



*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

Goal

Jesus made an incredibly bold statement one day, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” In this series, we will rethink the purpose of the church so that we can better understand why it should be a priority in our lives.

At the beginning of each gathering take a few minutes to connect with one another and get updated on the week. Then the discussion questions will begin with a few reflection notes about the message and progress into a discussion of the biblical text. Finally, there is a concluding prayer, which can be read aloud in the group after having discussed prayer requests from those attending.

Introduction

03/12/2017

The church is a movement. Whenever the disciples settled down, God unsettled them. They kept moving, just as Jesus had done. Their goal was to spread this message with everyone for the purpose of seeing lives changed by Jesus. Their message was applicable to all and offered to all. As part of welcoming that message and movement, baptism served as a public sign of someone’s commitment to Jesus and that movement.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you identify one or two of John’s main points from Sunday’s message? Which one’s impacted you most?
2. John mentioned that “the gospel (message of Jesus) is radically exclusive but also radically inclusive”, what does he mean by this?
3. What message did you take away from Acts 8:26-40, which John spoke from on Sunday?

Background to the Text

The author, Luke, recounts in the book of Acts the significance of the historical events of the early Church. He does not seek to validate or prove that something happened, but rather to communicate what these events signify. Consequently, he focuses on the fulfillment of a message and movement initiated by Jesus and fulfilled by Jesus through his followers. Luke, is in short, interested in the universal spread of the good news not only up and down the social scale but geographically to the ends of the world (cf. Luke 2:30-32).¹ This spread of the good news even to the least, last, and lost is made clear in Jesus’ speech in Luke 4:18-21 where he quotes Isaiah 61.

Luke highlights that the eunuch is an Ethiopian, which in all likelihood means he was visually different from Jew, Greek, and Roman. This suits Luke’s purposes of showing the gospel reaching different ethnic groups. This is likely the geographical location of the Nubian kingdom,

¹ Ben Witherington, III. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 69.



south of Egypt which is today part of Sudan. He had traveled no small distance and was from no minor kingdom in search of God...but being a eunuch and a foreigner was restricted from full access to the temple of God in Jerusalem. Based on his physical, social, and ethnic status he could not even become a proselyte within Judaism because he likely couldn't be circumcised (himself being partially dismembered). God was fulfilling his plan to spread the good news to all people, even if it required direct divine intervention. The human leaders of Christianity in Jerusalem could only try to catch up with the plan of God, which was operating often apart from and quite beyond their control.

4. How is the message of Jesus universally available to all people? (cf. Romans 10:13; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4)
5. When you consider its universal availability, how do you balance Jesus' statements of exclusivity?

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people." (2 Timothy 2:3-6)

6. The Ethiopian eunuch responds to Peter's confession that Jesus fulfills the words of Acts 8:32-33. What was the next step in the Eunuch's faith?
7. Take a few minutes to discuss the purpose and message of baptism.

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:4)

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free... (1 Corinthians 12:13)



8. Salvation (reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus) and baptism are universally available to all, but has to be received and responded to individually. How have you responded to this message? If you have responded to the first part—committing your life to Jesus—what prevents you from taking the second step of baptism?

If you or someone in your group would like to explore baptism further, please feel free to contact brian.parker@trygrace.org for resources. Grace's next baptism ceremony will be held April 2, 2017.

Prayer Requests

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask for prayers. Write these down as they are being shared. Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of boldness God may be calling them to during this series. Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.

Concluding Prayer

Dear God, thank you that you have made reconciliation with you possible through Jesus. Reveal to me the depth of your love and acceptance that prepares the way for my relationship with you. Open my heart to respond to your grace and share that message of forgiveness with the least, last, and lost. Grant me strength to take new steps in my faith. In Jesus name I pray, amen.