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WHAT DID JESUS LIVE FOR?

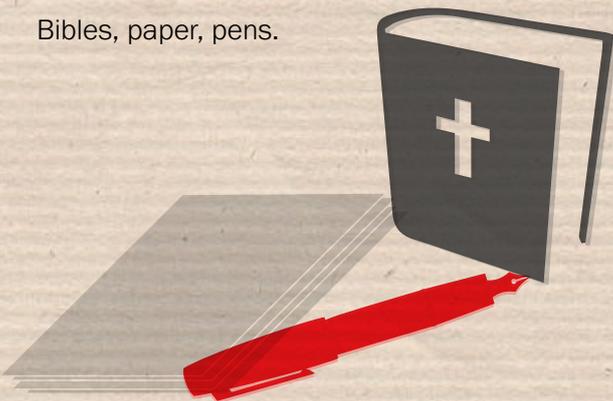
In Jesus, we find the ultimate revelation of God. Yet we often focus on the very beginning and very end of his life. What about the things he did in the meantime? How would we live if we took the things he said seriously?

A LOT OF THE THINGS JESUS SAID WERE PRETTY RADICAL, BUT WE MIGHT FEEL WE'VE HEARD THEM SO MANY TIMES THAT THEY'VE BECOME A BIT TIRED. CAN WE LOOK AGAIN WITH FRESH EYES AND GET EXCITED ABOUT THE CHALLENGE FOR OUR LIVES?



YOU WILL NEED:

Bibles, paper, pens.



GET STARTED: Jesus announces his purpose

Ask one person in the group to read Isaiah 61:1-4 and another to read Luke 4:16-21.

This is how Jesus starts his ministry – by reading from Isaiah, which all those listening to him would have been familiar with, and associated with the coming of the Messiah. Jesus, in quoting this passage, is announcing that he is the Messiah that they have been waiting for, and also announcing what that means: good news for the poor, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed. 'The year of the Lord's favour' is a reference to the year of Jubilee – the laws of redistribution that were designed to prevent extreme poverty and wealth, or indefinite slavery.

Ask the group if they can think of occasions in the Gospels when Jesus did one of these things that he has announced. What does this mean for what the kingdom of God is?

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READ: The Beatitudes Matthew 5:1-11

The Beatitudes are part of what is probably Jesus' most famous sermon. These sentences turned the expectations of people who were listening on their head – wealth, health and a good life were traditionally understood to be blessings from God; Jesus makes clear that this isn't the case. God is on the side of those that are poor, hurting or striving for a better world.

But what does 'blessed' mean in this case? Elias Chacour, the Melkite Archbishop of Galilee writes that in the Aramaic text, the word used is 'ashray'. This is a much more active word than the English 'blessed' implies, and means 'to set yourself up on the right way, for the right goal; to turn around, to act.'

Re-read the Beatitudes, taking into account this interpretation of the word ashray.

Chacour puts it like this:

'Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for you shall be satisfied.

Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you peacemakers, for you shall be called children of God.

To me this reflects Jesus' words and teachings much more accurately. I can hear him saying: "Get your hands dirty to build a human society for human beings; otherwise, others will torture and murder the poor, the voiceless, and the powerless."

Christianity is not passive but active, energetic, alive, going beyond despair.¹



READ: The Way Matthew 5:38-44

Jesus takes Mosaic laws that were designed to limit violence from escalating, and takes it even further, telling us to refuse to respond violently altogether. But importantly, Jesus is not telling us to be pushovers, to not respond at all. In each example, Jesus encourages us to find a creative non-violent way to respond which forces the aggressor to see us as an equal human being. Jesus is talking to people who are used to being oppressed or exploited, those with little power. By finding new, non-violent ways to respond, Jesus is empowering those who are listening. Walter Wink explains the power in each of Jesus' examples. You can find out more here.²

People who were in debt had to provide something as a down payment on the loan – like their overcoat, but the creditor had to give it back each night so that the poor person could stay warm. So when Jesus tells the crowd not just to give their overcoat, but their shirt too, he is encouraging them to use the system in their favour. Nakedness caused shame, not for the naked person but more for the person looking at them. Giving your shirt too would bring shame on the rich creditor, highlighting the absurdity of a poor person giving a richer person their coat.



READ: The Prayer Matthew 6:9-13

Discuss your initial thoughts about the prayer. What's in it? What does it tell us about Jesus' priorities?

Now look again at the following two verses from Matthew and think about what they mean:

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¹ Elias Chacour in 'We Belong to the Land', cpt.org/resources/worship/services/be-attitudes

² *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, Walter Wink, 1998.

**'Your kingdom
come. Your will be
done, on earth as
it is in heaven'
(Matthew 6:10)**

- What does this mean? What sort of values do you think are 'heavenly' that we should be bringing to earth?
- What role are we called to play in bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth?

**'Give us this day our
daily bread. And
forgive us our debts,
as we also have
forgiven our debtors'
(Matthew 6:11-12)**

- Why do you think Jesus uses 'our' daily bread rather than 'my' daily bread?

Jesus spent most of his time with the peasants and the poor. Their biggest concern would have been having enough food to feed their families, and avoiding falling into debts they could not pay back. So by including these concerns, Jesus is making clear that everyone should have enough to live well without having to enslave themselves to a creditor.

Don't forget that more sessions from this series and other great resources are available from christianaidcollective.org



ACTIVITY: **The modern parable**

Jesus, just like in the Beatitudes, often had something surprising to say. He had a knack of making people see things in a new way, questioning people so that they came to their own conclusions, or challenging their expectations of God.

Read the following passages:

Luke 10:25-37 – The parable of the Good Samaritan

John 8:1-11 – The woman caught in adultery

Luke 14:16-24 – The parable of the great banquet

Imagine you are the people listening to Jesus tell these parables for the first time, or that you were there when the Pharisees presented the woman caught in adultery. What would you have expected Jesus to say or to do?

If the gospels were being written today, who would the characters in these stories be? Think about how it would feel to be the different people in each story or passage, and then choose one to re-write as it could happen today in a context that you know.



PRAY:

The Lord's prayer, as Jesus taught us. Think carefully about each line, and reflect on what it means for how we should live our lives.



PLEDGE:

How can your group 'Get up, go ahead, do something, move' so that you will be called children of God? What can you do this week to be the neighbour to someone in need? Talk it over and agree to do one new thing this week that is inspired by the teachings of Jesus.