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► TO UNDERSTAND
THE ROLE OF FAITH
AND ACTION IN OUR
LIVES

o Grade 10 | o Unit 2 | o Lesson 9

Action and

faith

THEME: FAITH EXEMPLIFIED IN ACTION

Romans 3:21-31

NRSV

²¹But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. ²⁹Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the un-

circumcised through that same faith. ³¹Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

James 2:14-26

NRSV

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? ²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works.



²³Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? ²⁶For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

INTRODUCTION



In our society, there are many people who exemplify Christ-like servitude for the masses; one of whom we all know is Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa, born as Agnes Gonxha, was a Catholic nun who nurtured and took care of the “poorest of poor” in the streets of Calcutta. Born in Skopje, the capital city of the Republic of Macedonia, Agnes grew in hardship since her father passed away while she was young, leaving her family in financial straits. When she became eighteen, she joined the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, where they named her Sister Teresa of Lisieux and sent her to the Loreto Entally community in Calcutta to teach at the St. Mary’s School for Girls, which she did for twenty years. On a train ride from Calcutta to Darjeeling, Theresa, now dubbed as “Mother”, claimed to have encountered Jesus and was filled with the desire to directly help “the unwanted, the unloved, and the uncared for.” She was able to establish the Missionaries of Charity in the Archdiocese of Calcutta in 1950 and many other organizations thereafter to help the poor. She directly went into the village area and treated the sick, washed the feet of the poor, and prayed for the weary - those who were deemed “untouchable” in the society. On September 5th, 1997 she died, but her exemplary works and organizations still live on to further provide relief for the weary and restless, showing us how her faith in Christ produced deeds that outlive her own life to impact the world through God’s Plan



Bible Exposition

Who were James and Paul?

It is popularly believed that James, the brother of Jesus, a prominent leader of the Jerusalem church, is the author of the letter. James addresses his letter to the Jewish Christians outside of Palestine to instruct them on how to live and prepare for the second coming of Christ. Being the brother of Jesus, we can assume information of Jesus' teachings would come from a first-hand eyewitness, or from primary sources.

Saul of Tarsus, a known persecutor of the newly Jewish-Christ-worshipping sect, was a Pharisee who encountered Jesus in a blinding light and later received sight, marking a change in his heart to spread the message of Christianity. Saul, called by his Roman name Paul, was a missionary to the Gentiles and he preached throughout many areas of the Mediterranean. In many of these areas he was also imprisoned for his faith and still continued to spread the Good News through letters sent to specific churches. Living in an era post-Christ, his information of Jesus' teachings would come from secondary sources.

Views on Justification

“Justification” refers to God’s atonement of our guilt as sinners through Jesus Christ. In the Bible, there are two main views that arise from the concept of justification and how it is attained:

Paul’s View

Paul repeatedly emphasizes justification of salvation as being through faith. In Romans 3:29, Paul says this outright by declaring that we are saved by our faith in Jesus Christ and not by the actions that we do. Biblical scholars support his view by dissecting the idea of “grace”. Grace can be defined as unmerited favor by God, which ultimately means that we didn’t deserve this Grace at any point of our lives. This Grace is freely given to us and by this Grace we are justified. Moreover, any action we do to try and justify this Grace as being earned is outlandish, since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.

This perspective has been seen within the Gospels as well. When Jesus was on the cross, He was alongside two thieves, one who cursed at him and the other who rebuked the cursing thief. When the second thief showed his faith in Jesus as being innocent and asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus is in paradise, Jesus replies, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43) The thief was granted salvation regardless of any kind of action. Within the Bible, there are many other instances where Jesus performs miracles and He simply replies that “your faith has healed you”, regardless of the deeds committed by the individual.

If Paul is an advocate of “Faith Alone” being enough for justification, does that mean we can continue to live in sin? In Romans 3:31, Paul addresses such and makes it clear that we must uphold the law and the standards upon which society is built. Justification is through the grace of Christ, whereas salvation is attained through faith in God’s justification. Although this is often overlooked, Pauline views ascribes to a faith that bears fruit - which is similar to what we will see in James’ perspective on justification.

James’ View

James states that faith without works, or good deeds, is dead. The natural result of faith in Christ is action. At first glance, one may assert that James believes that good deeds are needed along with faith in order for us to gain and retain salvation status, but that’s not what he is implying within the text. James isn’t arguing that works must be added to faith to attain salvation, but that works will inevitably characterize genuine Biblical faith.

James distinguishes between false and genuine faith through his description of the man with faith but no deed. In James’ perspective, faith that is genuine and Biblically true to how Jesus seeks should be one that automatically follows a Christ-like manner. James continues to present his argument by referring to Abraham as being “justified by works” leading to his righteousness. James’ usage of the word “justified” means “demonstrated to be right”. Abraham’s faith was justified by God and, through this, it was “shown to be right” by his actions. Complete faith is manifested through action.

JAMES
Vs.
PAUL

HOW DO WE
RECONCILE?

A misunderstanding arises with these different perspectives since they seem to fervently oppose each other. James doesn’t write this letter to directly oppose Paul’s message. James wrote in the mid-40s AD, meaning that he wouldn’t have known about Paul’s teachings. His letters don’t abhor or directly attack Pauline teachings, therefore we can assume that James is writing to oppose those who pervert Paul’s teachings, since both James’ and Paul’s teachings are very similar in nature.

Both Paul and James agree in a faith that strives to bear good fruit, showing a similar view of justification; however, the expression of Grace isn’t the issue, but what we do in response to this Grace. “Sanctification” is our response to God’s Justification of our lives by setting it apart to be holy and dedicating it to following Jesus. Ultimately, we are justified by God’s Grace through faith and, as a result, sanctify ourselves to the will of the Father by deeds we try to exemplify a Christ-like nature.

LESSON REVIEW

Multiple Choice

Regarding Salvation, James believes that:

- a. simple faith without works saves
- b. faith producing action saves
- c. faith without action can save
- d. only faith and obedience can save

What is “Sanctification”?

- a. demonstrated to be right
- b. unmerited favor
- c. set apart to be holy
- d. faith in what we do not see

What is “Justification”?

- a. demonstrated to be right
- b. unmerited favor
- c. set apart to be holy
- d. faith in what we do not see

Regarding Salvation, Paul believes that:

- a. faith alone can save
- b. faith with works can save
- c. faith and reverence can save
- d. faith and fasting can save

Short Answer

How are James and Paul in agreement with each other with their teachings about salvation?

Discuss the major differences between James’ and Paul’s upbringing and who they target their message to.

What are practical ways we can show a “saving” faith in our Church? Community? School? Home?

Essay

The debate over “Faith vs. Good Works” has lasted over many centuries. Write a 300-word essay discussing the two main perspectives presented in this debate. Be sure to include the following:

- Introduction
- Background on Paul and James
- Paul’s view on Salvation
- James’ view on Salvation
- How can they be reconciled?
- Conclusion

Life Response

There are many other religions and organizations that see the importance of good works to help improve society. Hindus believe in “Karma”, Muslims believe in giving alms to the poor; but Christians are unique in their faith and action. Christianity is the only religion that emphasizes our salvation as being freely given and priceless. No amount of good deeds can make up for Christ’s sacrifice. We believe that only through Jesus we can attain salvation.

Our deeds have limitations connected to our wealth, mind, and physical might; but our faith is limitless in God. Even without these different limitations we have, our faith can save us because we believe in a God that is above all these different elements. We are justified regardless of our deeds, but the “saving faith” we have should produce good deeds, living out the lives God calls us to.



If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

James 2:15-17

Memory Verse

Closing Prayer

Father God, we thank You for giving us this undeserving Grace so freely, even though we don’t deserve it. We ask You to help us in sanctifying our lives for Your Plan and we ask for forgiveness of the shortcomings we will face in doing so. Amen.



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▶ TO UNDERSTAND
THERE IS HOPE IN THE
WORST OF TIMES

o Grade 10 | o Unit 3 | o Lesson 10

I

▶ TO UNDERSTAND
HISTORY IS UNDER
GOD'S CONTROL

Hope for the

M

▶ TO UNDERSTAND
GOD CHOOSES TO
WORK THROUGH THE
PEOPLE

hopeless

THEME: GOD'S RESTORATIVE POWER

Ezekiel 37:1-14

NRSV

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are

dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

INTRODUCTION



http://www.myhero.ws/hero.asp?hero=P_Brand_whitworth_US_2009

Dr. Paul Wilson Brand was a surgeon in the mid 1900s. Born of missionary parents, he grew up in India. After his studies in the UK, God led him back to India, to work in the Christian Medical College, Vellore. There, he was drawn to the plight of the lepers. He realized that deformities in their limbs were not caused by the disease but by insensitivity to pain. The lepers often injured themselves without knowing it, leading to the deformities. He pioneered various techniques of reconstructive surgery especially of the hands, restoring the use of the hands to victims of the disease. Dr. Paul Brand was not merely interested in the physical healing of the patients, he cared about restoring their dignity by giving them back the use of their hands. They were not treated as outcasts as was common in those times, but as people worthy of respect and healing. He co-authored three books *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, *In His Image*, and *Pain - The Gift Nobody Wants*; where he explored the connections between his Christian faith and his practice of medicine.

Dr. Wilson provided hope for a community of hopeless lepers who might have otherwise been left in despair. God worked through Dr. Wilson as He



Introduction

Ezekiel, whose name means “God empowers”, lived in a time of great upheaval. The power and fortunes of nations waxed and waned and the children of Israel had been banished into exile in Babylon. Their years of disobedience, idol worship, and backsliding had culminated in them being handed over to the Babylonians. The land of Judah was decimated and only a remnant remained in the midst of the ruins. Ezekiel himself was one of those who were exiled and during this time of displacement, God spoke to him in visions. His early visions foretold the tragedy of his people, principally, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as well as personal tragedy, the death of his beloved wife at a young age. Though he was the bearer of bad news, he was obedient to God’s will and prophesied as he was commanded to.

The vision that we study in this chapter occurs after the fulfillment of his earlier visions and prophesies; the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of his wife. From the Bible passage we see it is a vision replete with imagery that is hard to forget once we read it.

Opening of the vision

This is a metaphor for God’s revelation of the spiritual status of the Israelites in exile. The vision opens with Ezekiel being placed in a valley of dry bones. Unlike Ezekiel’s previous visions, this one is about the eventual restoration of Israel. However, the scene that was presented to Ezekiel was not one of hope but one of death and desolation. This represented the spiritual state of the people of Israel. They had no place of worship or spiritual fellowship in Babylon.

The valley represents their physical exile and spiritual inertia. In all these things, it would seem there was no hope.

God’s question to Ezekiel and his response

God rhetorically asks Ezekiel - “Mortal, can these bones live?” And Ezekiel answered, “O Lord God, you know.” We see three interesting aspects of Ezekiel’s personality in this exchange with God.

In the midst of the hopelessness (the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of his wife), Ezekiel’s hope was rooted in his faith in God.

He did not try to impose his will on God and left the final decision to God - “O Lord God, you know”.

During the times of desolation and exile, the prophets and priests of Israel lost all hope for restoration. Every person’s zeal and passion for God plunged into an abyss of hopelessness. In the midst of all this, Ezekiel, a trained priest with proven prophetic abilities, re-

Bible Exposition

mained hopeful, humble and obedient to God.

God’s commands to Ezekiel and his response

God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the dead bones that they would be restored; covered with flesh and sinew (tendons and ligaments) and filled with the breath of life. As Ezekiel spoke, remarkably the bones came together, covered with sinew, flesh and skin, but did not have life within them. God again commands Ezekiel to ask the breath of life to breathe on the ones who had been slain (Ez. 37: 9-10). Ezekiel speaks again, thus bringing a multitude of people alive and on their feet.

- We see that God chooses to work through the prophesying of Ezekiel. Though God is all-powerful, he works through His people who obey Him.
- Ezekiel had faith that God’s will would be done and he followed God’s commandments.
- The restoration of the people was incomplete with merely a physical transformation; they needed a spiritual transformation by being filled with God’s breath or Spirit.

Activities

- Think of a time in your life that things seemed hopeless. Are there promises that God gives you when you can stand on in these times?
- How will we respond if God promises something that we may think is ‘impossible’?
- What are some examples of spiritual decay that we find in our societies today?
- What are ways in which we can make known God’s promises within our communities?

CONCLUSION OF THE VISION

In the conclusion we see God reveals the meaning of the vision and his promise.

- God is able to redeem His people from absolutely hopeless situations.
- He was going to lift them out of their exile and bring them back to the land of Israel.
- Trust and hope in God brings revival and renewal in hopeless situations.
- Not only were they going to be physically moved to Israel, they were going to be spiritually transformed by being filled with God’s spirit.

It may have been very difficult for the people to believe that God would be true to His promises. But we know from history that God indeed kept His promises - He returned the exiles of Israel back to a restored Jerusalem and Temple.

LESSON REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. Ezekiel had his vision when the people of Israel were:
 - a. In Exile
 - b. In the Desert
 - c. Enjoying Harvest
 - d. Celebrating Jubilee
2. The bones in the valley were
 - a. Few
 - b. Crushed
 - c. Brown
 - d. Dry
3. God asks Ezekiel - “Can these bones _____”
 - a. Rise up
 - b. Live
 - c. Love
 - d. Fight
4. God promised that He would bring the people to the land of
 - a. Judah
 - b. Israel
 - c. Edom
 - d. Midian

Short Answer

1. What did Ezekiel see in the opening of the vision and how is it related to the spiritual state of the people of Israel?
2. What aspects of Ezekiel’s character do you see in his response to God’s questions?
3. What do we learn from God’s commands and Ezekiel’s response?
4. How does God interpret the vision in conclusion and what does He promise?

Values for Life

In the midst of desperate situations, it is easy to lose hope and faith. It is difficult to believe that God is in control, but our faith in God assures us that He can change our situations. It's only after overcoming these difficulties do we realize that God was with us the whole time.

We should never lose hope in our hopeless situations and lowest moments. Instead we should rely on the love of God and His faithfulness to us to guide us through. He calls servants of His choosing so that His will may be accomplished through them.



Life Response

How do I respond when I see society or myself not quite living up to the standards that God has set? Am I willing to accept God's commands and follow them? In times of joy and despair, we need to reach out to God.

I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord
Ezekiel 37:14

Memory
Verse

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to see that You are there in times of despair and hopelessness. Help me respond to Your call that you make known through Your servants and also help me be an instrument of Your will. We pray that You alleviate the suffering of Your people by using me as an instruments of Your will. Thank You for hope in the hopeless situations and Your guidance during these times. Amen



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o Grade 10

o Unit 3

o Lesson 11

Setting priorities in *life*

► TO UNDERSTAND
HOW WE CAN SEEK
GREAT THINGS FOR
GOD AND NOT FOR
OURSELVES

THEME: GIVING GOD THE HIGHEST PRIORITY

Haggai 1

NRSV

1 In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

² Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house. ³ Then the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: ⁴ Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵ Now therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. ⁸ Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. ⁹ You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the LORD of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses.

¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors. ¹² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all

the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of the prophet Haggai, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the LORD. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, saying, I am with you, says the LORD. ¹⁴ And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.

Haggai 2

In the second year of King Darius, ¹ in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: ² Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, ³ Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? ⁴ Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, ⁵ according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. ⁶ For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a

little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; ⁷ and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts.

¹⁰ On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: ¹¹ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests for a ruling: ¹² If one carries consecrated meat in the fold of one's garment, and with the fold touches bread, or stew, or wine, or oil, or any kind of food, does it become holy? The priests answered, "No." ¹³ Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered, "Yes, it becomes unclean." ¹⁴ Haggai then said, So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, says the LORD; and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean. ¹⁵ But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the LORD's temple, ¹⁶ how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. ¹⁷ I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the LORD.

²⁰ The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, ²² and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade. ²³ On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts.

INTRODUCTION



Oswald Chambers was born in 1874, in Scotland, the son of a Baptist pastor. Even as a teenager, Chambers was noted for his ‘deep spirituality.’ He was educated at London’s Royal College of Art and the University of Edinburg. He demonstrated gifts in music and art. Yet, at the age of 22, he felt that God was calling him to become a minister. Once he realized that the strength and peace he was looking for was Christ Himself, Christ’s life in exchange for his sin, he experienced a great renewal of mind. He made that choice to surrender his will to God absolutely and irrevocably.

In 1911 he founded and became the principal of the Bible Training College in Clapham, London. The school was closed in 1915 because of World War 1. He was assigned to Zeitoun, Egypt where he ministered as a YMCA chaplain to Australian and New Zealand troops preparing them for action in the Middle East. In the years following his death in 1917, Mrs. Chambers compiled her verbatim notes of his lectures and published them as books. His best-known book *My Utmost for His Highest*, a book of daily devotionals, gives deep Biblical Truths in ways that remain dynamic, even with the passing of time. The book begins with a reflection from Phil.1:20-21 and the reader is inspired to surrender to God’s will. Like the Apostle Paul, we see Chambers’ determination when he writes, “shut out every other consideration and keep yourself before God for this one thing only - My Utmost for His Highest. I am determined to be absolutely and entirely for Him and for Him alone.”



Bible Exposition

The book of Haggai is a collection of brief messages that came through Prophet Haggai in 520 B.C. He prophesied along with his contemporary, Prophet Zechariah and his messages are among the most carefully and precisely dated in the Old Testament. Haggai gives us a glimpse into a critical period in Jewish history, when those who had returned from exile were struggling to reshape their identity as a people in the land of their ancestors. The book holds modern day significance, not just as a historical record, but as a lesson to examine our priorities in life and to learn about the consequences of disobedience and the blessings of obedience.

The Return of the Exiles

In 538 B.C., the conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus, King of Persia, issued a decree authorizing the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of God. It was the Lord who had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to let the Jews go and rebuild the temple. Led by Zerubbabel, and Joshua the high priest, the first group of exiles returned with great joy and settled in their homeland. It took two years to rebuild the foundation of the Temple and they built the altar and sacrificed burnt offerings to the Lord. (Ezra 3:3). Then construction was delayed by Samaritan settlers whose friendly overtures masked a hidden hostility (Ezra 4:1-5). As a result of the opposition, the construction came to a standstill for 16 years. Finally, God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage and support Zerubbabel, and the work was resumed.

Prophet Haggai and the Lord's Command

In the second year of King Darius, King of Persia, the word of the Lord came by prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest (Haggai 1:1). Haggai's prophesy came at a time when the newly returned people from exile were extremely vulnerable because they had been humbled by their exile to Babylon, hopeful in their return to their promised land, and then discouraged by opposition in their rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:24). In 520 B.C., after a silence for sixteen years, prophet Haggai came to deliver God's message urging them to rebuild the Temple. His message stands out for one key reason: the people listened and obeyed. His message was passionate, inspiring and straightforward. He addressed the key issue with a question, "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (Haggai 1:4). Their neglect in rebuilding the Temple reflected their lack of understanding and appreciation of the temple of God. They focused more on beautifying their own houses while the Temple of God remained in ruins. They returned from exile with a limited understanding of God's plan for bringing them back from exile. They didn't give God the top priority.

People Obey the Lord's Commands

While living in comfortable houses, the people were experiencing a physical and spiritual drought in their lives. Despite their hard work, they could not feel satisfied; sown much, but harvested little; ate and drank, but never felt full; clothed themselves, but were not warm; earned wages, only to put into bags with holes; looked for much, but found little. Therefore, the prophet said, now it was time to give a careful thought to their ways, and make a shift in their spiritual lives. The Lord told them that it was He who had brought the drought on the land. He urged them to go up to the hills and bring wood to build the house of God, so that God will be pleased and will be worshiped as He should be. The people feared and obeyed the voice of the Lord through prophet Haggai (Haggai 1:12). The Lord inspired everyone to work on the temple: Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah; Joshua the high priest and all who had returned from the exile. "I am with you" (1:13, 2:4-5), "now take courage", and "do not fear", were the words of the Lord that motivated the people to begin the rebuilding with no fear of their enemies.

The Glory of the New Temple and Message of Redemption

For those who had seen the old magnificent Temple of Solomon, the new Temple they were building was nothing in comparison. Regardless of its modest look, Haggai urged them to continue working and not to be discouraged. He assured them that God was with them and that the future glory of this modest temple would be greater than the former one. He asked them to look into the past to see how they came out of Egypt. He exhorted them to turn from their unclean ways and to trust God's sovereign power. As with most other minor prophets, Haggai ends with promises of restoration and blessings. He assured them that the God of the past is the same in the present, as well as the future. As a result of Haggai's messages, they resumed their work and continued until its completion in 515 B.C. From the moment they laid the foundations of the Temple, God followed through in His promise to bless them. Once we prioritize God's will over our own, we become more blessed.

ZERUBBABEL

On God's instruction, Haggai promised Zerubbabel, a special blessing: "I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you." (Haggai 2:23). The signet ring, a symbol of honor, authority and power represents the house of David. Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David, and was in the direct line of the ancestry of Jesus (Matthew 1:6, 12 and 16). Zerubbabel, the governor, was the prime builder of the second temple, which was later reconstructed by King Herod. Zerubbabel prioritized God's will in his life and he was rewarded.

LESSON REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. He was the author of the book 'My Utmost for His Highest':
 - a. Billy Graham
 - b. John Bunyan
 - c. Oswald Chambers
 - d. Dr. Stanley Jones
2. The king who issued a decree authorizing the Jews to return to Jerusalem:
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar
 - b. Cyrus
 - c. Darius
 - d. Zerubbabel
3. The first group of Jews returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of :
 - a. Haggai
 - b. Joshua
 - c. Zerubbabel
 - d. Joshua
4. He was the high priest among the exiles who returned to Jerusalem:
 - a. Haggai
 - b. Joshua
 - c. Zerubbabel
 - d. Judah
5. He was the governor of Judah:
 - a. Joshua
 - b. Haggai
 - c. Zerubbabel
 - d. Solomon
6. Haggai's prophecy came during the reign of :
 - a. Cyrus
 - b. Darius
 - c. Nebuchadnezzar
 - d. Samuel

Short Answer

1. Cite two examples from the lesson of people who prioritized God in their life and explain.
2. How did the Israelites respond to Haggai's message? Elaborate.

Essay Questions

Write a 200-word essay giving an account of the Prophet Haggai's messages from God to Zerubbabel, Joshua and all those who came to rebuild the temple and the promises that inspired for completing the rebuilding. Write in the following format:

- Introduction
- Give the context of their return to Jerusalem

Group Discussion:

Discuss how the book of Haggai is relevant today and in your personal life. Discuss how sensitive you are to the needs of those around you. How do you experience the love of Jesus in your life, and how does it motivate you to the Lord's work? Do you seek great things for yourself or is it for the Lord? Discuss the priorities in life to see where the necessary changes are to be made.

Values for Life

Nothing is more important than proclaiming the Gospel by which Christ builds His church. Examine your priorities to see if you are more interested in the status of your life and personal goals than doing the will of God. If you feel that you haven't, then confess your failures and strive to live according to God's will.

Life Response

Christ teaches that the only way to true happiness is by doing His will. Do you understand the danger of living a worldly life? Is God first in your life? We are called to be agents of change for the Lord, even in the persistently changing environment. Regardless of social status or environment, we all have an important role to play in God's plan for the community around us.

In the days of the Prophet Haggai, the people came back from the exile, and they forgot the God who brought them back to their land. While the temple lay in ruins, they selfishly focused on their own personal desires. In our present day, we should stay untangled from the world. The Apostle Peter reminds us that we are like living stones built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).



Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?

Haggai 1:4

Memory Verse

Closing Prayer

Our heavenly father, thank You for Your blessings and guidance. Help us to live the way You want us to live. Give us Your grace to obey You and empower us to bring others to Christ. In Jesus. Amen



A

▶ TO LEARN WHAT IS THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IS

o Grade 10 | o Unit 4 | o Lesson 12

I

▶ TO ANALYZE THE BEATITUDES AND THEIR APPLICATION TO MODERN SOCIETY

Blessings in Jesus'

M

▶ TO UNDERSTAND THE BEATITUDES AS THE EXTENSION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Word

THEME: GOD'S PEOPLE ARE BLESSED

Matthew 5:1-12

NRSV

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.



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INTRODUCTION



Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian, pastor, writer, author and musician, was born on February 4th, 1906. Being a precocious child, Bonhoeffer quickly acquired an interest in theology and grew up surrounded with theologians to further supplement his education in theological studies. Bonhoeffer eventually graduated and became the youth secretary of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. At the peak of his success, the Nazi regime was established with Hitler heading the movement. Bonhoeffer, conflicted with what the Bible said and what society was deeming as acceptable, challenged the Nazi regime and was eventually banned from preaching, writing, and lecturing in Berlin. Bonhoeffer wouldn't rest until he saw the necessary change be implemented in the corrupted society. As Nazism spread into the church, a sect of Evangelical Christians rose called the "Deutsche Christen" (German Christians) promulgated the Nazi ideology and sought to eliminate the Old Testament from the Bible and, ultimately, the Jews. Bonhoeffer began to house Jews and plotted with conspirators for a political resistance against Hitler, attempting to stymie Hitler's advances. Bonhoeffer sacrificed all the riches and rankings of this earth to further his mission of living out God's world, even sacrificing his life. On April 9, 1945, Bonhoeffer, along with other conspirators, were hung at the Buchenwald concentration camp after being captured by Hitler and given a death sentence. Through Bonhoeffer, we see a life lived for the glorification of God's Kingdom by not indulging in the society's boundaries and unethical standards.



Bible Exposition

The Beatitudes meaning supreme blessedness are statements of blessedness that follow a formulaic expression: 1. The adjective “blessed”, 2. Identifying the subject that is “blessed”, 3. The condition assuring “blessedness”. The beatitudes are recorded in Matthew 5 and it spoke truth to the audience present.

After overcoming Satan’s temptations in the desert, Jesus went down to Galilee and started moving His ministry through finding his disciples and healing people before going up to the mountain and teaching the crowd as we see in the “Sermon on the Mount”. All the Beatitudes point towards the Kingdom of Heaven. The focus of the Beatitudes is reward based on the level of spiritual experience and relation with God rather than material recompense.

There are 9 subheadings of “blessedness” ascribed by Jesus to the crowd. Each of the Beatitudes serves a separate description of “blessedness” per condition:

Beatitude 1- “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”- the fundamental attitude of believers. (v3)

The “poor” have been a prominent audience in Biblical times for prophets of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Although “poor” may be attributed to monetary wealth, the Beatitude refers to those who are spiritually poor. This “spiritually poor” further describes those who have humbled themselves before the Lord, acknowledging their sinful condition and their need of a Savior. Being “spiritually poor” allows us to understand the attitude believers should possess - understanding their dependence on God and their need for a fulfilled relationship with Him.

Beatitude 2- “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”- an everlasting hope for believers. (v4)

Mourning comes with the loss of something significant in our lives, whether it be a loved one, broken relationship, etc. Out of mourning comes a hope that everything will return to normal - ultimately that things will get better. Jesus speaks to all those who are mourning for losses in their lives and assures that their hope is in Him - He will be the comfort and hope for all those who are suffering now.

Beatitude 3- “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”- a spirit of gentleness and self-control possessed by believers (v5)

“Meek” people possess a spirit of gentleness and self-control; they don’t oppress others and are free from malice. “Meekness” for believers is also seen as fruit of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells the crowd that those who are meek will inherit the earth, but what does “the earth” refer to? Doesn’t Jesus always mention that material and worldly possessions will be of no use in the Kingdom of Heaven? Is there a contradiction? Jesus wasn’t speaking of the physical earth, but most likely referred to “the promised land”, or the ultimate haven the Jews have sought for throughout their history. Jesus refers to “the earth” to exemplify the security and inheritance of God that will be given to those who are meek.

Beatitude 4- “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”- the yearning nature of the believer for the Lord’s vision (v6)

Jesus clearly states that those who have that constant thirst, or desire, to seek uprightness and are in search of God’s way, they will be filled. This Beatitude also recurs in Matthew 7:7 where Jesus says, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Beatitude 5- “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”- the forgiving nature of the believer (v7)

Along with the other characteristics of a believer seen in the other Beatitudes, we notice an outward expression of dependence and need of help from the Lord. Having a merciful heart acknowledges the flaws of oneself and how one falls short many times and enables one to forgive others and show mercy. The Lord will show mercy to those who are merciful because they have understood the grace given by God and are willing to share among many, no matter how wronged they were.

Beatitude 6- “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” – the vision and seeking of God by believers (v8)

The “pure in heart” refers to the actions of a believer that are aligned with God’s vision and are intended to be good in God’s eyes. With this in mind, the promise is the ability to “see God”, something which no one has ever done. Such a promise demands faith and a vision-abiding walk of life. Those who are “pure in heart” will be able to see God in every situation or circumstance in life, allowing them to fully give praise and honor to God amidst struggles as well as joy.

Beatitude 7- “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”- the advancement of the Kingdom of God by believers (v9)

Jesus doesn’t refer to the ceasing of hostilities and war within the world when He mentions “peace”. He refers to a drastic change of nature that the world has not yet seen for peace to persist. Jesus characterizes peacemakers as being just not those who focus on harmonious communities, but ultimately those who are promoting the Kingdom of God on earth. The promise of being “children of God” may be misleading, since “children of God” is often characterizing all Christians. In this Beatitude, the “children of God” expresses an even greater relationship and connection with God as well as constantly working the way in which Jesus has done.

Beatitude 8- “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”- the perseverance of believers (v10)

Although it may seem only logical that a life of “righteousness” is one that should be sought for, the world is broken and far removed from the way of the Lord. Those who are searching for righteousness will be persecuted on account of their pursuit after God’s heart. Jesus reassures those who may be distraught and worn from the persecution that the reward is great, for “theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”.

Beatitude 9- “Blessed are you when people 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, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” – the great reward for believers. (v11)

Jesus changes the subject of the Beatitudes and focuses on the direct “you” subject as well as Him being the other subject. It shows the direct relationship formed with Jesus and that Jesus is the center of all the Beatitudes. All the persecution and scorn against believers for the sake of Jesus Christ will have no effect in the end when they receive the great reward in heaven. The Beatitudes end with this to show the aspect of martyrdom and perseverance during times of trial, similar to how Paul preaches the Gospel to others. The suffering on this earth will not be felt in vain, for “your reward is great in heaven”, just as the prophets before had endured and received reward.

Values for Life

Jesus talks about the spiritual wealth gained from the present suffering experienced by following Him (by taking up His Cross daily). These are the rewards for every true believer. People believe that Christian life is an easy task - if you do good things, God will bless abundantly, but what happens if something along the way goes awry? Will worshipping God cease?

The answer to this question clearly defines the boundaries between a true Christian and a “name-sake Christian”. Believers suffer from the world’s misleading cultural dynamics by standing firm to what the Gospel preaches and how Jesus lived out His life on earth. Jesus lived an exemplary life among the Jews, who persecuted and eventually crucified Him, to set the example on how we should conduct ourselves in an ever-changing society.

The real question is, are we willing to take up the Cross for your Savior? Are we going to daily take up the Cross, expecting a reward to follow? Suffering isn’t only of material loss, but of spiritual and mental burdening as well.

What is the contemporary relevance of “The Beatitudes” in a 10th grader’s life? In the 21st century?



“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Memory Verse

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father we thank You that You have restored the relationship between humankind and You through Your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask to be able to exemplify each characteristic of a believer as seen in the Beatitudes and that we be constantly after Your Heart alone. Please guide us through this world so that we may be a light for others to see You. Amen.



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<http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/Biography.html>

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<https://bible.org/seriespage/beatitudes-matthew-51-12>

LESSON REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. What are the Beatitudes?
 - a. Statements of “Blessedness”
 - b. Statements of “Happiness”, “Favored”, and “Fortunate”
 - c. Statements of “Gratification”
 - d. Statements of “Everlasting Peace”
2. How many Beatitudes are present in the Sermon on the Mount?
 - a. 7
 - b. 8
 - c. 9
 - d. 10
3. Blessed are those who mourn, for _____
 - a. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - b. They will inherit the Earth.
 - c. They will be comforted.
 - d. They will see God.
3. Blessed are the meek, for _____
 - a. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - b. They will inherit the Earth.
 - c. They will be comforted.
 - d. They will see God.

Short Answer

1. What was the context in which Jesus spoke to the crowd? What did Jesus endure before speaking to the crowd?
2. What does the following Beatitude mean: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”
3. What does the following Beatitude mean: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Essay Questions

The Beatitudes reflect the characteristics believers should have. Write a 200-word essay including the following:

- Introduction
- What makes up a “Beatitude”
- Discuss the meaning of each Beatitude

A

▶ TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF BEING BORN FROM ABOVE

○ Grade 10

○ Unit 3

○ Lesson 13

I

▶ TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOD HAS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FOR THE WORLD

God loves the

M

▶ TO LEARN THAT GOD'S LOVING NATURE IS EXEMPLIFIED IN JESUS

world

THEME: FULLNESS OF LOVE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

John 3:1-21

NRSV

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Bible Exposition

In this short passage Saint John summarizes a conversation between Nicodemus, a ruler/spiritual leader of the Jews and Jesus. It is believed that Nicodemus was one of the prominent members of the Sanhedrin, the highest and most powerful Jewish religious council and the ruling body of Israel. Being a Pharisee, Nicodemus belonged to the conservative school of Jewish thought. Pharisees believed that strict observance of the Law, rituals and moral codes are prerequisites to enter the Kingdom of God which is an earthly Kingdom with the Messiah as its King. Since the majority of the Pharisees were against Jesus, Nicodemus ostensibly has difficulties in seeking clarifications for his doubts from Jesus. Being an honest seeker of the truth he decides to interview Jesus and clear his doubts about Jesus' authority and the Kingdom of God. Thus, he encounters Jesus at night and asks some of his doubts and questions. This Bible passage does not narrate all the questions asked by Nicodemus. However, from the replies of Jesus recorded by St. John, it is clear that he asked at least one question about the Kingdom of God. Jesus' answer that "no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above" catches him off guard, as he was not expecting such an answer from Jesus. Nicodemus seeks to clarify the answer by asking another question to Jesus, whether it is a physical rebirth by entering mother's womb? Jesus slightly rebukes Nicodemus of his ignorance of the word of God ("Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"). Jesus may be alluding to various scripture passages by Moses and prophets such as Jeremiah, David, Ezekiel and others (refer Old Testament passages in Deuteronomy 30: 6; Jeremiah 4: 4, Psalm 51: 10; Ezekiel 36: 24-27).

Jesus further explains to Nicodemus that a person has to be born of "water and Spirit" to enter the Kingdom of God and such a change is one that cannot be accomplished by human effort; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The passage does not describe the response of Nicodemus or what impact Jesus' teaching had on him. In John 19: 39-40 it is stated that Nicodemus brought 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes and along with Joseph of Arimathea gave a proper burial for Jesus. When all the beloved disciples of Jesus fled the scene of crucifixion, we see a courageous disciple in Nicodemus, who is not afraid of the Jewish high priests and people who crucified Jesus, performing the last rites for Jesus!

Being Born from Above

Nicodemus is confused about Jesus' answer that only people who are born of water and spirit (born from above) enters the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus does not understand the meaning of Jesus' words, "born of water and spirit". Jesus further explains that all people are born of the flesh, as part of their natural physical birth from their mother's womb. It means that whoever is born only by natural birth cannot enter the Kingdom of God, this requires the spiritual birth (born again/born from above).

Jesus tells Nicodemus that what is "born of spirit is spirit" and further uses the allegory of wind to explain it. We cannot see wind with our naked eye; nevertheless, we experience its sound and the changes made by it. Man cannot create or control the direction of the wind. Nobody knows from where it comes or where it goes. In this allegory, wind is the Spirit (Holy Spirit). It comes from heaven or above (from God). According to the Gospel of St. John, water and spirit are synonyms used to describe the Holy Spirit. In this passage "born from above" means those who submit to the will of the Holy Spirit. Man cannot invoke the Holy Spirit by his free will. God will send the Holy Spirit to His children. Whoever submits to the Holy Spirit can bear the fruit of the Spirit and this transformation is visible to the world around him/her.

God has Unconditional Love for the World

The central theme of the Gospel is the redemption of man through God's love. Through the disobedience of Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden, all men became sinners and death prevailed on them. It is very clear that God was not pleased with this state of man. God wanted to restore the status of man; i.e. restore to the state of having permanent fellowship with God. God's redemptive plan is explained by St. John in the golden verse "for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life"- John 3:16. From this verse it is clear that God:

- Loves the world
- Gave His beloved Son to the world
- All people who believe in the Son will have eternal life
- All people who do not believe in the Son will perish

We see a God who is concerned about His creation; a God who sympathizes with the downfall of man, who is His own image. God has implemented a divine solution for Man's restoration through Jesus Christ; by sacrificing the only begotten Son. God is giving everybody a chance to regain the divine status of permanent fellowship with Him. It is an unconditional offer to humankind. Whoever believes in the Son will have eternal life; those who do not believe are condemned by their choice.

God's Loving Nature Exemplified in Jesus

In this conversation Jesus demonstrates God's loving nature and kindness to Nicodemus. When we compare Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, a teacher and ruler of Israel with other events recorded in the Gospels we see that Jesus was always interested in the redemption of man, whoever he/she was.

- **Jesus is near to everyone regardless of the time one calls upon Him.** It is worthwhile to note that Nicodemus came to visit Jesus in the night. Jesus made no distinction of the time - day or night, Sabbath or a week day, afternoon or evening. Jesus reaches out to all those who long for Him.
- **Jesus redeems all sorts of people regardless of their status.** Jesus made no distinction between rich or poor; sick or healthy; man or woman; educated or uneducated; Jew or Samaritan; Pharisees or Sadducees.
- **Jesus is the light of the World.** Jesus explains that He is the light of the world and contrasts this with the state of mankind in darkness. Man loves darkness because he wants to hide his evil deeds (Adam and Eve sought darkness not to be detected by God). It is also interesting to note that Nicodemus came to see Jesus in the dark of the night.
- **Jesus is the Savior of the world.** Jesus explains that whoever looks upon Him or believes in Him (Christ being lifted up on the cross, which alone could defeat Satan and sin) will be saved; Jesus makes it easier for Nicodemus to understand; by telling him that it is like the rebellious Israelites saving their life by a simple look at the bronze serpent raised by Moses in the wilderness.

All of us want to enter the Kingdom of God. Does it come as an entitlement of being born in a Christian family and a weekly church-goer or having known about God for many years? Many a time, we are also like Nicodemus who was a ruler/spiritual leader/teacher of the Law with an enviable position in the Jewish religion, and think that we can enter the Kingdom of God through our merit. Without submitting to the will of the Holy Spirit, we cannot have a rebirth and experience the Kingdom of God. The people who are born from above can experience the Kingdom of God.

LESSON REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. Who was Nicodemus?
 - a. Pharisee
 - b. Leader of the Jews
 - c. Teacher of Israel
 - d. All of above
2. To what did Jesus compare "born of Spirit" in his conversation with Nicodemus?
 - a. Wind
 - b. Prayer
 - c. Serpent
 - d. Fire
3. What time of the day did Nicodemus visit Jesus?
 - a. morning
 - b. afternoon
 - c. night
 - d. noon
4. How is God's nature exemplified in Jesus?
 - a. savior
 - b. redeemer
 - c. as the light of the world
 - d. all of the above

Essay Questions

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” Explain this statement on the basis of the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus.

1. Introduction
2. Born from above: Jesus’ clarification of its meaning.
3. Give appropriate illustrations from the Bible.
4. Conclusion

Group Discussion:

- Compare Nicodemus’ understanding of entering into the Kingdom of God and Jesus’ teaching.
- How do we know that someone is born of the Spirit?

Values for Life

A true Christian must have the experience of being born from above. Those who are born from above bear the fruit of the spirit and will be visible to others.

Life Response

We must have an understanding of rebirth and being born from above. Those who are born from above should witness their experience to others. Therefore, let us renew our faith, love God with full heart and might and live each day of our life, pleasing to God. Then, the Holy Spirit will transform us and we will become sons and daughters from above.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath.

John 3:36

Memory Verse

Closing Prayer

Loving Father, Thank You for giving this opportunity in Sunday School to learn about You and helping us to understand the meaning of ‘born from above’. Lord, we understand that we cannot come to Your Kingdom unless we are transformed by the Holy Spirit. Please give us the grace to lead a life pleasing to You every day. Please send Your Holy Spirit to each one of us to dwell in our hearts and lead us in Your ways. Amen.

