

Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ
Small Groups, Spring 2011
“Great Events in the Life of Christ”

The Small Groups meetings during spring 2011 will study selected stories from the life of Christ. The series is titled, “Great Events”. The focus is on understanding the identity and nature of Jesus. When we understand who Jesus is, we can better understand what he is calling us to become, including our participation in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The series includes eight lessons:

- Lesson One: The “Identity Sections” of the Gospels, Jesus’ Birth
- Lesson Two: Jesus’ Baptism and Temptation
- Lesson Three: Jesus comes Preaching, Teaching, and Healing
- Lesson Four: Feeding of the 5000
- Lesson Five: Predictions of Jesus’ Death
- Lesson Six: The Transfiguration
- Lesson Seven: The Triumphal Entry
- Lesson Eight: Jesus’ Death and Resurrection

These lessons will be used in small groups meetings January-April, scheduled to meet on second and fourth Sunday evenings.

Each lesson follows the same basic outline. Lessons and discussion should generally be limited to 30-45 minutes. Leaders can add icebreakers, Bible study questions, or applications of their own. It is not necessary to get through all of these materials—these are only suggested areas of discussion to help the group consider the topics and applications.

Lesson One: Who is Jesus?

Theme/Key Concept: Jesus is the unique Son of God.

Lesson Summary: Each of the four Gospels begins with an “identity section.” Just as each of the gospels has a different emphasis concerning Jesus, each of the Gospels also presents a slightly different aspect of Jesus’ identity. Matthew describes Jesus with a genealogy, a “royal” birth narrative, and the account of his baptism and temptation. Mark begins with a simple declaration (1:1) and describes Jesus as fulfilling prophecy, calling disciples, and characterized by amazing works and words. Luke also focuses on fulfilled prophecies, and includes a “poverty” birth narrative along with a genealogy. Luke also describes Jesus’ baptism and temptation. John’s description is the most unique: The Word was God, the Word became flesh. This one is the unique (only begotten) Son of God, this is our cosmic Lord.

Text: Matthew 1-4

Companion Texts: Mark 1-4; Luke 1-4; John 1

Icebreakers

What are some of the answers people might give in answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” How would you have answered the question: (1) as a pre-schooler, (2) as a grade-schooler, (3) in high school, etc.

What things would you want to include in telling the story of a birth?

Bible study/Discussion Questions

What is the purpose of the genealogy in Matthew 1? (Note the symmetry of the generational section dividers.)

What key words do you notice in Matthew 1-2?

Discuss the three “names” or descriptions of Jesus in Matthew 1-2: Jesus, Emmanuel, Christ.

Discuss the parallel between the Hebrew concept (Messiah) and the Greek concept (Christ).

How does the baptism of Jesus contribute to our understanding his identity?

How does the temptation of Jesus contribute to understanding his identity?

Applications

What descriptions or understandings of Jesus are most helpful to you as you seek to live a Christian life?

How would you complete this sentence as a reflection of your faith and everyday life? Jesus is my _____.

Lesson Two: Who is Jesus?

Theme/Key Concept: Jesus' baptism and Jesus' temptation provide special insights into his identity and nature.

Lesson Summary: Jesus' baptism speaks to his identity in the statement of John the Baptist, and also in the voice from heaven afterward. Jesus' temptation also speaks to his identity, especially in some of the details included in the narratives in Matthew and Luke.

Text: Matthew 3-4

Companion Texts: Mark 1; Luke 3-4; John 1

Icebreakers

Based on his baptism and/or his temptation, what are some answers people might give in answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?"

That is, what do people conclude about Jesus' identity based on these two narratives?

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

What is the purpose of the baptism of Jesus?

To what extent or in what ways does Jesus' baptism provide us an example?

What aspects of his baptism might suggest that this is not an example of Christian baptism?

How does the temptation narrative contribute to the identity of Jesus in Matthew and/or Luke?

What significance, if any, do you see in the two different orders of the temptations?

Are the three temptations designed to reflect three general classifications of temptations or is there another way to understand the temptations? Discuss the answers given.

To what extent does Jesus' temptation provide us an example of how to respond to temptation?

Applications

How does your baptism help you remember who you are?

Was your identity changed at your baptism? in what ways?

How often do you think about your baptism as a motivation to Christian identity and Christian living?

What is the significance of Jesus' temptation immediately after his baptism?

Are we ever tempted during those times when it seems we should be the strongest?

In studying the baptism and temptation, what lessons do you think are most often overlooked?

Lesson Three: Jesus Comes Preaching, Teaching, and Healing

Theme/Key Concept: Matthew's "internal outline" presents Jesus' life in two parts (compare 4:17 and 16:21). In the first part of Matthew's gospel, Jesus comes preaching, teaching and healing. In the second part, Jesus comes dying.

Lesson Summary: Each of the gospels has a unique focus. In Matthew, Jesus is a servant King; in Mark, he is a servant Lord. In Luke, he is a universal Messiah—Son of God and Son of Man. In John, he is cosmic Lord—Word, and light, and life.

Matthew describes Jesus as an active servant King who comes serving his subjects rather than being served.

Text: Matthew 4:12-25

Companion Text: Matthew 9:35-38

Icebreakers

What are some answers people might give in answer to the question, "Why did Jesus come to earth?"

What is the significance of a Messiah who teaches, preaches, and heals?

What is the significance of a Messiah who dies?

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

How is preaching, teaching, and healing an adequate (or inadequate) description of what the church is called to do in the world today?

Do people today still have the same problems and challenges as they did in Jesus' day?

Are the fields white unto harvest today?

If the fields are white, why are not more people brought to Christ?

Is there any significance in the order in which Matthew describes the three activities of Jesus?

Were all of the "healings" of Jesus physical? Give examples to support your answer.

Applications

How could we as a church be more actively involved in teaching, preaching, and healing in the context of our community and our world?

How could we individually be more actively involved in teaching, preaching, and healing in our world?

Select a limited number of prayer needs that the group will "adopt", and commit as a group to praying for those special needs every day in the coming week.

Lesson Four: Jesus Is Rejected

Theme/Key Concept: The Feeding of the 5000 is a pivotal point in the Gospel narratives, and in Jesus' ministry. The Feeding of the 5000 is one of a limited number of stories from Jesus' life that are told in all four of the Gospels. (What are some of these stories? Use a chart of the harmonies of the gospels to find the answer. A chart is included in many study Bibles.) The significance of this event is especially clear in John (6:1-15, 60-71).

Lesson Summary: The Feeding of the 5000 ends the increasing reception of Jesus and begins the increasing rejection of Jesus, especially among Jewish leaders. The Feeding of the 5000 thus provides a high point or climax to the narrative of Jesus' life.

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

Companion Texts: Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13, 60-71

Icebreakers

What do you like to do at the end of a long day?

How do you typically react to interruptions?

If you had 5000 people at a picnic, what would you serve?

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

How did the disciples feel after Jesus told them to do what they considered impossible?

Do you ever face situations of Christian service that you consider impossible? Share some examples.

How do you think the disciples reacted after the miracle of the feeding?

How could feeding 5000 people be the beginning of a grand "turn off"?

What new power of Jesus is now revealed?

What does this story say about Jesus' identity?

How do people respond when Jesus (or his followers) have power but refuse to use it?

Which of these is most significant in the story: (1) the Jewish leaders were afraid when they saw what Jesus could do, (2) the people were disappointed that Jesus would not feed them again, (3) the disciples were disappointed that he would not serve as the kind of Messiah they wanted or expected, (4) the people were turned off by his teaching about eating flesh and drinking blood.

Applications

How do you feel when you think Jesus is urging you toward a ministry that is too large for you?

What are some ministries that you think this church ought to consider?

How would these ministries reflect the identity of Jesus to those we might serve?

Pray together about ways the church can serve its community.

Pray individually (or share your story with another Christian for shared prayer) about those you know who seem to have rejected Christianity.

Lesson Five: Jesus Comes Dying

Theme/Key Concept: As previously presented, the text of Matthew changes its focus at 16:21. After the confession of Peter and the reaffirmation of Jesus' identity, the ultimate purpose of Jesus is revealed. Jesus is the Messiah who comes to die.

Lesson Summary: All of the Synoptic gospels have three predictions of Jesus' passion (suffering and death). These appear in Matthew 16:21, 17:22; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32; and Luke 9:22; 9:44; 18:31-34. These predictions of Jesus' suffering and death serve to reaffirm his identity and his purpose.

Text: Matthew 16:21, 17:22; 20:17-19

Companion Texts: Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32; and Luke 9:22; 9:44; 18:31-34

Icebreakers

If you were to ask the average person, "Who is Jesus Christ?" what would he or she say?
Religious nut, greatest man who ever lived, Son of God, swear word, mystery

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

What makes a god divine? (Hint: mortality vs. immortality)

What is unique about a dying Messiah?

Why is the idea of the Son of God coming to die so difficult to accept?

Why do you think Jesus had to repeat this teaching so often?

When Peter said "you are the Christ," what did he mean?

(1) Long-awaited Messiah, (2) ruler of a new Israel, (3) sacrifice for sin

Why did Peter get upset when Jesus explained his death?

(1) Didn't understand prophecy, (2) didn't want Jesus to suffer, (3) didn't want to lose his leader, (4) was just acting tough, (5) was trying to protect Jesus

How did Peter feel?

(1) Confused, (2) disappointed, (3) rejected, (4) scared to death

Applications

Think about your life in segments: childhood, teen years, young adult, etc.

For each part of your life, respond with whether you saw Jesus as someone to know, someone to learn about, someone to follow, someone to avoid.

If Jesus comes dying, might we have to die for him?

How do you feel about taking up a cross to follow him?

(1) Not ready, (2) long way to go, (3) have come a long way, (4) involves more than I bargained for

What would taking the next step in your spiritual life mean?

(1) Basics like Bible reading and prayer, (2) ask Jesus for daily guidance, (3) deeper commitment, (4) reevaluating goals and priorities, (5) other _____

Lesson Six: Reaffirmed by God

Theme/Key Concept: The transfiguration narrative appears in the three Synoptic gospels, and provides a final reminder and reaffirmation of Jesus' identity before he goes to Jerusalem to die.

Lesson Summary: The Transfiguration story intertwines several different themes which are explored in this lesson.

Text: Matthew 17:1-13

Companion Texts: Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36

Icebreakers

When have you had a "mountain top" experience?

What does the word "transfiguration" suggest to you?

If you could take anyone in the world to meet Jesus personally, who would you take and why?

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

How does this story tie into Jesus' prediction of his death?

Why might Jesus have taken only three of the apostles?

Why do you think Peter did not "get it"? Why was his response inappropriate?

Why did God have to reaffirm Jesus' identity to these three apostles?

How do you think Jesus felt when he heard God's affirmation?

Why did Jesus tell them not to tell others?

Discuss the imagery of Elijah.

Applications

When have you experienced the presence of God in a special or unusual way?

What lasting impact did it have on your life?

When do you most need to be reminded that Jesus is God's son?

What kinds of transformation do you most long to experience in your own Christian walk?

When have you known God's reaffirmation of your identity as his child?

Lesson Seven: From Triumph to Suffering

[The Triumphal Entry and Last Week before the Cross]

Theme/Key Concept: The final week of Jesus' life begins with a picture of triumph (the Triumphal Entry) and concludes with the despair of his followers which follows his suffering and death. As we will see in our next and final lesson, with the resurrection, suffering and death turn to eternal triumph.

Lesson Summary: The Triumphal Entry and several other events during the final week of Jesus' life certainly qualify as "great events". The Triumphal Entry shows the acceptance of the common people despite the rejection of the religious leaders.

Text: Matthew 21-27

Companion Texts: Mark 11-15; Luke 21-27.

[The textual sections referenced begin with the Triumphal Entry and continue the story through the death of Jesus on the cross, right up to the account of the resurrection. Also see John 12:12-19 concerning the Triumphal Entry.]

Icebreakers

What events from Jesus' life would you include in a listing of "great events"? Why?
How would you arrange for Jesus to have maximum exposure in our town?

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

Why is the Triumphal Entry (Palm Sunday) so important in the Jesus' story?
What kind of kingdom, king, and Messiah were the people expecting?
How is the Triumphal Entry narrative an "identity narrative"?
What did the crowds say about his identity?
How is the temple narrative (immediately after) also a reflection of his identity?

Applications

When have you had an opportunity to put in a good word for Jesus and done so?
When have you had an opportunity to put in a good word for Jesus and you did not do it?
In your experience, who hears the story of Jesus best?
Pray this week about people whom you could invite to worship with the church on Easter Sunday.
Think about some of those who have special problems in their lives right now, those who need to hear the story of Jesus, and those whom you could touch and help.

Lesson Eight: From Suffering to Triumph

Theme/Key Concept: The final act in the life of Jesus moves from his resurrection to various post-resurrection appearances in which he communicates confidence, acceptance, and forgiveness. These are followed by the Great Commission and his ascension back to the Father.

Lesson Summary: The suffering of Jesus results in triumph, suggesting that something similar is possible also in our faith journey.

Text: Matthew 28

Companion Texts: Mark 16; Luke 28; John 20-21; 1 Cor. 15

Icebreakers

What is the first thing you do on Sunday morning? Why?

What is the best news story that you have ever read in the newspaper? (or heard on TV?)

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

What do you think the women were thinking and feeling on their way to the tomb?

What problems were they anticipating?

How do you think they felt as they left the tomb?

Why do you think Jesus appeared to the women even before his disciples?

Why is the resurrection central to the Christian faith?

Applications

When has a difficulty in your life turned out to be for the best?

Think about and describe a time when emotions quickly turned from despair to joy, or vice versa.

How would you explain the importance of the resurrection to a non-Christian?

How is every Sunday's worship a reminder of the centrality of the resurrection to the Christian faith?