; and
- pointing towards Yeshue, "*Living for God's promises to one in faithfulness and obedience*".

The **target group** of this study would be Christians, perhaps young in their faith, exploring the Old Testament.

This study was presented to the workshop on 5 April 2010.

The Bible Study

> [1]Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. [2]She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her. [3]Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, [4]"I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." [5]The Hittites replied to Abraham, [6]"Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead." [7]Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. [8]He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf [9]so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you." [10]Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. [11] "No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." [12]Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land [13]and he said to Ephron in their hearing, "Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there." [14]Ephron answered Abraham, [15]"Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between me and you? Bury your dead." [16]Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants. [17]So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded [18]to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. [19]Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. [20]So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site. — Genesis 23 (NIV)

1. You have had a strong desire to do missionary work for a long time. Eventually this realises and you arrive with your spouse in a foreign place: a place you have desired to see for a long time. But shortly after you arrive, your spouse contracts an exotic disease and dies from it. You can barely speak the native language, at best. What do you do? How do you feel now about being in this mission field?
2. Verses one and two tell us about the death of Sarah, and Abraham, her husband, mourning for her.
    1. Why are Abraham and Sarah important in the Old Testament? Read Genesis 17:5–7 and Genesis 17:15–16.
    2. Read Genesis 21:6–7. Name one reason why Abraham mourned his wife.
3. Why is it necessary for Abraham to buy land from the Hittites? What does Genesis 12:1–7 tell us about this?
4. Abraham insists on wanting to buy the land from the Hittites. How does Abraham feel about unearned gifts in the light of Genesis 14:21–24?
5. The transaction in our passage is a formal legal transaction in ancient near-eastern culture. What is the implication of this for Abraham?
6. A proper burial was crucial in ancient near-eastern culture. Ideally a person was buried where their forefathers were buried. Given this, what is the significance of Abraham purchasing a burial plot in Canaan?
7. Read Genesis 24:6–9. This takes place some time after Sarah's death. What does this tell us about Abraham's attitude toward God and His promises to Abraham?
8. In Genesis 15:6, we see that God credits Abraham for his faith. In our passage, we see a small example for Abraham's faith and obedience by tying himself to the land where he is an alien and a stranger (v. 4). How do these qualitites—faith and obedience—summarise a Christian's relationship with Jesus?

9. God promises eternal life through Jesus. Although we have not seen this reward for dedication and obedience with our own eyes, what should our attitude be in the light of the life of Abraham?

Critique

The Bible study was well received. It was a different approach than most other in the group had followed; their target group was more mature Christians and relied somewhat on the *Swedish Method*. My approach was partially inspired by the approach certain Bible study guides take, especially the interactive Bible studies [12] published by Matthias Media [13].

I found writing this Bible study challenging and what I presented was only, in effect, my first draft. Writing the launching question was particularly difficult and I never come back to it. I considered several different possible launching questions, but settled on the one above to get the audience thinking about loss and alienation in a strange place. I hoped to evoke some empathy for Abraham in his situation as described in the passage.

Admittedly, I never tied the passage back to a New Testament, which I probably would have done if I had more time. Possible such passages could have included, but not limited to, Romans 9:6–8, Hebrews 11:8–16, Acts 7:2–16 and 1 Peter 1:3–12.

The main points of criticism were:

- The leading questions were good, but could be less general/vague.
- I should have stayed more inside the passage, especially regarding the big picture of the Bible study.

The leader of the workshop and I were somewhat at odds about the main idea of the passage. While I placed emphasis on Abraham's faithfulness, he believed it should rather have been on God's faithfulness. I do not think one should necessarily make such a distinction: one ties in to the other (Abraham is faithful to God because He is faithful, and God will in turn honour His promises because Abraham is faithful and obedient). It should have made this point more clear in this Bible study.

Another reason why I stuck with Abraham's faithfulness as a theme, is because that is how I believe the apostles presented him whenever they wrote about him (see, for example, Hebrews 11 and Acts 7).

I wanted to tie the ideas of *faithfulness* and *obedience* to how it is when one comes to Yeshua: a person believes Yeshua can forgive sins and accepts this forgiveness (faithfulness), and appoints Him as Lord and Ruler over his/her live (obedience).

Addendum

This was a challenging Bible study to write, but one that taught me much. I learned how a Biblical passage can easily be twisted to say something which it, in fact, doesn't.

Additional questions which didn't make the final cut:

- What does v. 4 reveal to us about Abraham's lifestyle? Why do you think Abraham wants to own the land Sarah is to be buried in?
- At this point in his life, Abraham is a widower, has only one unmarried son with him and the only land he owns is a small patch which holds the tomb of his beloved wife. How well do you think this bodes for the promises which God gave Abraham?

Final Thoughts

> "The meaning of a passage is always the same and must always be taught. This must not be changed to suit a particular audience! The application of a passage can be tailored to a specific audience."
>
> "What would the gap [in the Bible] be if our passage was taken out of the Bible?"

- Add new comment [14]

Poverty and Sin

At Equip 2011 [15] I was introduced to doing systematic theology Bible studies. Systematic theology is taking a single topic and then looking at what the Bible as a whole has to say about that topic. This is different from Biblical theology, which we had studied in previous [16] years [17], in that Biblical theology considers how a single passage forms part of God's greater plan.

Systematic theology obviously requires hard work, as you need to consider all that the Bible has to say *before* reaching a conclusion! One also needs to resist the temptation of using proof texts out of their individual immediate contexts. All that said, I found writing this study slightly less taxing than the previous two. Obviously we were limited by time and could not consider all the passages in the Bible which dealt with the topic (we were limited to six passages, but I went slightly over), but we still had to search the Bible for key passages which we wanted to use in our studies.

Our topic was **poverty**. My **main idea** was to show the link between poverty and sin, and what the response of a Christian to poverty should be.

This study was presented to the workshop on 25 April 2011.

The Bible Study

In 2005, film producer Morgan Spurlock and his fiancée Alexandra Jamieson had their bank accounts frozen and took minimum wage jobs for 30 days. They soon found themselves in trouble: unable to afford basic medical care, they were spiraling into debt. Their experiment highlighted serious flaws in the American social security system.

1. If you were to freeze your bank account for 30 days, what would you like to prove or demonstrate? What would you absolutely refuse to do to survive?
2. Think about some of the reasons for people to be poor. Who or what is responsible for poverty?
3. Read Genesis 2:8–9 and 15–17. Did Adam lack anything? Or do you think that he was provided for abundantly?
4. What do you think was the most valuable that Adam has in the garden of Eden?
5. Read Genesis 3:17–19. Think of some reasons why these curses can lead to poverty.
6. Read Deuteronomy 28:12–14 and 45–48. The former are some of the covenant blessings which God promised the nation of Israel if they were to remain faithful, while the latter are some of the covenant curses promised for unfaithfulness. In light of Deuteronomy 28, how do you think an ancient Israelite might view wealth and poverty?
7. Can you identify any similarities between Deuteronomy 28 and Genesis 2 and 3?
8. Read Deuteronomy 15:1–11. If the people of ancient Israel were being faithful to God, what should not be in the land? Does verse 4 agree with your answer? What about Deuteronomy 28:12–14?
9. If someone were to fall into poverty, how were the Israelites commanded to respond?
10. If poverty is a consequence of sin, why do you think the Israelites are commanded to act

towards them as they were done?
11. Compare verses 4 and 11. Why do you think they are stated in that order?
12. Read Job 24:5–7. Job was a man "blameless and upright", but was allowed by God to be afflicted and become poor. Here he laments the fact that the poor are dependent on the wicked, who prosper. Do you think Job's observation is accurate?
13. Do you think that we can still hold to a view that poverty is only a form of punishment for sin?
14. Read the whole of Job 24. Does it seem like there is currently a correct order in the world regarding punishment and reward?
15. Read Matthew 9:9–13. Although not stated as being poor, the tax collectors and sinners recognise a need within themselves which only Jesus can fulfill. What other passages which we have looked at deal with similar issues? What parallels can be drawn? What about the Pharisees?
16. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. What was the richness that Jesus had? In what ways did He become poor? Where have we seen this before?
17. Read Matthew 25:31–46. How does Jesus want the faithful to respond to the needy?
18. Why do you think Jesus is so serious that we should care for the needy?
19. What are the implications of providing for the needy as Jesus commands?
20. Verse 34 speaks of the righteous inheriting a kingdom. Revelations 21 makes it clear that there will be no need or suffering in this kingdom; the new heaven and earth. Discuss the similarities between the new earth and Eden, and the differences with the old (current) earth.

We have seen that poverty will only ever exist in a period of human history whre we are living under the effects of sin. Poverty is not, however, now a universal punishment for sin.

21. What do you think the relationship between poverty and sin is?
22. Why should we as Christians be involved in helping the poor?
23. What aspects need to be addressed in a person who is stuck in poverty? [Answers: material needs, spiritual needs, helping to understand their afflictions as part of a fallen world]
24. How can we practically help to alleviate poverty in our community?

Critique

The Bible study was well received. I tried to thread the different passages together by connecting ideas of abundance with God and lacking without Him. Again this was but a first draft and could do with some refinement.

The main criticism was that it was much too long. I somehow got confused as to the length. But then this study could be presented as a short series of Bible studies.

Addendum

Other ideas which could have been explored:

- What does the whole of the Mosaic law say about poverty and attitudes towards the poor?
- Poverty as a result of injustice (see the Wisdom literature and the Prophets).
- Poverty amongst believers (Acts 4:34).
- The issue of accountability (e.g. Paul and the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians).

- Add new comment [18]

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