

Unexpected Jesus Series Discussion Guides April - May 2021

Week 1 – Unexpected Kingdom



Teaching Text

Mark 1:14-15

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon kicked off our new sermon series called The Unexpected Jesus. He began by discussing the unexpected kingdom, diagnosing the biggest problem in our society as a discipleship problem. We have been inundated by different false gospels that have distorted the true Gospel. When Jesus began His ministry, the Jewish people were in want of a king and a kingdom to free them from the Roman rule. Much as He is today, Jesus was not who they bargained for. Even though the beginning of His ministry drew the Jewish people in through His parables and revelations about the kingdom of God, it didn't take long for them to desire a military leader instead of the Suffering Servant before them. Jesus conflicted with each of the religious, political, and cultural groups of His day. His kingdom was so unexpected that Jesus was ultimately rejected for claiming that the kingdom could only come through divine humility and not human strength.

As a people who now live in the overlap of the ages, the time between the cross and the ultimate restoration of humanity, we must learn to live in the tension and longing of waiting in between. There are traps in the form of false gospels laid before us: 1) the gospel of atonement, which focuses solely on the forgiveness of sin; 2) the gospel of secular humanism, which implements the characteristics of God's kingdom without a king; and 3) the gospel of religious moralism, which results in shame and hiding from God's presence. Instead, we are called to seek first the kingdom of God by announcing what Jesus has done, living in Christian community, and pushing against darkness. Knowing that we will never fully fit into our culture, we must live in expectation without agenda, trusting that God is moving and joining Him where He asks us to.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

What is one unexpected thing about yourself that most people don't know?

Check In

Has God moved in a surprising way this week?

Contemplate

Ask someone to read the teaching text, Mark 1:14-15, aloud. Allow your group to sit with the verses. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. Which words or phrases stand out to you?
2. If you were in John the Baptist's shoes, what would your reaction to Jesus's declaration be?

Consider

1. Out of the three false gospels Jon discussed, which one influences you the most?
2. What do you find most appealing about Jesus's ministry and His vision for the kingdom?
3. What aspect of Jesus's ministry and vision for the kingdom is hardest for you to wrap your mind around?

Create

Pastor Jon said we can seek the kingdom by announcing what Jesus has done, living in Christian community, and actively pushing against the darkness. Ask the group if anyone wants to share where they see God working in their life at the moment and how, through one of these three actions, they can join Him in His work. Encourage your group members to share practical, specific examples.

Cover

Spend time asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the false gospels we've adhered to, and to teach us fresh ways to join Him in His true kingdom. Pray over any other prayer requests from the group.

Week 2 – Unexpected Extravagance



Teaching Text

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

Recap

In John 12:1-11, a time immediately following the complete surprise of Lazarus's resurrection, the followers of Jesus came to a spiritual crossroads. Did they believe in Jesus, or was He a fraud and potentially dangerous? Mary of Bethany knew what she believed, so she extravagantly worshiped Jesus by pouring out a perfume on His feet that is said to be worth a year's wages. Mary understood the opportunity she had to worship and sacrifice for the Lord. Just like King David before her, Mary became undignified before the Lord, washing

Jesus's feet with her hair and sitting on the floor to listen to Him speak. This example stands in stark contrast to Judas Iscariot, who wanted to take the offering to Jesus for himself. As the money holder, he argued that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus defended Mary immediately and publicly. Though we might expect Jesus to agree with Judas to help the poor, He subverts our expectations by telling Judas that what Mary did was right; she was preparing Him for His burial. In Mark 14, Jesus said "she did what she could," meaning Mary took what she had and offered it as worship. In the same way, we can offer whatever we have, big or small, to Jesus.

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Discussion Guide

Connect

1. If you could have any other name besides your own, what would it be and why?

Check In

What has been weighing on your mind this past week?

Contemplate

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read one or two of the scriptures from this week's sermon:

- John 12:1-11
- Mark 14:1-9

- 2 Corinthians 2:15-16
- Deuteronomy 15:11
- 1 John 3:1

Allow your group to sit with the verses. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images stuck out to you?
2. How does this passage help you understand the significance of discipleship? Of worship?

Consider

1. How would you define "extravagant worship" or "undignified worship"?
2. After Mary of Bethany poured the perfume on Jesus, Jesus was pleased with her worship and said "she did what she could." What did He mean by that and how can we apply it to our lives?
3. What is the difference between serving out of humility and holy ambition versus obligation?

Create

Spend some time individually brainstorming what you feel led to sacrifice in order to extravagantly honor and serve Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring things to mind, and write your ideas down. Allow time for people to share if they feel comfortable doing so.

Cover

While extravagant worship can be difficult and require great humility, we are constantly reminded of God's never ending grace. Take time to pray for each other and for the Lord's presence to give us strength to worship unwaveringly.

Week 3 – No Quid Pro Quo



Teaching Text

Matthew 5:38-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Recap

This Sunday we heard from guest pastor Dr. Bryan Loritts, who called on us to follow the command of Jesus to give up our rights, love our enemies, and be reconciled to each other. Dr. Loritts taught that because the exchange of good for good and evil for evil, or quid pro quo, inherently makes sense to us, we tend to do something good for someone who did something good for us, and either oppose or ignore someone who has hurt us. However, since all human relationships involve sinners, it is in our nature to hurt one another, and eventually our kindness is not reciprocated, or is met with betrayal.

This tendency toward betrayal can not only make us enemies of each other, but reflects the deeper truth of our sin making us enemies of God. When we live on our own terms, we end up stabbing God in the back, betraying His plans for the world. But rather than returning blood for blood, He lays down His rights and his life, spilling His own blood so that we would be reconciled and be transformed from enemies into beloved sons and daughters. In the teaching text Jesus calls us to follow His example, returning good for evil instead of evil for evil, so that we might be reconciled with each other.

Dr. Loritts pointed to stories of civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis to show how suffering and non-resistance are able to change people's hearts. In order to win our enemies, we must live like these men, and the man who inspired them, Jesus Christ, and give up our rights— the right to retaliate, the right to our time, our money, and sometimes our legal rights. Not only does Jesus call us to give up what feels rightfully ours, but to go the extra mile and love our enemies.

Dr. Loritts boldly reminded us that Jesus loves the oppressor just as much as He loves the oppressed. He called on us to rise above our natural tendency to act on quid pro quo, or defend our rights, and follow the command of Jesus to actively love and pray for those who have wronged us. While betrayal alienates us from one another, praying for God's favor over our enemies opens up our hearts, and has the power to renew our humanity and theirs. If there is no partiality with God, then there should be no partiality in the hearts of His people. When we are wronged and choose to respond in love, we are living up to the example of Jesus, and following His command to be perfect as the Father is perfect.

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Discussion Guide

Connect

1. Where have you seen God move during this Community Group season?

Check In

What is your first reaction when someone hurts you? How does your own view of “fairness” align or misalign with God’s view of fairness/turning the other cheek?

Contemplate

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read Matthew 5:38-48 aloud:

Allow your group to sit with the verses. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images stuck out to you?
2. How have you processed being betrayed in the past? Do you still feel underlying resentment? Have you experienced reconciliation?

Consider

1. Where have you seen reconciliation in your life or your community’s lives?
2. In what ways is Jesus’ view of reconciliation different from a macho, leader, ego-centric view of quid pro quo?
3. What are healthy limits when “turning the other cheek?” At what point is that not appropriate or safe?

Create

Take some time to think about “enemies” you have been withholding love or forgiveness from, and write down their names. Ask Jesus to begin to renew your heart for them, and write an identity of Jesus next to their name. (Ex. Child of God, Beloved, etc.)

Cover

Take a few minutes to pray for specific enemies of yours: those who don’t believe in Jesus, those in the opposite political party of yours, those who benefit from taking advantage of others, and those who have betrayed you, hurt you, or even attacked or persecuted you.