

SEARCHING FOR JESUS

Context

Joseph and Mary were devoted Jews who were faithful to the law. They attended the Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem as a family, even though only male members were required. Jesus was 12 at that time - one year away from accountability as a Jewish boy. In their tradition, the instruction of boys became more intensive at the age of 12 in preparation for adulthood (m. 'Abot 5.21).

1. How did your parents prepare you for adulthood?

Observation

2. Mary was distressed. She questioned Jesus when she found him (verse 48). Was her reaction to Jesus justified?
3. How does this passage reveal who Jesus was?

Meaning

4. Jesus responded to Mary with questions: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (verse 49). What did he mean?

Application

Those who know God have two families - biological in which God has placed them and spiritual through knowing Jesus (Luke 8:19-21; Matt 12:46-50).

5. How can we apply what Jesus did where he honoured both his biological and spiritual families, even in a potential conflict? Share an example.

6. Jesus himself grew in wisdom (verse 52). Instead of underestimating the capability of the younger generation, how can we encourage their spiritual growth?

PREPARING FOR JESUS

Context

In concerts, there is often a warm-up act who performs before the headline act arrives. The warm-up act prepares the crowd, gets them excited and builds anticipation for the headline act. In the same vein, John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus' ministry by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. John clearly stated that he was not worthy to untie the sandal straps of Jesus. And while he baptised with water, Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Observation

1. The crowd asked John what they should do to avoid the coming wrath. What was his specific response to the three groups of people? What were the reasons behind these examples?

Groups of people	What should they do?	What aspect of repentance was John promoting?
Those with more than enough (verses 10-11)		
Tax collectors (verses 12-13)		
Soldiers (verse 14)		

Meaning

2. John preached in the manner of Old Testament prophets - seeking for the repentance of the heart. What does it mean to have a repentance of the heart (James 2:14-17)?
3. How is John's baptism similar to or different from the baptism we understand and practice today?
4. What was John illustrating in verses 16 and 17? See also Malachi 3:2-4 and Jeremiah 15:7.

Application

5. What does a lifestyle of repentance look like? How do we know if we have truly repented from our sin?

John was imprisoned by Herod for reproving Herod's marriage to Herodias, who both had left their previous marriages to marry each other. Herod responded to John's rebuke like a hardened sinner by trying to remove the source of accountability.

6. It is often extremely awkward and difficult to rebuke someone else. How would you handle these scenarios?
 - A friend bragging about saving money by scanning meat as bananas at a supermarket's self-service checkout
 - A colleague verbally abusing a waiter for messing up their order
 - A friend neglecting his wife and kids by constantly going out until the wee hours of the morning

Share and pray for an aspect in your life where repentance of the heart is required.

IDENTIFYING JESUS

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

One of the most popular movie franchises in the master-and-apprentice genre is Star Wars. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke Skywalker trains to be a Jedi under the guidance of Yoda. When Luke asks if the dark side is stronger, Yoda replies, "No, no, no. Quicker, easier, more seductive... Once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny. Consume you, it will."

Imagine being deprived of food for over a month. After 40 days and nights, Satan makes an offer. A study of the temptations that Jesus faced (4:1-13) reveals the progressive and insidious nature of Satan's propositions - similar to the way Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-4).

First, Satan tried to cast doubt by subtly questioning Jesus' identity (4:1-4). Next, Satan attempted to deceive by presenting an offer that would fast-track Jesus' mission and bypass any need to suffer along the way (4:5-8). Finally, Satan sought to delude by casting doubt on Jesus' relationship with his Father - daring him to be reckless and to put God the Father to the test (4:9-13). Full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus overcame Satan in every test and proved himself as the true Son of God.

Context

Jesus had grown in wisdom and in stature - finding favour with God and man (2:52). He was about 30 years of age when he was preparing for ministry. His baptism revealed God's endorsement of him (3:21-22), while his genealogy (3:23-38) and experience with temptations (4:1-13) revealed his connection to Adam and highlighted his historical and spiritual credentials.

Observation

1. God in Three Persons (the Holy Trinity) was revealed in Jesus' baptism. How does God relate within himself?
2. Which key biblical characters did you notice in the genealogy written by Luke? What does that indicate about who Jesus would represent?
3. What are the parallels between Jesus' 40 days in the desert and the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness after leaving Egypt? How did Jesus respond differently (Acts 7:37-41)?

Meaning

4. Since Jesus is the Son of God, what was the purpose of his baptism?
5. What were Satan's strategies? How did Jesus overcome them?

6. Why did Luke insert a genealogy in between Jesus' baptism and experience of temptations - seemingly interrupting the narrative?

Application

7. How can we prepare ourselves to face and resist temptations like what Jesus did in the desert?

"The key to Jesus' triumph is his faithfulness in walking with God wherever God leads him, even in the midst of testing times."

(Darrell L. Bock, Luke IVP NTC 1994)

REJECTING JESUS

Context

The passage from Isaiah that Jesus read (verses 18-19) alluded to the Year of Jubilee - a time of celebration, the return of property and freedom for servants. Isaiah used this imagery to prophesy on the return of the Israelites from captivity in Babylon. At the time of Jesus, Israel was under the Roman rule.

1. What do you think the hearers in the synagogue were imagining when Jesus said that the year of the Lord's favour had been fulfilled (Isaiah 61:1-7)?

Observation

2. Why did the people of Nazareth praise Jesus and then bring up his father Joseph (verse 22)?
3. In what ways were the people of Nazareth poor, captive, blind and oppressed?

Meaning

4. How did Jesus himself fulfil the passage he read from Isaiah (verses 18-19)?
5. What was Jesus' message (verses 23-27)? Why did the crowd become enraged? Consider their spiritual, national and familial (hometown) loyalty, as well as their expectations for the Messiah.

Application

6. God's heart is not only for those nearby, but also for those far away. Who are the people nearby and far away in your life? How can you continue Jesus' declared mission in their lives?
7. In what ways do you consider yourself spiritually poor, captive, blind and oppressed - maybe even rejecting Jesus? Share and pray with others asking for liberty and recovery in your life from God.

ENCOUNTERING JESUS

Context

After being rejected in his hometown, Jesus had far greater reception in the town of Capernaum in Galilee. Capernaum (where Peter's house was located) played a significant role in the Gospels and became a "home base" for Jesus and his disciples. Of course, they were on the move most of the time due to Jesus' rapidly growing popularity.

Isaiah's scroll that was read by Jesus (4:18-19) predicted the marks of the Messiah, which were relevant given that those who were demon-possessed or ill were often marginalised from the society at that time. Luke accounted the beginning of the fulfillment of those prophecies. He also highlighted the relationship between the message of the Kingdom and the signs accompanying that message.

Observation

1. This was the first occurrence of Jesus instructing the demons not to reveal his identity to the people - often referred to by scholars as "the Messianic Secret". Why would Jesus want to conceal his identity?

2. What can we observe about the patterns of Jesus' ministry?

Meaning

3. The way Jesus performed exorcisms was different from other people's. How did the authority in Jesus' preaching (verses 31-37) relate to the exorcisms he performed?
4. Although Jesus had the power to amaze the crowds and address physical ailments and other problems, his core purpose was to speak the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the other towns as well. How did Jesus' miracles relate to his preaching? Were they completely separate matters?

Application

5. How does Jesus' authority comfort us considering the challenges in our lives?
6. Jesus demonstrated and communicated the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, yet he indicated a priority in communicating the message. How do we balance communicating the benefits of following Jesus (e.g. "Jesus gives you purpose and meaning" - an assertion of subjective benefit) and remaining true to the core of the message (e.g. "Jesus is the King" - an assertion of objective truth)?

FOLLOWING JESUS

Icebreaker

"I once was ... but now I am ..."

Context

At a synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus taught with authority and rebuked unclean spirits - bringing astonishment and amazement to the people. As he entered Simon's house, Jesus continued to heal the sick and rebuke demons, who knew that Jesus was the Christ and identified Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus then departed and continued teaching in the synagogues of Judea - preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God for which he was sent. Until one day, the crowd pressed in on Jesus by the Lake of Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee) to hear him teach God's Word.

Observation

1. What stood out about Jesus and the crowd (verses 1-3)? Why was that?

2. What did Simon realise about Jesus that the other fishermen missed (Isaiah 6:5)?

3. What did the interaction between Jesus and Simon reveal about Simon's heart (verses 4-8)?

4. What was intriguing about Jesus' response and the fishermen's decisions (verses 9-11)?

Meaning

5. How is encountering Jesus heart-changing and life-transforming (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20)?

6. What does it mean to follow Jesus and leave everything behind (verse 11)?

Application

7. How do we ensure that we regularly pause and reflect on our sins and weaknesses, as well as our need for Jesus as Lord and Saviour?

8. What might God be calling us to forsake and embrace as we follow him this year?