

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE - VOLUME 2

About the author

Ian Flanders has recently joined the radio production team that puts together Serving Today and other Christian programmes. He has over fifteen years' experience as missionary, Bible teacher and pastor.

Ian grew up in southern England, not far from London, in a Christian context. He heard the gospel regularly, but was always aware that he had not as yet made a faith commitment. As he left home to pursue his studies, he began seriously to question Christian teaching, but as he did so, through the Christian testimony of new friends, God graciously made everything crystal clear. Rather than allowing Ian to drift into a new life in the world, the Lord gave him new life in Christ through a personal faith in his death upon the cross.

As a response to the Lord's incomparable mercy, Ian had a growing awareness that he should make himself available to the Lord, to do his bidding. As a result he was led into full time Christian ministry.

Ian spent seven years in a large city in southern France, where he was mainly engaged in evangelism and Bible teaching amongst the immigrant community. During this period he also had some short stays in North Africa.

Following his marriage, Ian and his wife, H el ene, went to North West France to oversee a small church planting work, also for a period of seven years. It was in 2003 that the family came to England to begin a new ministry in Christian radio.

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Introduction

The subject and goal of this booklet is to examine various aspects of Jesus' life and ministry and to see how they can be an example to us in the various roles that God has entrusted to us. We need to give ourselves time to meditate on Christ as we follow him in the gospels, and as we consider each event or word we must ask ourselves: In what way is Jesus an example to me in this text? How can I apply this example to my own ministry? How is it relevant to my life?

This is the second of two booklets covering this theme. If for some reason you have not received the first then do contact us at the Serving Today address or at the TWR address and we will be pleased to send you a copy.

Chapter 1 Jesus and women

If we read some of the things being written about women, at the time of Jesus, by certain religious leaders, then we would realise that women were neither treated very well nor esteemed very highly. Some of these writings are very

rude, offensive and demeaning. Women were often seen as stupid or unintelligent, as being created simply for domestic duties and motherhood. They were also perceived as being a source of temptation and sin, a danger that could lead men astray.

Even today women are not necessarily treated as they should be and we can find in society and in churches, attitudes towards them that reflect those that Jesus witnessed in his day. For this reason it is necessary to study Jesus' attitude towards women and to think through whether we have taken his example on board.

To begin with we should read a text from the gospels, Luke 10:38-40. *“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work all by myself? Tell her to help me!’”* The reading will be interrupted there for a moment, in order to ask an important question. Who was right and who was wrong? Which woman, Martha or Mary, was behaving as a woman should behave? Many Jews would have believed that Martha was quite right to complain, that she was doing her duty as a woman. They would have criticised Mary for listening to Jesus. According to them that was not her place, she should have been preparing the meal and leaving the spiritual

conversations for men. Now then, let us discover what Jesus said: *“Martha, Martha’, the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her.’”*

This answer would have surprised and shocked many of those present. Mary, in sitting at Jesus' feet to listen to him, is taking the position of a disciple towards his master and in first century Israel it was not accepted that women be disciples. As has already been mentioned, a woman's place was to look after domestic duties. Jesus however affirms Mary's right to be a disciple; he even encourages this as a good choice. He is not saying that she should neglect her responsibilities, but rather that she, as a woman, has every right to be his disciple just as a man. This was something quite new; the other religious leaders normally did not allow women to be their disciples. We see elsewhere in the gospels that many other women were included as Jesus' disciples and actually accompanied him along with the men, serving him in various ways.

It is important to understand that in terms of our relationship to Jesus Christ and to God the Father and in terms of our access to all the promises of God, men and women are equal, they are all disciples on the same footing. The apostle Paul obviously picked up on Christ's attitude when he says - *“there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.”* (Galatians 3:28). In the Kingdom of God women are not second-class citizens and

so they should not be treated as such in their everyday lives. There is no place in the church for discrimination or prejudice against women.

This does, though, lead on to an important question: given that traditionally the church has not allowed women to teach or to take up leadership roles within the church – is this not in contradiction with this teaching that men and women are spiritual equals?

It is my conviction that this traditional position of the church sits better with the overall teaching of the scriptures. I would add, though, that men have often taken some Bible verses out of context and have interpreted them in such a way as to justify the oppression and discrimination against women in a way that Jesus would certainly condemn.

This is not the time to enter into a detailed study of the issue of women's leadership in churches. I would just make the following brief comments:

Firstly we should not confuse equality of status before God with uniformity of role. That is, God accepts us all in the same way, we are all equally loved, valued and dear in his eyes but God does not entrust the same tasks to all. Men and women are very different. Physically this is obvious, but we are also different in other ways. It would appear from scripture and from experience that men are more apt to teach and to lead in the church. That seems to be what

they are created for, although of course not all men are able to do these tasks. Women have been created for other roles in God's purposes but the tasks that women are entrusted with are equally important and valuable as the things that men do. Each man and each woman has a valuable place in God's purposes. Men and women are different but can complement each other in a lovely way.

Finally, men who teach or lead in churches should not consider themselves to be superior to women because of their position. Remember, that in Jesus' scheme of things, to lead is not to exercise abusive power, but to serve in love. As we teach and lead we are not to put women down but to help them to enter into the fullness of their relationship with God and to find a joyful, fulfilling place in the service of Christ.

Chapter 2 Jesus and foreigners

Wherever you may be living in the world you are likely to encounter, sooner or later, foreigners, that is people who have come from other countries. People may come to live in your country for a whole variety of reasons: they may come as immigrants trying to find employment, they may come as refugees fleeing natural disaster or war, tragically they sometimes come as enemy occupying forces, or others may just be there for a short visit, tourists. Whatever the case, foreigners are not always welcomed or accepted in the countries where they arrive. Sometimes they are discriminated against or even badly treated, but, if we are going follow Jesus' example in all things, we need to ask

what his attitude was towards foreigners? How did he treat them?

However, before we proceed we need to ask what kind of foreigners Jesus met in Israel in his day.

Firstly, Jesus came across Romans; these were of course the oppressive occupying army trying to enforce the rule of the Roman emperor. They were very unpopular, as could be expected, much resented, and sometimes targeted by rebel resistance groups called the Zealots. Then, in the gospels we read of Jesus coming into contact with other foreigners: a woman from Samaria in John 4, another woman from the region of Tyre in Phoenicia in Matthew 15, and some Greeks who had come to visit Jerusalem in John 12.

We can understand that the Jews might have hated the Romans but how did they regard these other types of foreigners that have been mentioned?

John's gospel chapter 4, verse 9 says "*Jews do not associate with Samaritans*". Historically there had been quite a lot of tension between these two peoples and this persisted even in Jesus' day. At a more general level the Jews tended to think of themselves as superior to other nations because they saw themselves as God's chosen people and many, to maintain what they saw as their ritual purity, would not go into the homes of foreigners or eat with them.

As we move on now to consider Jesus' attitude towards foreigners we need to consider the incident with the Phoenician woman that I mentioned earlier because, when we read the account in Matthew 15 we learn that when she first asked Jesus for help, he did not reply and then seemed rather unwilling to assist in any way, saying at one point "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.*" Then, when she persists he adds "*It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.*" All this might seem surprising and could leave us wondering if Jesus was just like all the other Jews in his attitude towards foreigners. This situation needs to be clarified.

The passage has intrigued many commentators, but my conviction here is that Jesus actually behaved in a way he would not normally do so in order to drive home his lesson, both for the lady in question, and for his disciples.

We should note that, at first, it is actually the disciples who ask Jesus to send the foreign woman away and it may be the case that Jesus' apparent reluctance to help the woman was intended to mirror the disciple's general attitude. Jesus maybe hoped that the disciples would be surprised and shocked by his behaviour but then recognise that they too did just the same thing. Sometimes we need to see a fault in someone else before we can recognise it in ourselves. Secondly, Jesus is probably testing the faith of the Phoenician woman. As Jesus in a sense holds back this makes this woman's conviction shine all the brighter. She

really did believe that the salvation Jesus offers was for all people.

However, Jesus did say that he had been sent only for the lost sheep of Israel. How should we explain this verse?

From the context of the historical unfolding of God's purposes, we can say that Jesus' ministry, during his lifetime, was principally limited to the people of Israel. He was their promised Messiah, or King, the one spoken of by the prophets. God's promises of salvation were to be offered, first and foremost to the nation that he had chosen and cherished throughout the centuries.

Having said this though, Jesus does have a positive attitude towards those of other nations who approach him with faith. This is true, despite everything, in the case of the Phoenician woman. Jesus does answer her request. In John 4 the Samaritan woman's life is transformed as she meets with Jesus, and the Roman centurion who comes to Jesus is held up as a shining example of faith.

Following Jesus' resurrection, things become even clearer, for he sends out his disciples to preach and to make disciples of all nations. Jesus is King and his Kingdom extends beyond any geographical borders. His Kingdom extends to all who will submit to his rule over their lives, irrespective of where they come from.

What, then, should we learn from all this as an example to us in our ministries?

Once again, and simply, that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed to all. We are not to discriminate against people, or to withhold the gospel on the basis of race or nationality. If it is true that there remain tensions and conflicts between people for historical reasons we still should not reject others just because of where they come from. All who respond to the gospel are to be welcomed into the church, which should be working to overcome barriers and prejudices, working towards reconciliation and the harmonious working together of all people. Sadly, in the past the church has failed much in this area. We need to examine our own hearts and if we find that we are rejecting foreigners that humbly needs to be repented of and our congregations shown that we should be reaching out to all, wherever they come from.

Chapter 2 Jesus and his enemies

Jesus is well known for those famous words that he uttered, words that challenge us all from Luke chapter 6 and verses 27-28 – "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill treat you.*" However, did Jesus actually have occasion to put these words into practice? Who were Jesus' enemies?

Jesus' words will only have weight and credibility to the extent that he actually lived by them himself. Jesus did have enemies. If it was the Roman occupying power who

actually put Jesus to death, we have to say that sadly, during his ministry, it was actually the Jewish religious authorities that were Jesus' principle enemies, two groups called the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

There are many clues throughout the gospels indicating the differences of opinion and teaching between Jesus and the Pharisees. Most notably the Pharisees criticised Jesus because he spent time with the sinners, the poor, the outcasts, and offered them promises of God's salvation. The Pharisees were very legalistic and thought that God could never forgive the worst sinners and they thought that no true prophet or teacher would ever compromise their purity by having fellowship with these prohibited groups of people. Additionally, Jesus acted in a way and said things that suggested he could do things that only God could do: he went about forgiving sin and said he was one with the Father, for instance. The Pharisees thought this was blasphemous and would not recognise that Jesus was in fact the Son of God.

The Pharisees' opposition started out as criticism but as time went on Jesus became more and more popular and the Pharisees felt threatened. They feared to lose their influence over the people. They finished up, as we know, plotting to kill Jesus, and finally delivered him over to the Romans, persuading them that he should be crucified.

So, how did Jesus react, first of all during this period when the opposition was mainly in the form of criticism? This is

something, if we are honest, we can all face at some time in our ministry.

Firstly, Jesus did not allow the criticism to affect his ministry, he did not bow to the pressure, he did not change his ways, and he stuck to his convictions. Now, when we are criticised it is always good to try to evaluate whether what people are saying is right or wrong. Unlike Jesus, we can so easily get things wrong and we need to listen sometimes to criticism. However, if we become convinced that the criticism is unfair or vindictive and that we are acting in agreement with the Word of God, then we must not allow ourselves to be swayed by the pressure.

Loving one's enemies does not mean bowing to their every wish. However, Jesus did love the Pharisees, his enemies, and we can see this love in a number of ways:

Firstly, despite their criticism and devious scheming he continued to spend time with them. When he was invited into their homes he went to eat with them, even though they were trying to snare him into saying things that could be used to condemn him. Jesus did not break off the relationship, he did not walk away from the Pharisees, and he did not refuse to speak with them. This is an example that we can follow. If there is to be a complete breakdown in a relationship it should come from our enemies and not from us.

Secondly, Jesus persevered in trying to teach them the truth of the gospel. He sought to defend his way of doing things; he sought to enlighten the Pharisees. He did not reject them but rather wanted them too to come to a fuller understanding of God's grace and glory. Once again this is an example that we should follow.

Now we know of course that the opposition that Jesus faced went beyond simple criticism, however painful that might be. Jesus also had to face the humiliation and brutal violence of the events that led up to his death upon the cross. Is there any evidence that Jesus loved his enemies in this, the most extreme of circumstances? It is one thing to love one's enemies when all that is involved is an exchange of words, but it is quite another when it becomes a question of losing life and limb. However, even in this most extraordinary situation of unjust pain and suffering Jesus did love his enemies, and I would suggest that he expects us to follow this example should we ever find ourselves in similar circumstances.

Here is one specific example showing Jesus' love for his enemies during this time. Luke 23:34 quotes Jesus as saying "*Father, forgive them*". When Jesus uttered this prayer he was hanging on the cross and was surrounded by his enemies; those who had rejected him, plotted against him and who were now sneering, taunting and mocking him, taking pleasure in their apparent success. Jesus prays for them. This is proof of his love, and his prayer is not that judgement might fall upon them, but rather that they would

find God's forgiveness for their appalling attitudes and acts. Beyond that of course we know that on the cross Jesus had actually taken upon himself God's judgement against sin and so was opening the way up by which God's forgiveness could be obtained. If that is not love then I do not know what is.

In what sense can and should this be an example to us? Something we can all do for our enemies, for those who hurt us in some way big or small, is pray for them – that is loving them. We should pray that they experience God's transforming grace and forgiveness in their lives for this is ultimately what will lead them to change their attitudes towards us. As we pray for others in this way it can change our own feelings towards our enemies and help us to be ready to offer our forgiveness. If we show a loving attitude towards our enemies that can, sometimes, help them to stop and think about what they are doing. It will not always do so, but to love one's enemies does open up the possibility that the situation will evolve in a way that avoids a degenerating cycle of opposition and violence.

Chapter 4 Jesus and the religious hypocrites

The word hypocrisy originates from the world of ancient Greek theatre. It refers to someone who wore a mask or to someone who acted out a particular role. Now, when we see someone wearing a mask we know that what we see on the mask does not necessarily portray the person behind it, and again when we watch an actor playing a part what we are seeing is not necessarily a reflection of the real person.

Now, religious hypocrisy refers to those people who put on the mask of being spiritual, good people when really inside they are not. It refers to people who are just putting on the show of being religious but are not necessarily sincere; they are acting out a role.

Jesus must have met this type of person quite often because he addresses himself to them on a number of occasions. Unfortunately it seems that some who were considered religious leaders were falling into this kind of trap. As for an example of the type of thing I am talking about, a few verses from Matthew's gospel are quoted, they figure in Jesus' well known sermon on the mount: chapter six verses one and two, verse five and verse sixteen, which figure in Jesus' famous sermon on the mount: "*Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven.*" (Matthew 6:1-2) "*And when you pray do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth they have received their reward in full.*" (Matthew 6:5) "*When you fast do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting.*" (Matthew 6:16).

Later on in Matthew's gospel Jesus uses some quite colourful language to really expose the scandal and wickedness of such behaviour: "*Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.*

Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." (Matthew 23:25-28).

This is really quite harsh language but remember that this latter quotation comes from near the end of Jesus' ministry. Gentler teaching had apparently not had an effect and so Jesus was really trying to shock these people into seeing the truth about themselves, for it is only as a person sees the truth about himself, in all its ugliness, that he can be led to desire change and a solution, that proposed by the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I trust that as we have read these passages from the Bible that you've built up a picture of what these people were like. We can see that these people were putting on a show of being law abiding, respectable and spiritually pious individuals, but there was no sincerity, and inside they were just as much sinners as anyone else, just as greedy and as selfish. Of course these Pharisees and teachers of the law were also very quick to condemn sin in other people. They were however just not ready to admit that sin was present in their own lives. In addition their motivation for performing spiritual acts such as public prayer and fasting seemed to have little to do with God and a whole lot

to do with getting a good reputation before men and being well considered. In a sense there was a contradiction between their public life and their private life and also a contradiction in that what they taught others to do they could not fulfil themselves. Jesus is very hard against this kind of attitude, not for the sake of being nasty, but because he wants to awaken people from the error of their ways and lead them to true faith and assurance.

However, we need to see lessons in this for us as well:

We as pastors or church leaders are in a similar position as the Pharisees. We have a public life in that all we do is quite visible and people can look up to us, respect us and even praise us. Given this state of affairs we must not fall into the traps of the Pharisees. We must avoid wanting above all to please men and to have their praise rather than to please God. This can lead to us putting on a show or an act trying to make people think that we are better than we really are, trying to attract attention to ourselves rather than to our Saviour. Secondly we should be making every effort to live up to the standards that we are encouraging our congregations to follow. There should not be a contradiction between what we are teaching and the way that we are leading our lives. Of course, all of us fail in some measure to live up to the standards that God places before us but rather than pretending that we are super spiritual or perfectly holy we should be transparent and humble, recognising before others our weaknesses and struggles. This is really the essence to avoiding hypocrisy,

being who we really are before God and men, rather than pretending to be somebody we are not.

Chapter 5 Jesus and legalism

This chapter will consider the theme of Jesus and legalism. This issue relates to the important question of what place should the law have in a Christian believer's life and throughout history there have been two extreme responses to this question. First of all there are those who claim that because a Christian has been saved by grace then the law has no relevance to his life and hence he can behave as he wishes. Such people would claim that it does not matter if you sin because God will forgive. This is not this chapter's theme but I would stress that this position is wrong, that the Bible stands against it, that we must not think we can do just as we please before God.

The other extreme position is the one that Jesus encountered from parts of the religious establishment during his ministry. This position consists in adding a whole list of arduous and petty rules to God's law and to maintain that we will only remain accepted by God so long as we respect all these additional regulations. This was the teaching of a religious group in Jesus' time that was called the Pharisees and we call their attitude to the law legalism.

In the gospels we can read of some examples of the kinds of rules that they were seeking to impose upon people's lives. Many of these regulations concern the keeping of the Sabbath, a day that God had prescribed should be free

from work, a day of rest. The Pharisees had composed a long list of things that should not be done on the Sabbath because they believed them to be work. For instance when Jesus' disciples picked a few ears of corn from a field one Sabbath they were criticised by the Pharisees for doing the work of harvesting (Luke 6:1-5) and when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath he was criticised for the Pharisees considered this to be work (Luke 6:6-11). There were many, many more rules defining what could and could not be done on the Sabbath.

So what were the real problems with this approach? And what should we learn from Jesus on this issue?

In some ways the Pharisees should be praised, for many had a zealous desire to please God. However, I do think they had got things quite wrong and that their legalistic approach could be very misleading and damaging to people's faith. At least this is what Jesus seems to suggest when he says, for example: *"Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees for you shut the Kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not try to enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."* (Matthew 23:13).

So, how were the Pharisees guilty of shutting the Kingdom of heaven in people's faces? This is where legalism is very misleading and goes against the message of good news that Jesus heralded. Legalism will usually teach that a person's acceptance before God, or salvation, depends upon a man or woman respecting and obeying all the prescribed laws,

rules and regulations. However, this system of rules can become so complex and difficult that they weigh upon people like a heavy burden and folk will soon become discouraged and give up on God, believing that religion is too difficult. This is undoubtedly the background to Jesus' invitation: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30).

Jesus is saying that the Pharisees' teaching actually dissuaded people from seeking the Kingdom. The approach of the gospel is quite the opposite. Jesus wants to throw open the doors of the Kingdom to all and sundry and entry is not on the basis of respecting a lot of petty rules. Entry into the Kingdom, according to Jesus' teaching, is on the basis of faith and repentance: faith in the promises of God for forgiveness of sin and resurrection hope; repentance which is that attitude that acknowledges Jesus as Lord and allows him to reign over our lives. Submitting to the Lordship of Christ is not the same as slavishly respecting a long list of petty rules.

So, why is all this important to us as ministers of God's Word?

It is so easy for Christian pastors, even from a sincere desire to please God, to fall into the same trap of being legalistic in the teaching they bring to believers. People

may have questions – am I allowed to do this as a Christian? Am I allowed to go there as a Christian? Can I eat such and such food? And as we deal with such questions it is easy for our answers to become a new list of rules and regulations which sometimes lead folk away from the true meaning of the Law, and which can begin to place a heavy burden upon believers, ultimately misleading them or others to think that acceptance by God is through obeying a list of rules and not by grace through faith in Christ's promises.

What I want to underline in this chapter, from Jesus' example, is that the Law must never be allowed to conceal the grace of the gospel. Salvation is a gift of God's mercy and is not obtained or merited by obedience to the Law or any man made rules. Please avoid making up lists of do's and don'ts, that go beyond the law, and that you impose upon your congregation. They will only hide the gospel and bring fear and burden where there should be joy and freedom.

Chapter 6 Jesus and the Law

If in the last chapter we saw that Jesus denounced the Pharisees' misuse of laws and rules this does raise the question of what is a good use of the Law of Moses. How did Jesus address the question of the place of the Law in his own life and that of his disciples?

Firstly, we can say that Jesus did not teach that the Law of God, given through Moses, was irrelevant, or that it should

be abandoned or abolished. He said, according to Matthew 5:17-19: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commandments will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven.”*

Now what did Jesus mean when he said he had come to fulfil or accomplish the Law? There are two levels of meaning to these words. Firstly, Jesus fulfilled the Law in that he perfectly obeyed all the moral, civil and ceremonial requirements of the Law; there was not a single instance of Jesus disobeying the Law of Moses. In this Jesus was unique. He is the only person ever to have accomplished this perfect obedience and in doing so he was showing how men and women should live before God.

Secondly, Jesus accomplished the prophetic significance of the Law. Much of the Law of Moses is concerned with regulating the various sacrifices, festivals and offerings that punctuated the religious life of Israel. These showed that we could only be purified of our ungodliness and forgiven our sin by the shedding of blood through the sacrifice of a substitute. The teaching of the New Testament reveals that these various ceremonies were shadowy pointers to a

higher reality; in Jesus Christ there would be the ultimate sacrifice for sin that would put an end to all the other ritual sacrifices. In this sense Jesus fulfilled or accomplished the purpose of the ceremonial law.

This sets the background to Jesus' teaching on the Law. I have always been concerned to underline that our acceptance by God is on the basis of the grace of the gospel and not by the works of the Law – so what is the place of the Law in the life of the Christian? What is Jesus' example in this matter?

Jesus sets before us an example, an ideal even, of a good and righteous life. Even if we know that we will never achieve such standards of goodness, we should be striving towards this ideal. Our priority, to echo Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 6:33, should be to "*seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness*". We must understand though that the motivation for striving after righteousness is to gain acceptance by God, but is rather a response of thanksgiving, an offering of praise in view of his immeasurable mercy towards us. We have seen previously that a mark of Jesus' love for his Father was trusting submission and obedience to his will. Again, we should obey God because we love him and trust him. It really is necessary to stress that we should be following Jesus in living righteous lives and that our motivation should be one of love and gratitude to the Father.

Now, the question remains - what is a righteous life? How can we know the difference between right and wrong, good and evil? This is where Jesus stresses the universal validity of the Law of Moses. It remains a very good guideline defining what is right and what is wrong. It sets boundaries to our behaviour and when we cross these boundaries we should know without any doubt that we are straying into behaviour that God detests. As Jesus made clear in the text we read earlier, if we break the Law of God and if we encourage or teach others to do so then we should not be surprised if God becomes angry with us. We will be considered the least in the Kingdom of God. Interestingly, this does indicate that we will not be cast out of the Kingdom. This is further proof of the fact that our presence in the Kingdom is by grace and not of works.

The order not to teach or encourage others to break God's commands is of great importance to those with leadership or teaching responsibilities in churches. Our lives should be an example of the highest standards of righteousness possible. If we ourselves break God's law then others might think that it is all right to do so as well and we will be guilty of leading them astray. If we formally teach that it is fine to disregard God's Law and that folk can lead their lives as they please then this is even worse. We will be a danger to ourselves and a danger to the flock that God has entrusted into our care. God will not look kindly upon the situation and we can expect him to discipline and to correct. That will be painful.

I want to add though that Jesus' teaching on righteousness goes beyond the scope of the Law. The Law can regulate our acts, our external behaviour and relationships with God and men but Jesus is concerned to show that righteousness is also about controlling what goes on inside, in our thoughts and our feelings.

Some examples: In the Sermon on the Mountain Jesus picks up on the Law against murder. Obviously it is wrong to kill people and most people do not actually commit murder. However, Jesus says that feeling hatred towards someone is just as bad as committing murder. *"You have heard it said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement."* (Matthew 6:21-22). True righteousness seeks not only to obey the letter of the Law but also to abstain from such thoughts. Jesus follows this example with many others. For example, adultery: desiring an illicit relationship in one's heart is just as bad as committing an act of sexual immorality. This is why Jesus says that our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees. We are to respect not only the letter of the Law but to deal with the thoughts and feelings that could one day lead us to break that Law.

Chapter 7 Jesus the servant

The idea that Jesus was a servant might seem strange to some. We are used to seeing Jesus as an authority figure.

He is often called Lord. So, how can he at one and the same time be both a leader and a servant?

We are so used to the way this world works that this can seem a bit odd. We are used to persons in positions of authority and leadership just giving orders, and using their position to improve their own lives but that is not the way it should be, certainly not in Christian ministry. A text from Mark's gospel will help really reach into the heart of the matter. *"Jesus called his disciples together and said: You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:42-45).

The context of this discourse is that Jesus is addressing the disciples at a time when they seemed to be trying to manipulate him into giving them the most important positions in the Kingdom of God. The disciples obviously feel on the verge of a great movement that was going to herald in a new age and they wanted to rise up out of their positions of poverty and powerlessness to become the rich and influential. First of all the mother of James and John approached Jesus with the request that they be given the two most important places in the Kingdom of God. This fact causes the other disciples to become disgruntled,

revealing in turn that they too coveted these positions. The verses we have read are Jesus' reply to this potential conflict. According to Jesus, the Kingdom of God must be very different.

Jesus stresses that Christians must be unlike the world around and that if the disciples were just going to grab power for their own personal benefit then they would be, in fact, no different. That type of thing had been going on for centuries and it has continued into the present day.

How are Christian disciples to be different? In what way is this to be seen?

Jesus says that the purpose of our existence is to serve rather than to be served. That is, rather than being self-centred, we are to be Christ-centred, and if we are Christ-centred that will naturally lead us to be other-centred, to love and to serve those around us – our family, our neighbour, our enemies even. When we are self-centred we are always thinking about our own needs and aspirations, our own preoccupations and ambitions but when we give our lives to serving others it is their needs and preoccupations which become important to us and we will think less about ourselves and more about how we can help others in their need.

There is no doubt that in the text we read earlier Jesus really sets himself up as an example in this. He said that he *“did not come to be served but to serve”* and that his

ultimate act of service would be to give himself up to death on a cross in order to provide for the redemption of many.

It is so true that in this area of servant hood, Jesus really is our example. Jesus is Lord, but he exercises his Lordship in the manner of a servant: he put the needs of others before his own; he was compassionate and merciful; he accepted an uncomfortable, tiring and painful way of life in order that multitudes might benefit from his ministry. There is nothing particularly romantic about servant hood; it is difficult and our sinful, self-centred nature will shy away from it. Nevertheless, Jesus calls us to follow his example.

Remember, on the night he was betrayed and led off to be crucified, Jesus gave a very vivid picture of what it means to be a servant. I am thinking of John 13 when Jesus took a bowl of water and a towel and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. We must bear in mind that important people, persons in leadership or authority just did not usually do this task of feet washing. They would usually have slaves who would wash their guests' feet for them. So Jesus is showing, that despite the fact he is Lord, he is ready to do tasks that would normally be accomplished by slaves.

Now, recall the words that Jesus addressed to his disciples once he had finished washing their feet: *“Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that*

you should do as I have done for you. I tell you, no servant is greater than his master.” (John 13:14-15).

What exactly is this example that Jesus sets? Does it mean we should be literally washing each other’s feet?

I do not think feet washing should become some kind of ceremony. This is not the point. Rather, Jesus is saying that if we are in Christian leadership then we should not fall into the trap of thinking that there are some tasks that are too low for us. We should not think that we are above others and above doing menial jobs. Jesus was not and we are not to be. We are not to think – “I am the pastor so I am not going to perform that task.”

To sum up, being a servant involves putting others first and exercising our ministry in such a way that we are seen to give consideration to people’s needs and to serve the interests of the church as a whole. It means spending ourselves in service and accepting to do things that we do not necessarily feel we should or want to be doing. Jesus’ teaching, and his example of servant hood is a great challenge to our pride and self-centredness but we trust that the Holy Spirit would enable us to make very real progress in this area.

Chapter 8 Jesus the communicator

In this chapter I would like to consider the whole theme of Jesus as a communicator, that is, the way in which he sought to get across the message that he had come to bring.

This is an important subject because, as leaders of churches, God has entrusted us with the message of the gospel, and this message is without doubt of the highest importance, being one that everybody needs to hear. The question we need to ask ourselves is – are we communicating the message of the gospel in a way that people around us can understand and relate to it?

Communicating is not necessarily as easy as we think it might be. You may think that you are clearly explaining an idea but the people you are talking to may not understand what you say because you are using words or ideas that are unfamiliar to them. Again, you may intend to say one thing but your hearers may mistakenly understand you as saying something else.

This is especially the case when we are evangelising. The gospel will be a message with which many are unfamiliar and it contains ideas that many have never heard before. It is a message that we want people to understand because their eternal destiny depends upon it, so we must be really careful to do our best to make it clear. Now, throughout this series we have been looking at the example of Jesus, so, in this area of communication, just what can we learn from him?

The first point sounds a little silly, but it is not. Jesus spoke the language of the people to whom he was sent. He spoke the Aramaic that the people living in Israel at that

time spoke. Obviously the best communication occurs whenever the two persons involved are speaking the same mother tongue. For many of you reading this booklet English will be your second or third language. If we were able to produce booklets in the various mother tongues with which you speak we are sure that you would get even more out of them. The point is, wherever possible, it is best to speak to people of the gospel in the language that they know best.

Moving on, then, to other lessons that we can learn from Jesus; perhaps one of the most important is that Jesus used lots of everyday examples and illustrations to help him to convey spiritual truths. These range from the simple comparisons such as – “*you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world*”, to the longer parables that are really short stories designed to get a message across.

Jesus used many types of illustration and we can learn much from their use. Jesus took examples and illustrations that people would be familiar with from their everyday lives. He took illustrations from the world of agriculture: the sowing of seeds and the reaping of crops, trees bearing fruit, the vine, also from the world of sheep and shepherding. Others reflect the use of everyday objects such as lamps or coins or of memorable events such as wedding feasts. It is important in your choice of illustrations to take them from everyday life and situations with which your congregations are familiar. For example,

someone living in a desert may never have seen snow, so using snow as an illustration would not be helpful.

Illustrations are useful because the truths of the gospel, spiritual truths, are in many ways quite abstract, invisible and intangible. It can be difficult for many to grasp the concepts if we just use technical theological language. To use an illustration of my own, if we go into an unknown house at night time, without turning on the light or bringing a lamp, we will not be able to see clearly what is in the house or appreciate any objects that might be found there. We might even stumble and fall or knock things over and break them. If, however, we bring light to the room everything becomes clear, we know where everything is and what everything is and we can move around without risk. Good illustrations help people to visualise and to understand spiritual truth so much more clearly.

Before we conclude this chapter there is one more aspect of Jesus’ communication skills that I would like to highlight.

In many of the parables that Jesus tells stories of everyday situations are punctuated with events or anecdotes that would have surprised or shocked many of those listening. Take, for example, the parable of the Good Samaritan. The average Jewish listener would just not have expected such an outcome to the story. He would have been very surprised, and possibly offended, to hear that a Samaritan, who were quite disliked by the Jews, would be the hero of the story. Another example is in the parable of the

Prodigal Son where people would have been very surprised by the behaviour of the son. For someone to ask for his inheritance while his father was still alive was a deeply shocking thing. As a last example, think of the parable of the wedding feast where a man gets thrown out of the party by the King for not wearing the right clothes. This again is a surprising turn of events. My belief is that to surprise people in such a way adds interest, it gains the attention of the listener, but I am convinced there is an even more important reason for these surprises. Jesus wanted his audience, and us, to leave behind our old way of thinking and our traditional ideas, which can be quite rigid and unquestioned. He wants people to examine their assumptions about life and to consider looking at new ways of viewing the world, particularly spiritual issues. So, Jesus peppered his teaching with surprising statements and stories in order to shake people out of their complacency. In our teaching ministry, we need to bring this added interest; it will help people to listen. We also need to communicate in a way that challenges the traditional non-Christian beliefs that people have always assumed to be true, but which the gospel reveals to be false. We need to be surprising people into thinking again and into considering the truth of the gospel.

Chapter 9 Jesus the trainer

Training is important. We must recognise that Jesus shows us his mercy and grace not only in the fact that he forgives us and grants us salvation, a place in his Kingdom, but also in that he gives believers the privilege of joining with him

in mission. He entrusts Christians with various tasks to accomplish in his Kingdom. This is evidence of the grace of God, because God, if he wanted, could achieve anything he liked all by himself, he does not need men's help. However, he desires to include us as useful partners in his plans and purposes. Now then, given that God entrusts believers with various tasks or ministries to carry out, we need to be trained by Jesus in order to serve God to the best of our abilities. The ability to serve God well does not just appear overnight but is gained over time and through much effort and discipline, and in a sense we will always be learners, that is the meaning of the word disciple.

We see in the gospels that Jesus chose twelve of his disciples to be men that would follow him wherever he went and be with him whatever he did. This reflects Jesus' concern to train up those who would continue the task of mission following his ascension. Whilst it is true that we see Jesus as a trainer particularly with respect to the twelve, there are hints that his training method reached out to a far wider circle. For instance, we know that at one time Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples on short term preaching tours. These too received training in preparation for that mission and in a sense the very mission itself was part of their training.

So, how did Jesus actually go about training his disciples?

This subject could be neatly divided into three sections: Jesus taught his disciples, Jesus was an example to his

disciples, and finally, Jesus gave his disciples practical experience. To put it another way – Jesus told his disciples what to do, he showed them how to do it, and then he sent them out to do it. If we take Matthew's gospel for example, the first time that Jesus sends his disciples out is recorded in chapter ten. On this occasion Jesus gives them considerably teaching, advice and exhortation before actually sending them on their way. Of course, the disciples had already spent a lot of time in Jesus' company: they had heard his teaching contained in the Sermon on the Mount, they had seen how Jesus dealt with a whole variety of situations from healing the sick to casting out demons. Then, according to Luke 10, when the disciples returned from their practical experience they spent time with Jesus talking through all that had happened. They always had the opportunity to ask Jesus questions.

How then can we put this into practice in our own situations? Let us just imagine for example that we want folk in our congregation to participate in teaching the children in Sunday school. What do we need to do?

A first point is that we should not be entrusting the teaching of our children, or any other ministry for that matter, to just anybody. Christians must be trained for the task. It is interesting to note that before Jesus chose his disciples he spent much time in prayer (see Luke 6:12-16 for example). This is a good example to follow. There may be needs in your church, but the first step is to pray

that you might be led to believers who, given training, will grow to meet those needs.

So, let us imagine that we have found some Christians who we think will be suitable to teach in Sunday school. How should we go about training them?

First of all we need to reassure ourselves that the person in question has a good grounding in the scriptures, that he understands the truth of the gospel and does not hold to any ideas that are flagrantly unbiblical. Secondly, they will need to receive some kind of instruction to help them know how to go about teaching, in this example children. There are lots of things that need to be taken into account when we engage in various ministries, things that people might be unaware of and part of training is to get this information across so that folk are better equipped to do the task in question. This is the first element - tell them how to do it.

Secondly, in the example we are using, that of teaching children, either in Sunday school or in clubs that are held at other times, you should send the person who is being trained to watch an experienced teacher at work. The person should sit in on a Sunday school class or a club night to see how it is done, to see how theory translates into practice. This is the second element – show them how to do it.

Then, once again using this example of the trainee Sunday school teacher, he or she should be given the chance to

actually teach a real class. At this stage someone more experienced should sit in on the class to watch and see how the person gets on. Then they can talk together afterwards about what was good and where perhaps improvements could be made. Be careful to encourage the trainee wherever possible and to talk about things that need improving in a kindly manner not with destructive criticism. It will take time for someone to fully develop his skills and confidence and we are there to help them to do this.

We can see something of Jesus' kind and patient manner in the gospels as he trained his disciples. They made mistakes and experienced failures but Jesus always sought to pick them up and help them on their way again. He helped them to see where they went wrong and to learn positively from their negative experiences.

Remember that we too, if we hold positions of responsibility, are still learning. We are still disciples and need to receive training from the Lord. He will always teach us with patience and mercy, in an encouraging and uplifting way. We trust also that the material contained in the *Serving Today* radio programmes and booklets are of use to you as the Lord continues to equip you to serve the churches and believers that he has entrusted into your care.

Chapter 10 Jesus' message, our message

This chapter will look at the essential message that Jesus proclaimed and seek to underline that we too should be

preaching that same message and making its proclamation a real priority in our ministries.

The obvious place to begin is to remind ourselves just what message Jesus was concerned to herald. There are many summaries of his message to be found in the gospels. Here are a couple of examples: "*Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come' he said. 'The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'*" (Mark 1:14). The second is when Jesus stands up to read the scriptures in the synagogue at Jerusalem and announces that he has come to fulfil these verses from Isaiah. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news for the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*" (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus' message, then, is that the time has come for some good news to be announced. It is so sad that most of the news that we hear, either by word of mouth, or over the radio, is bad news: people committing wicked acts or suffering tragically in all manner of ways. Well, Jesus says there is good news available, indeed it is the best of news, and he was fully committed and enthusiastic in declaring it.

There is a lovely chorus that summarises the scriptures that we read earlier. Its first couple of lines are: "there's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, there's a door that

is open and you may go in.” Jesus message, to all and sundry, without distinction, was that whatever their past and whatever their background the possibility of a marvellous future was opening up for them. However they may have offended God in the past, forgiveness was available, it was possible from now on for anyone to be reconciled to God, to know God as their compassionate and merciful Father and to have the hope that on the day of the resurrection they would be welcomed wholeheartedly into his presence for eternity.

We have seen throughout this booklet that Jesus did indeed bring this message of grace and hope to all types of people: to those who had been cast out of society, to notorious sinners, to the sick, to the foreigners, to women as well as men, even to those who opposed Jesus and became his enemies. This in itself is an example we should follow, no-one should be denied the occasion of hearing the gospel.

However, it must not be forgotten that this message that proclaims forgiveness does need to meet with a human response for a person to enter into the blessing of its promises. The verse that we read earlier from Mark’s gospel provides a good summary of this response, one that is repeated on numerous occasions throughout the gospels. The human response to the good news should be faith and repentance. Jesus says – *“repent and believe the good news!”* Authentic faith believes that the promises of the gospel are true for us personally. Repentance is that life

transforming change of attitude that allows Jesus to reign over our lives in a way that he previously did not.

The gospels show very clearly that Jesus entrusted this very same message that he preached, to his disciples, that they in turn might proclaim it, not just to Israel but also throughout the whole world. We can say that the church today has inherited this message and this responsibility. The good news must be preached, by us.

Here are some texts reminding us of this: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:19). *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”* (Mark 16:15). *“Repentance and forgiveness will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”* (Luke 24:47).

It could not be much clearer could it? Jesus has entrusted a task to the church. We have a message to bear to the world.

It is important to note that the sayings quoted above are amongst the last recorded words of Jesus to his disciples and this undoubtedly underlines the fact that this task should be considered of the highest priority. It is so easy for churches to get sidelined by other activities or problems that might have some importance but which can eclipse evangelism. Church leaders also must be careful to give

the proclamation of the gospel the importance it deserves and to make sure that the church as a whole is doing all it can in this area and that believers are being equipped and taught so that they too can be witnesses speaking the good news where they are.

As you read the gospels, look afresh at Jesus' example in this area. His announcing of the good news was born of his deep concern and compassion for the lost. *"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom ... When he saw the crowds he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* (Matthew 9:35-36). Do you and your congregations have this same concern for the lost around you? Jesus worked tirelessly to proclaim this message of hope, he gave himself sacrificially to the task and he persevered through good times and bad. Do you and your congregations show this same costly commitment to the undertaking of mission?

We should not see evangelism as an optional extra or as a pastime. The message that we have is the greatest of news but its proclamation remains an urgent task and a solemn responsibility for ultimately it is a question of life and death. May the Holy Spirit help us to go about our duty just as he helped those first disciples that we read of in the book of Acts.

Chapter 11 Conclusion

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: *"Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."* (1 Corinthians 11:1). Church leaders and pastors are relatively public figures who will be watched, both by their congregations and beyond, by the community in which they live. We will be examples whether we like it or not; this is inevitable. The big question is – will we be good examples or bad? Will we be examples that point to Christ and display something of his character in our lives? Or will we be examples that give people a bad image of Christ and the Christian faith? Looked at in this way maybe we can appreciate the heavy burden of responsibility that falls upon church leaders and for this reason James says; *"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."* (James 3:1).

We are then to follow the example of Christ. This booklet has sought to outline a number of aspects of life and ministry in which Christ should be our example and to show, in a practical way, what a difference following that example should make.

You may feel the heavy burden of this responsibility and think that you are not up to it, that you do not have what it takes to be such an example in ministry. In a sense such an attitude, which displays humility rather than pride, is a good starting point, but we need to move on from there and with sincerity seek the powerful working of the Spirit of God in our lives, for it is he who will mould us into

increasing Christ likeness. Remember, amongst Jesus' first words recorded in the New Testament are: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:3). That is, it is those who consider themselves in need of help who will look with most trust to the Lord and will receive from his riches as they allow him to reign in their lives. The apostle Paul displays a similar attitude. In 2 Corinthians 2:16 he writes "*and who is equal to such a task.*" Paul keenly felt his limitations and vulnerability before the overwhelming weight of the task that the Lord had entrusted to him. However, rather than allowing himself to be cast down into despair he threw himself afresh in trusting submission upon the Lord, that he might be enabled to do that which he feared he could not. A little later in the same letter Paul writes: "*we are not competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.*" (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).

So then, progress in being an example of Christ can be made as we depend upon him to transform our lives by his Spirit.

However, it must be made clear that in this whole matter of following the example of Christ there are not to be two distinct classes or tiers of Christians. The Church is not to be divided into leaders, who are obliged to follow the example of Christ, and others who are not. The verse that was quoted at the beginning of this conclusion shows that Paul expected the Christians he was writing to also to

follow the example of Christ, just as he did. There is no question of double standards.

There is a sense then in which the material contained in this booklet should not be restricted to pastors. Rather, in the matters that are addressed, Jesus is an example for all believers. In this context, Paul's exhortation to the believers in Corinth – "*Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ*", reveals that one of the goals or purposes of Christian leadership is that believers be encouraged and exhorted to follow the example of Christ themselves. How can we go about doing this?

Firstly, through the teaching ministry, we should be teaching believers that Christ is an example who is to be followed. If you need help or suggestions on how to go about this, then do feel free to use the material in this booklet as the basis for a series of sermons on this theme. Each chapter could be used to form the outline of a sermon; the contents can be expanded and adapted so that it applies to your own congregation and situation.

Finally though, our own lives must be an example of increasing Christ likeness. There should not be a flagrant contradiction between what we are teaching and how we are living. We cannot expect believers to do that which we are unprepared to do ourselves. Christians in our care will only be enabled to follow the example of Christ in the measure that we too show that we are committed to following it.

The apostle Paul gave similar advice when he wrote to the young pastor Timothy. “*Command and teach these things*”, instructed Paul (1 Timothy 4:11) and then a little later he added “*set an example for the believers in speech, in love, in life and in purity.*” (1 Timothy 4:12).

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