

**CONNECT** GROUPS  
**word time**



AUSTRALIA *for* CHRIST FELLOWSHIP



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# **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS I**

## **JESUS IS BAPTIZED**

1. Today's scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

2. Key Verse: Matthew 3:16

Jesus was baptized and came up out of the water. Then heaven opened, and He saw God's spirit coming down on Him like a dove

3. Reference scripture: Romans 6: 1-5

4. Objective

Through the baptism of Jesus, we will learn the three lessons of a repentant life, a life of prayer and a life of humility.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. Who baptized Jesus? (Matthew 3:13)

2. With whom was Jesus baptized? (Luke 3:21)

3. What was Jesus doing when heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down? (Luke 3:21)

### **Today's Message**

John the Baptist was preaching that people should change their hearts and lives because the kingdom of heaven was coming soon, and also baptizing people in the Jordan River. After 30 years of private life in Galilee, Jesus came out to the Jordan River in order to be baptized. Seeing Jesus ready to be baptized by him, John quickly declined: "Why do you come to me to be baptized? I should be baptized by you"

But Jesus said: "Let it be this way for now. We should do all things that are right" (Matthew 3:15) and offered Himself to be baptized by John. When Jesus was baptized and while he was praying, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down on Him like a dove (Luke 3:21). There are some lessons to be learned through Jesus' baptism.

## **Jesus' Baptism was a preparation for public life**

Just prior to His public ministry, Jesus was baptized. Of course, Jesus had committed no sin. He was without blemish, yet He received water baptism. Jesus' baptism teaches that we, too, at the time of conversion, should be baptized as a sign to the world of our true repentance and our willingness to bear the fruit of repentance. Going down into water signifies our dying to a life of self-gratification and sin, and coming up from the water symbolized a newness of life like the resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle Paul teaches this in Romans 6: 3-4 "That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus". (The Message)

## **Jesus Prayed**

Jesus prayed when baptized. Luke 3:21 records this. John's baptism was the baptism of repentance of sin (Matthew 3:1-12). Jesus did not need to pray for repentance of sin before he was baptized, because He had never committed any sin nor knew sin (Hebrews 4:15, 1John 3:5). Nevertheless Jesus prayed at baptism and showed us a true example.



Jesus cast out the devil through fasting and prayer. He often prayed overnight and also prayed in the mountains (Luke 6:12). Before choosing disciples he prayed (Luke 6:12). He prayed alone and also with His disciples (Luke 5:16, 9:18, 28)

Before He died on the cross for our salvation, to become our sin offering, He prayed until the sweat dripped off him like blood in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). The Bible shows us the whole life of Jesus was a life of prayer.

In like manner, we should always pray (Luke 2:37, 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). We should pray in the Holy Spirit who always helps us (Ephesians 6:18), and especially we should be watchful and serious lest we fall into temptation and fail in our faith (1Peter 4:7). As long as we live we are to pray to God (Psalm 116:2).

When Jesus was baptized and came up from the water, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down like a dove upon Jesus and the voice of God was heard:

“This is My Son and I love him, I am very pleased with him”

Here we find something very significant, Jesus received baptism before He began His public life, and when He was baptized the work of the Trinity was clearly manifested – the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus and God Himself witnessed that Jesus is one part of the Trinity .

Just as heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus when He was baptized and prayed, we believers shall also receive answers to prayer from our heavenly Father.

### **Jesus' Humility**

From the scene of His baptism we see Jesus' humility. He is the King of kings, the Creator of all, and the Son of God, yet He lowered Himself to be baptized by a man.

As Jesus humbled Himself and was baptized, His Father, raised Him up in an amazing way and confirmed:

“This is my Son and I love him. I am very pleased with him”

Jesus too said of Himself:

“I am gentle and humble in spirit” (Matthew 11:29)

Therefore, we, as Jesus' own people, should also bear a resemblance to Jesus' humility. Humbleness is lowliness of mind, in which each one esteems others better than himself. And to those who have this lowly attitude, wisdom (Proverbs 11:2), honour (Proverb 29:23) and joy (Isaiah 29:19) come and they can experience wondrous miracles of having God hear all their desires.

Through Jesus' baptism we have learned three lessons:

1. Before we believers begin any work, we must search our hearts for Him to reveal sin.
2. We must follow the steps of Jesus in His prayer life.
3. We must have the mind of Jesus, the lowliest mind, one of humility.

Then, we also live a life of miracles that experiences God's answers to our prayer, as happened when Jesus was baptized.

### **Closing questions**

1. Should we really search our hearts for sin, wouldn't that be too inward looking and depressing? NKJV® Lamentations 3:40 - Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD;

NLT® Psalms 139:24 - Point out anything in me that offends You, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

NET® 139:24 – See if there is any idolatrous tendency 1 in me, and lead me in the reliable ancient path!²

2. It's easy to feel condemned about our prayer life or lack thereof. Discuss as a group what it would take to consistently spend 10 min a day of purposeful time with the Lord reading a passage of scripture for 5 min and praying for 5 min. (Some groups call this having a quiet time.) Why not be accountable to each other as a group to give it a go for 2 weeks?

3. What is the difference between growing in the humility of the Lord, false humility and just plain poor self-esteem?

### **Application in our daily lives**

1. Since Jesus, as the Son of God was without sin, and as the Son of God He did not need to be baptized by John, yet to be our example, He Himself was baptized. Are you truly over-whelmed by this love of Jesus and do you give Him due thanks?
2. Let's learn to pray without ceasing just like our Lord Jesus.
3. Let's strive for true – Jesus like – humility

## **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS II**

### **THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS**

1. Today's scripture : Matthew 4: 1-11

2. Key Verse: Matthew 4:10

Jesus said to the devil, "Go away from me, satan! It is written in the scriptures 'You must worship the Lord your God. Serve only Him'"

3. Reference scripture: Genesis 3:6 Hebrew 4:15

4. Objectives

a. To learn how Jesus became the sinners' Saviour by resisting satan's temptation (1Corinthians 15:45)

b. To be convinced that Jesus always helps our weakness and leads us to victory.

c. Let us also lead a word-centred life as Jesus did.

#### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. What was Jesus' physical condition like when He was tempted? (Matthew 4:2)

2. What were the 3 temptations Jesus confronted. (Matthew 4:3,6,9)

3. How did Jesus repel satan's temptations? (Matthew 4:4,7,10)

#### **Today's Message**

Baptized by John at the Jordan River, Jesus was immediately led by the Holy Spirit to the wilderness. After He had fasted there for forty days, He was tempted three times by satan, but by the Word of God, Jesus repelled all 3 temptations. Today we will study God's love towards us and learn God's profound providence for delivering us from satan's snares and temptations.

#### **Why was Jesus tempted?**

Immediately after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, He was led by the Holy Spirit to the wilderness. Tempted by satan after forty days of fasting, Jesus proved that He was a man in no way different from Adam. This was the first reason Jesus was tempted by the devil.

Second, Jesus was tempted for the test of obedience to God. The first man Adam could not overcome temptation and eventually ate the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. In other words, Adam trampled down God's

authority and disobeyed. Now, to Jesus the same temptation came again. In one word this temptation was a “cross-roads” with a choice of ways to follow – acknowledge God’s sovereign right and just obey Him, or turn to other ways.

In His period of testing, Jesus overcame the temptation and obeyed God until He died on the cross.

### **The Three temptations of Jesus**

There are two kinds of temptation mentioned in the Word of God. One reads “dokimazo” in Greek. This testing is given by God as a stepping stone to receive the greater blessings that God loves to bestow upon His children. God allows us to go through these kinds of testings and trials so that each one of us might be proven, and thereby be recognized as a qualified saint by withstanding these difficulties and being victorious in our faith in Christ.

Another kind of testing is called “peirazo” in Greek. This is a satan-given temptation that brings ordeal, suffering and afflictions with intent to kill, destroy and rob. Satan never gives us the “dokimazo” testing that upgrades us in our faith. Satan only leads us to stumble by the ensnaring trap of our sins.

Satan knows that once we succumb and fall to his temptation, we will surely receive God’s judgement. We can see for ourselves God could never use us in certain places because we would constantly give in to the temptations which are out to destroy us unless we live close to God. That is why the devil, like a roaring lion is looking for someone to devour (1Peter 5:8)

The devil tempted Adam and Eve with this “peirazo” temptation. Our first parents failed because they succumbed to this temptation of wanting things to please their sinful selves, wanting the sinful things they saw and being too proud of what they had (1John 2:16), and were therefore cast out by God. Now the devil extended to Jesus the same temptation of “peirazo”. But Jesus did not succumb to the devil’s enticement.

The devil knew too how hungry Jesus was after the forty days’ fasting, so he tempted Jesus to fill His empty stomach first by making bread out of stone. The devil used the “lust of the flesh” (1John 2:16 in the AV) as the

test object. Eve failed here, and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that was pleasing to her “lust of the flesh”. But Jesus’ supreme concern was obedience to God’s Word. This was greater than the “lust of the flesh” and Jesus proved it by saying:

“It is written in the Scriptures, ‘A person does not live only by eating bread. But a person lives by everything the Lord says.’”

After the first test, the devil, even quoting scripture verses from Psalm 91:11-12, again tempted Jesus to jump down from the pinnacle of the temple in order to put God to the test, and also to show off in front of the Jewish people that He is truly the Son of God. Eve, too, at the Garden of Eden was ensnared by this “lust of the eyes” (wanting the sinful things she saw) and fell by taking the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. Needless to say, Jesus could have jumped unharmed. He need not have sprained so much as a toe, even if He had jumped from the pinnacle of the temple to the farthest depths of the Kidron valley. If Jesus had jumped down like that at the time of the evening sacrifice, it would have been a great spectacle for the crowd who would probably have followed Jesus immediately as their great leader.

But Jesus subdued the “lust of the eyes” and resisted the devil by speaking the Word of God.

“It also says in the Scriptures, ‘Do not test the Lord your God’”

Finally, the tempter took Jesus to a high mountain, showed Him all the glory of the world kingdom and offered to give all of them to Jesus if He would worship him. It could have been one way for Jesus to take back the world and mankind that were legally handed over to satan by Adam’s fall. Jesus came to the world with that purpose anyway. But He knew only too well that if He accepted the way satan offered, it would only bring destruction. Jesus did not choose or act on His own to take such an easy and comfortable way to solve the problems of mankind, but He chose death on the cross, God’s very own provision. Jesus Christ revealed His absolute obedience to God through His confession when He proclaimed:

“It is written in the scripture, ‘you must worship the Lord your God. Serve only Him’”

But Eve, who pursued her “pride of life” (1 John 2:16 in the AV), dared to become wise like God, and fell.

Jesus resisted all the “peirazo” temptations of satan and therefore became the sacrifice offering for our sins through His total obedience to God.

### **Some lessons to be learned**

First, the time Jesus was tempted by satan was after the Holy Spirit came down upon Him like a dove, and also after a voice was heard from heaven. It is the same today. The devil tempts us at the time we are faring well. When we are being promoted, when we are praised by others, when we are beginning to live comfortably or are getting wealthy and when we enter a deeper level of God’s grace with the blessing of a fast growing faith, these are the times satan tempts us. Satan fundamentally abhors our faith and life when all is going well. Satan tempts us when we are very much alive, just as a hunter aims his gun at a live animal, not a dead one. So the Apostle Paul admonishes us:

So anyone who thinks he is standing strong should be careful not to fall. (1Corinthians 10:12)

Second, we notice the place where Jesus was tempted. It was in the wilderness. There is a spiritual parallel here. The meaning of wilderness indicates our present life. The people of Israel came out of Egypt but spent a transit life for forty years in the wilderness before they entered the promised land, Canaan. We, too, are delivered from the wicked world (our Egypt) when we accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour, but we also are destined to live a sojourner’s life in a “wilderness”, which is the world we are now living in. Later, once we enter the heavenly kingdom there will be no temptation, but while we are living in the wilderness of our present life, we have no choice but to confront storms, hunger, thirst, misunderstandings and days when the sun seems to be scorching hot. Therefore, in this wilderness of life we need to be watchful and pray always to our Father, “Lead us not into temptation”

Third, when we are tempted we could discipline ourselves staunchly to obey God! We should never discard our faith, but hold fast to the truth that God is a good God and He will save us. Regardless of the circumstances that befall us, we should resolutely determine to obey

God. Also we should resist temptation by the Word of God as Jesus did, beginning with “It is written ....”. Without making such a firm resolution in our hearts and minds towards our absolute trust and obedience to God, we will not be able to win over the devil’s temptation easily. We cannot defeat the devil just by quoting God’s Word because he uses it to tempt us sometimes. Furthermore, we should always seek the help of the Holy Spirit in every temptation, because the Holy Spirit is the Comforter who was sent and He is ready to rescue us every time we are in trouble.

### **Closing questions**

1. How does a temptation ensnare Christians? (James 1:14)
2. What do Christians need to do if they fall into temptation (1 John 1:8-10)
3. How did Jesus handle the woman who fell to the temptation of adultery? (John 8:11)
4. What kind of temptations could we be susceptible to when everything is well and going our way? What kind of temptations would we be susceptible to when we are tired or discouraged?



### **Application in our daily lives**

1. Let us strive to become absolutely obedient children of God
  2. Let us become the Holy-Spirit-filled believers who are able to resist satan’s temptation.
- Always meditate on the Word of God, store scriptures in your heart and
3. quote scriptures as a weapon to repel the devil.

## **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS III**

### **JESUS CALLS HIS DISCIPLES**

1. Today's scripture : Luke 5: 1-11

Reference scripture: Matthew 4:17-22, John 1:35-42

2. Objectives

- a. To realize again that our Lord Jesus chose us as His disciples for the job of preaching the good news about the kingdom of God.
- b. To remember our Lord Jesus uses industrious hard working people to fulfill His will on the earth.
- c. To understand a good kingdom “work ethic”

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. Though Peter had toiled all night without catching anything, what caused him to put his net in the water again? (Luke 5:5)
2. What did Jesus say he would make of his disciples and how would it happen? (Matthew 4:19)

### **Today's Message**

As soon as He started public life, Jesus did the job of choosing His disciples. We can see Jesus did a really wise thing to train His disciples to take the good news about the kingdom of God into the world, at a time when any communication and transport systems were not developed. Today, too, Jesus calls us to become His disciples and commits His work to us.

### **The Calling of His Disciples**

Wherever Jesus went, huge crowds followed to listen to His words. One day on the shore of Galilee, swamped by the multitude, there was not even a place for Jesus to stand, so he got into a boat and asked to be pushed off a little from the shore, and He preached the good news about the kingdom of God from the boat.



The owner of the boat was Peter. He had cast nets all night long but caught nothing. At the time he offered his boat to Jesus he was washing his nets with an empty heart. Peter could see Jesus from the nearest seat and as he listened to what Jesus said, peace and faith must have stirred in his heart. At that moment, Jesus commanded Peter:

“Take the boat into deep water. If you will put your nets in the water you will catch some fish.”

Although Peter remembered his night’s experience, he simply obeyed Jesus’ command.

“You say to put the nets in the water, so I will”

The scripture says Peter caught a great number of fish, enough to fill even two boats at a time. Peter immediately fell down at Jesus’ knees and confessed:

“Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man”

Jesus said to Peter.

“Don’t be afraid. From now on you will be a fisher of men”

He called Peter, Andrew, John and James as His disciples. Jesus also called other disciples but He never used human standards to select them.

When Jesus chose His disciples, He always called people who were busy working at their jobs. Therefore, we should be committed to soul-winning work, and never excuse ourselves with: “I cannot do it because I am busy.”

## **The Duty of Disciples**

What is the job of Jesus’ disciples?

First, a disciple of Jesus should represent, through his own living, our good God. When Peter cast out his net into the deep water in obedience to Jesus’ command, he caught a great many fish. The glory of God was manifested and the power of Jesus Christ was proven before the eyes of the watching crowd on the shore. Also, when the disciple Andrew obeyed Jesus and presented a mere five loaves of bread and two fish, another miracle of feeding a multitude took place. There were five

thousand men. If women and children had been counted it would have been several tens of thousands. Likewise, a disciple of Jesus should let the power of God be manifested through his faith and obedience so that many can be led to the kingdom of God.

Second, a disciple of Jesus should be a “fisherman” catching people. By the Word of God, we should fish dying men from the sea of death.

Third, a disciple of Jesus should have the power of Jesus. Jesus gave His twelve disciples:

... power to drive out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness (Matthew 10:1)

Jesus also commanded His disciples:

“When you go, preach this: ‘The kingdom of heaven is coming soon.’ Heal the sick. Give dead people life again. Heal those who have harmful skin diseases. Force demons to leave people. I give you these powers freely. So help other people freely.” (Matthew 10:7-8)

Jesus’ disciples are the people who do the works of Jesus. Jesus Christ came to this world and preached good news to the poor. He freed the captives of sins, gave eternal life to people blinded by the “lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1John 2.16AV). Jesus made them see again, and proclaimed a new era of forgiveness, love and grace (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus said:

“He who believes in me will do the same things that I do. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12)

We must cast out devils and rescue those suffering souls from the bondage of devils and lead them to God. As the seventy disciples of Jesus rejoiced after they preached the gospel powerfully and reported back to Jesus, we too should taste that same joy:

“Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we used your name!”  
(Luke 10:17)

## **The Attitudes of a Disciple**

A disciple of Jesus should be totally a Jesus-man/woman. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24 AV)

Once we have become Jesus' disciples we should no longer say, "My ..." "My..." and completely thrust ourselves upon Jesus. In "my home", "my business", "my whole life", we should let Jesus be our master.

When we live as Jesus' disciples, there will be times when we are mocked by the devil and persecuted, but it should not bother us because the battle we are fighting has already been won by Jesus. A disciple of Jesus should endure.

Those who cry as they carry out the seeds will return singing and carrying bundles of grain. (Psalm 126:5).

Whether it's a convenient time or not, we must proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God by enduring every kind of circumstance. So proclaim the Message with intensity; keep on your watch. Challenge, warn, and urge your people. Don't ever quit. Just keep it simple. (2 Timothy 4:2 The Message)

In Jesus' parable of the minas (Luke 19) the master told his workers "Occupy till I come." The word "occupy" here means not merely to "possess," as it often does in English, but to "improve," to employ "in business," for the purpose of increasing it or of making "profit" on it. The direction was to use this money so as to gain "more" until his return. By making use of the parable Jesus is instructing his disciples to "improve" their talents; to make the most of them; to increase their capability of doing good and winning souls, and to continue to do so "until" He returns at the 2nd coming or until He comes to call us home to heaven whichever comes first. See 1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:7.

### **Closing questions**

1. Before Peter met Jesus he was a hard working fisherman. he later became a hard working “fisher of men”. Is there a correlation?
2. How does Matthew 16:24 relate to our rescuing people from hell? “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24 AV)
3. How do we relate the last paragraph above that explained “occupy till I come” to our individual Connect Group and Sunday Service evangelism.

### **Application in our daily lives**

1. As Jesus’ disciples, let us become faithful workers for the Lord.
2. To work faithfully in the area that is entrusted to us, let us always seek the help of the Holy Spirit.
3. Let us obey and act upon the word of Jesus as Peter did.

## **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS IV**

### **JESUS PREACHES THE GOOD NEWS OF THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM**

1. Today's scripture: Matthew 4:12-17
2. Key Verse: Matthew 4:17 "From that time Jesus began to preach saying, "Change your hearts and lives because the kingdom of heaven is coming soon".
3. Cross Reference: Mark 1:15 Luke 17:20-21
4. Objectives
  - a. Let's spread the Good News of God's kingdom as Jesus did.
  - b. Let's always remember that when we preach the gospel, the devil will flee and the kingdom of God will expand.

#### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. Whose prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum? (Matthew 4:13-14)
2. What did Jesus preach? (Mark 1:14)

#### **Today's Message**

After the baptism and temptation, Jesus went to the land of Galilee. After John, who was sent beforehand to prepare the way for Jesus, had completed his job and was put into jail, Jesus began to preach the Good News: "The right time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!" (Mark 1:15)

Today we will study what exactly was "the Good News" that Jesus preached.

#### **The Kingdom of God is near**

Jesus preached:

"The right time has come. The Kingdom of God is near."

This tells us that the fullness of God's time for the redemption of mankind had come and His kingdom was near. Jesus' words, "the kingdom of God is near", have a far deeper meaning than that the kingdom of God was approaching closely or that it was already present here. As the Son of God, Jesus Himself is also God and at the very time and place where God is, the kingdom of God is there too. Therefore, whenever and

wherever God the Son stood, as a human being, the kingdom of God existed right there. Thus, when the Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come (Luke 17:20-21), Jesus replied: “God’s kingdom is coming, but not in a way that you will be able to see with your eyes. People will not say, ‘Look, God’s kingdom is here!’ or ‘There it is!’ No, God’s kingdom is within you.”

This is because when we acknowledge Jesus, we welcome Him into our hearts and our lives to live and rule, and rely on Him. That is where the kingdom of God is.

The Pharisees slandered Jesus, saying: “Jesus uses the power of Beelzebul to force demons out of people. Beelzebul is the ruler of demons”. (Matthew 12:24) But Jesus said in Matthew 12:28; “But if I use the power of God’s spirit to force out demons, this shows that the kingdom of God has come to you.” Furthermore, when John the Baptist sent his disciples and asked: “Are you the man who John said was coming, or should we wait for another one?” Jesus answered: “Go back to John and tell him about the things you hear and see: The blind can see. The crippled can walk. People with harmful skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear. The dead are raised to life. And the Good News is told to the poor.” (Matthew 11: 4, 5)

John was asking whether the kingdom of God had arrived yet or not, while Jesus confirmed that the kingdom of God was already existing, giving signs of its presence.

Today, too, Jesus Christ is within us through the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who is in nature, the same God as Jesus Himself. Where Jesus is, the kingdom of God is. Where the kingdom of God comes, devils flee, the sick are raised, sins are forgiven, the Good News is preached. These things take place all the time. And today the church is the kingdom of God where these works of God continue to happen.

### **“Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News”**

The gospel in Greek is “evangelion”, meaning Good News. What could be the best “Good News” to a human being, after all? What is it that mankind has been yearning for, generation after generation, from the bottom of his heart?

It is the news of the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of a right relationship with God again. Since Adam and Eve fell, mankind had become “lost”. Man lost his Creator, God. Man lost the joy of living, which was in the Garden of Eden. Man lost his neighbours. Man lost his true self. People did not know where they came from, why they were living and where they were heading. To this mankind, the Good News of God arrived. That Good News was and is: For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. God gave His Son so that whoever believes in Him may not be lost but have eternal life. (John 3:16) The Good News is Jesus Christ. When Jesus said, “believe the Good News” He meant, “believe Me, Jesus Christ!” He identified Himself with His Good News by saying: “Whoever wants to save his life will give up true life. But whoever gives up his life for Me and the Good News will have true life forever.” (Mark 8:35)



In order to believe this Good News and to enter the kingdom of God, repentance is essential. Repentance is “metanoia” in Greek, which means a turnabout of 180 degrees, from the past direction one was headed, to the new direction, a new life. You should discard your old life in which you followed your will instead of following God’s will. Repentance is not merely that you are sorry for your past sins, and ashamed of them. Repentance means you are turning away from your old way. I forget the things that are past. I try as hard as I can to reach the goal that is before me. (Philippians 3:13) Once we have confessed our sins before God and sought His forgiveness, we must believe and trust God that He has forgiven us.

Therefore, strictly speaking, repentance is not a past-oriented retrospect but a future-oriented prospect. Repentance enables one to look forward and advance in Christian living. Therefore repentance and faith are working together at the same moment.

## **Preach the Good News!**

We have the awesome responsibility of preaching the Good News to the world. “I give you these powers freely, so help other people freely.” (Matthew 10:8) We are called to usher our family members and neighbours into the kingdom of God. To do so we should preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. We should deliver nothing but the Good News, not our human knowledge or ideas.

As Jesus’ disciples, sent by Him, we should not be ashamed of His Good News. Being ashamed of the Good News is being ashamed of Jesus. The Apostle Paul declared: I am proud of the Good News. It is the power God uses to save everyone who believes .... (Romans 1:16) We too should not be ashamed of the Good News of Christ and preach it so that the power of God is revealed.

## **Closing questions**

1. Why was Paul proud of the Good News? (Roman 1:16)
2. Why did Jesus say “change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!” (Mark 1:15)
3. What are the two prerequisites to enter the kingdom of God? (Mark 1:15)
4. Is it possible to be a Christian and only fulfil one of the prerequisites? Explain your answer.

## **Application in our daily lives**

1. Ask yourself whether you are ashamed of the Good News or not. The Good News is the power God uses to save everyone who believes. Let us boast of this Good News very boldly.
2. Let’s diligently preach the Word of God as Jesus and Paul did. Then we will see wondrous miracles manifested in our lives.

# **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS V**

## **JESUS PRAYS**

1. Today's scripture: Mark 1:35-39
2. Key Verse: Mark 1:35 "Early the next morning, Jesus woke and left the house while it was still dark. He went to a place to be alone and pray."
3. Cross Reference: Matthew 6: 5-13
4. Objectives:
  - a. Let us always strive to become fervent praying believers as Jesus was and still is praying today.
  - b. Let us not stop praying for those we should lead to Jesus; our family members and our neighbours.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. When and where did Jesus pray? (mark 1:35)
2. After Jesus cast out the evil spirit what did he say was the only way to force this kind out? (Mark 9:29)
3. What did Jesus do during the nights before He chose His disciples? (Luke 6:12-16)

### **Today's Message**

Jesus is truly God and truly man and as the sacrificial lamb for sinners, led a life of prayer. He prayed to be strengthened in power to break satan's stronghold so that He could rescue sinners from the slavery of satan. He prayed to praise God. He prayed to seek God's forgiveness towards sinners. Jesus prayed for the weak. The life of Jesus on earth was tied together with unceasing continuing prayer. Even now He is continuing His prayer ministry for us at the right hand of God.

### **Jesus Always Prayed**

The first record of Jesus' prayer is in Luke 3:21. At His baptism, He prayed to God once more and set His heart to obey God's will. The answer to Jesus' prayer came immediately. The Holy Spirit and a voice from heaven descended right away. Before choosing his twelve disciples, Jesus prayed to God all through the night. Jesus prayed before the daylight and always preached His kingdom powerfully throughout the day. When casting out evil spirits, He also used the power of prayer. Returning from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus healed a lunatic and

taught His disciples: “This kind can only be forced out by prayer.” (Mark 9:29) Jesus always prayed to praise God. The praise songs we are giving the Lord are actually prayers being sung!

Before Jesus called for Lazarus to come forth from his grave, He also prayed a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to His Father. Many of the Jews were present and Mary and Martha were watching too, full of awe. In front of the already impossible situation, Jesus prayed to the Father, lifting up his eyes:

“Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me.” (John 11:41, 42)

Jesus prayed to God when he fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fishes; He prayed for His disciples; He prayed at the garden of Gethsemane; He prayed on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) His life was closed with His final prayer to His Father: “My God, my God, why have you left me alone?” (Matthew 27:46)

## **What to Pray?**

Jesus taught us what to pray and also gave us His good example of prayer.

First, Jesus told us to pray to receive the Holy Spirit. He promised that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would be sent after He ascended to heaven. He taught us to pray to receive the Holy Spirit: “Even though you are bad, you know how to give good things to your children. So surely your heavenly Father knows how to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” (Luke 11:13)



As Jesus always prayed, the Holy Spirit was always present upon Him and by the power of the Holy Spirit He could cast out evil spirits and build the kingdom of God (Matthew 12:18). Therefore prayer is the royal road to walk on, together with the Holy Spirit and to receive His help.

Second, Jesus said: “Stay awake and pray that you will not be tempted.” (Mark 14:38) In order for us to cast out the devil, to overcome his evil temptation to recover sinners from satan’s slavery and for the kingdom of God, we must be armed with prayer. As we pray, both our flesh and soul will be strengthened and our spirit will get enough power from the Lord to control our greed and lust of the flesh.

Third, Jesus requested us to pray for our brothers (Luke 22:32). Especially, as we pray for our brethren who are infants in the faith, our prayers prevent satan from causing our weaker brethren to fail. We must pray also for the body of Christ, our Christian members.

Fourth, we should pray that God’s will be done. Jesus prayed: “My Father, if it is possible, do not give me this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.” (Matthew 26:39) The only One who always knows the right decision for our lives and our business is our heavenly Father! Therefore, our praying that God’s will be done means we want the best result manifested at all times in our lives.

Fifth, Jesus taught: “So be ready all the time.” Pray that you will be strong enough to escape all these things that will happen. And pray that you will be able to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:36) Our ultimate hope is not in this world. We are just travelling through this life. This world is not our final home. Our yearning is for the time we shall stand before Jesus Christ to receive our reward on judgment day. Therefore, till we reach the end of our lives on this earth and receive the crown of righteousness, we must not stop praying to our heavenly Father.

### **Answers to Prayer**

Answers always follow prayer. Jesus promised His answered prayer to us in John 14:13 “And if you ask for anything in my name, I will do it for you. Then the Father’s glory will be shown through the Son.” “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive. And your joy will be the fullest joy.” (John 16:24) “If you believe you will get anything you ask for in prayer.” (Matthew 21:22)

God always hears the prayers of those who cry out to Him and He always answers them. The Holy Spirit also helps our infirmities: “We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit Himself speaks to God for us. The Spirit speaks to God with deep feelings that words cannot explain.” (Romans 8:26)

Let us follow Jesus’ prayer and pray always too!

### **Closing questions**

1. Testimony time, everyone can share about answered prayers.

Application in our daily lives

2. We have a pre-service prayer meeting every Sunday at 9am. Do you think your presence at that meeting would make a difference in what happens during the church service?

3. What has been your experience during our Connect Prayer meetings? Have you sensed the presence of God?

### **Application**

If your prayer life needs a boost try this method:

a. Praise God

b. Confess our sins

c. Give Him thanks for blessings already received

d. Ask for what we need

e. Conclude with thanks in faith for His answers to our prayers.

f. When praying, Jesus often labored very hard. Even if we do not receive answers to prayers immediately, let us continue in faith and persist in prayer and patience.

# **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS VI**

## **JESUS PERFORMS MIRACLES**

1. Today's scripture: John 2: 1-11
2. Key Verse: John 2:5 "His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you to do"
3. Reference scripture: Matthew 7:7-11
4. Objectives:
  - a. To realize that Jesus is performing miracles for us today too.
  - b. To become believers who endeavor to give, rather than only receive.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

- a. Where did Jesus perform His first miracle? (John 2:11)
- b. With what did Jesus tell them to fill the water pots? (John 2:7)
- c. Who got the credit for the wine Jesus made? (John 2:9-11)

### **Today's Message**

Being invited, Jesus went to a wedding feast in Cana. As the banquet was at the height of merriment, they ran out of wine. From the very beginning of their new married life, the bridegroom and bride were put into a very awkward position. But through Jesus, this couple received the solution to their impending problem. Like them, we also meet with all kinds of trouble as we live on this earth. What shall we do when we are in trouble? We will see and receive the answer through the miracle experience of this young couple when they were with Jesus.

### **The Newlywed's Frustration**

The first lesson we must learn from this couple is their attitude. The first trouble was facing a big embarrassment because they had prematurely run out of wine in the climax of their joyous wedding feast. But instead of retreating to a corner, downhearted with despair, they stood up to find a solution to their problem. They brought the matter to Jesus' mother and she took it to Jesus.

On this earth no one is living without problems. But there are winners and losers because their heart attitudes are different when they run against difficulties. Your attitude can lead you to the road of success or down a road to failure. Most people, when they encounter life's

obstacles, say: “Something serious has happened to me. Oh, I am in trouble! What can I do!” As soon as people utter such words a sense of insecurity and fear begins to spark a flame in their heart, soon they are engulfed in a negative attitude and eventually they enter the road to destruction. But against exactly the same problem, there are people who say: “Something serious has happened to me. Very well! I’ll confront it!” And these few will become the winners who live on the road of success.

Joshua and Caleb, among the twelve spies sent out to Canaan, are good examples. When they encountered a problem, they chose the attitude of “Very well, we can take the city” That is how they could report with such positive faith: “Don’t turn against the Lord! Don’t be afraid of the people in the land! We will chew



them up.” (Numbers 14:9) Man cannot survive without bread – and Joshua and Caleb took their serious problem as their bread, with the attitude of obtaining new strength even by eating up the very problem they encountered. How marvelous was their thinking!

There is no one in the world who ever encountered a problem that was more serious than the one Jesus met. When Jesus was praying at Mount Olives, the officers and the chief priests came to arrest Him. Peter immediately thought: “I’ve got a problem. I am in trouble!” and in confusion struck the right ear of the high priest’s servant. Then Jesus told Peter to put his sword back into the sheath and said: “Shall I not drink of the cup the Father has given me?” Jesus accepted His “problem” and drank the cup of suffering, the “crucifixion on the cross”. By Jesus’ obedience to the problem, He became the door of blessing for every sinner to be forgiven of his sins, healed of sickness, freed from curse and to obtain life from death.

Likewise, we should not become discouraged and sink down when a problem comes to us. Rather we should give thanks to God for the problem because when we do so, it will take off its mask and reveal its true face. God’s purpose for allowing it, will turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

The frustrating problem of running out of wine at the wedding banquet turned out to become a doorway to a great blessing. The thing could have turned out to be a failure because wine had run out in the peak of the festivities, but this couple, with a positive attitude, anticipated a solution and brought the matter to Jesus' mother who sought Jesus' solution. This was how Jesus' first miracle came about. And the couple's wedding banquet was so blessed that their story became part of our Bible story for thousands of years for the children of God.

### **They invited Jesus when they had food**

The second point we note from this couple is that they invited Jesus and His disciples to their banquet. The couple put themselves into a position to experience God's miracle because they had invited Jesus. I urge you believers, too, to treat Jesus well. Whenever you can, give your time, talents and money to Jesus as taught in Matthew 7:12 "Do for other people the same things you want them to do for you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets." We always want Jesus to do things for us first while we want to do things for Jesus last. This is the wrong order. When I am able to give, I must give to God.

### **They Obeyed**

The third attitude we should learn from this couple is their obedience. When Jesus' mother told Him that wine had run out, He said: "Dear woman, why come to me? My time has not yet come." We should learn from this that when Jesus blesses us He always does it according to His timing.

Jesus never comes too late or too early. He always arrives on time. As we worship the Lord and wait upon Him, when His time is fulfilled, He will speak to us and once the word of the Lord comes to us, the problem is solved.

Mary knew this so she told the servants: "Do whatever he tells you to do." Jesus, in His own time, gave His command: "Fill the jars with water!"

The servants, in obedience to Jesus' command, filled them up to the brim. Then Jesus commanded: "Now take some out and give them to the master of the feast." When they faithfully obeyed His command, water became wine! Their problem became a blessing, the very best blessing! The word from the headwaiter of the feast, "you have saved the best wine till now", proves it was the best wine of the day, which is also a very significant point. What the world is giving you may taste good at the beginning but it will taste bitter in the end. But what Jesus is giving you seems to be bitter at first, but in the long run you will find that anything from Jesus will not only be good but will be the best blessing for you!

Jesus wants to give us good things. Jesus is our good Lord so He changes our problem to become the wine of joy. Do you feel yourself to be as worthless as water? Even so, give yourself to Jesus and let Him take charge of you. Then your life will become like the best wine, that is welcomed by all people, and will contribute to their benefit!

### **Closing questions**

1. According to Joshua and Caleb, what was the problem? (Number 14:9)
2. How did Jesus summarize "the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets?" (Matthew 7:12)
3. What is the principle from tonight's passage that speaks to you the most and why?

### **Application for our daily lives**

1. When we encounter a difficulty, this is the time for Jesus to perform a miracle for us. Let us have this kind of positive faith.
2. By obeying Jesus, we can experience God's miracles.

# **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS VII**

## **JESUS BEARS OUR SICKNESS**

1. Today's scripture: Matthew 8:16
2. Key Verse: Matthew 8:17 "He did these things to make them come true what Isaiah the prophet said: 'He took our suffering on him. And he felt our pain for us.'"
3. Cross Reference: Isaiah 53: 5-6, 1 Peter 2: 21-25
4. Objectives: To realize that about two-thirds of Jesus' earthly ministry was spent in healing the sick. Because the foundation of the kingdom of God is healing, let us allow the blessing of God's healing be a part of our daily lives.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. After He was resurrected, what five signs did Jesus tell His disciples would follow those who believed?

Please list them in order from Mark 16:17-18.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Today's Message**

Jesus came to this world as the greatest physician in human history. Two-thirds of His public ministry was spent in healing the sick. To us living in the world today this same Jesus bestows the same healing grace.

### **The Prophecy by Isaiah**

The prophet Isaiah had described the scene of Jesus' suffering even more clearly than an actual eye-witness who later saw the crucifixion. Through chapter 53, Isaiah gives us a full account of the gospel of healing. As we read in Isaiah 53:4 "But he took our suffering on him and felt our pain for us." We saw His suffering. We thought God was punishing Him."

## **Jesus Bore our Sickness**

What kind of sickness did Jesus heal and bear?

The Bible says the things that Jesus did were too many to record in all the books of the world (John 21:25). But if we try to name some of the ills Jesus healed, they are: skin disease or leprosy (Matthew 8:2-3), paralysis (Matthew 8:6), dropsy (Luke 14:2-4), fever (Matthew 8:14), constant bleeding (Matthew 9:20-22), blindness (Matthew 9:27-30), dumbness (Matthew 9:32-33), deafness (Mark 7:32-35), a crippled hand (Matthew 12:10), the lame (Matthew 15:30) and so on. Also, He delivered those who were possessed by evil spirits, and healing those who had epilepsy. All kinds of diseases and sicknesses were healed by Jesus Christ. The Bible records that Jesus healed all kinds of sick people, including those who were despised and held in contempt by other people.

The Apostle Peter testified in Acts 10:38 how Jesus healed: “You know about Jesus from Nazareth. God made him the Christ by giving him the Holy Spirit and power. You know how Jesus went everywhere doing good. He healed those who were ruled by the devil, because God was with Jesus.”

By declaring: “But if I use the power of God’s Spirit to force out demons, this shows that the kingdom of God has come to you.” (Matthew 12:28) Jesus Himself clearly showed us that the presence of the kingdom of God and the manifestation of healing are not separable. The presence of the kingdom of God inevitably brings healing. The foundation of the



kingdom of God is in healing. So the Messiah, the builder of the kingdom of heaven, should necessarily become a physician for the sick also. Are you in the kingdom of God? If so, you have entered into His blessing for healing and deliverance also, because Jesus is our Great Physician.

## **The Reason for Jesus Bearing our Sickness**

Why did Jesus heal the sick, work signs and wonders and why is He still doing the same work today?

Some claim Jesus is healing and working miracles to prove that He is the Messiah. This of course is an authentic view but it does not explain to the fullest extent the reason for Jesus' healing and miracles.

Another important reason that Jesus healed the sick was to show His loving kindness and mercy towards us. Wherever He went during His earthly ministry, He felt compassion toward sick and spirit-possessed people so He freed and healed them. When Jesus arrived, He saw a large crowd. He felt sorry for them and healed those who were sick. (Matthew 14:14) "Jesus felt sorry for the man. So he touched him and said, 'I want to heal you. Be healed!'" (Mark 1:41) These verses reveal that Jesus' healing works were not only to prove that He was the Messiah. Wherever He went, Jesus healed the sick out of deep compassion and mercy.

### **Signs That Follow Believers**

Our Great Physician, Jesus, gave this word of promise after He was resurrected: "Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be judged guilty. And those who believe will be able to do these things as proof: They will use my name to force demons out of people. They will pick up snakes without being hurt. And they will drink poison without being hurt. They will touch the sick and the sick will be healed." (Mark 16:16-18)

Jesus, Who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) declared that we are given power to heal the lepers, the blind, the paralysed and the crippled in His Name. This is an amazing promise from Jesus that signs and miracles will follow to those who believe in Him.

### **Closing questions**

1. Have you experienced supernatural healing?  
Share your story with the group?
2. How did Jesus feel towards the crowd of sick people? (Matthew 14:14)
3. Have you ever prayed for somebody and he got better? Tell your Story.

### **Application**

End the night praying for everybody in the group who has anything physically wrong with him and see God work!

## **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS VIII**

### **JESUS CASTS OUT DEVILS**

1. Today's scripture: Matthew 17:14-20
2. Key Verse: Matthew 17:18 "Jesus gave a strong command to the demon inside the boy. Then the demon came out, and the boy was healed."
3. Reference scripture: Mark 5: 1-20
4. Objectives
  - a. Learn how Jesus had victory over the devil and follow His example by resisting the devil.
  - b. Understand the nature and work of the devil so we will be watchful not to be deceived by him.
  - c. To realize that we possess the authority to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, and use this authority in our daily lives.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. Why couldn't the disciples of Jesus cast out the demon? (Matthew 17: 19-20)
2. How much faith did Jesus say was needed so that "All things will be possible for you?" (Matthew 17:20)
3. How long did it take Jesus to heal the epileptic boys? (Matthew 17:18)

### **Today's Message**

This world in which we are living has days of bright sunshine and nights of pitch-black darkness as well. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, while there exists God's world of light, there exists also the world of the devil, which is the headquarters of the forces of darkness. This world of evil spirits has a structure, with Lucifer the fallen archangel as its head. At the next level are the fallen angels who fell with Lucifer when he opposed God. These are also called evil spirits. Lastly, there are the myriads of demons on the actual front line of the evil forces. They stand directly in opposition to us, attempting to destroy us at all times. The fourth dimension where God's angels and Satan's demons dwell cannot be understood nor explained through human science or with the natural mind.

## Jesus Casts out Devils

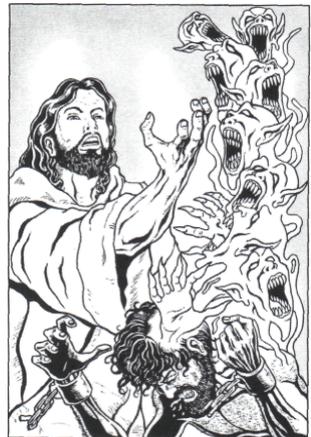
The purpose of Jesus' coming to this world was to rescue man from the bondage of satan's rule so that He gives him eternal life.

Before they fell, Adam and Eve were perfect people with a free will. According to their free will, they happily obeyed God and ruled the earth well as God had entrusted it to them. But once Adam and Eve obeyed satan instead of obeying God, they fell and became servants of satan.

Ever since then, satan, the ruling power of the air, has controlled the minds of men so unceasingly that they have worshipped idols and slipped into the way of destruction; however, God, being a God of love and mercy, did not leave man in that condition by sending His only begotten Son, Jesus, born in the flesh and crucified on the cross. So Jesus became a redemptive sacrifice to bear man's sin. Now, satan can no longer claim man's sickness, curse, hatred and strife for the wages of man's sin. God's only begotten Son, Jesus, came to this world to destroy satan and his works. Wherever He went, He cast out the devils and set men free from their bondage.

## The Authority that Jesus Gave to Us

Jesus gave authority to cast out devils not only to the disciples of His day, but also to us living today. Because we have already been given this authority to cast out devils, the devils should leave. When we proclaim "it is written ..." and we command them to go in the name of Jesus, they should go! Jesus said in Mark 16: 17-18 "And those who believe will be able to do these things as proof. They will use my name to force demons out of people. They will speak in languages they never learned. They will pick up snakes without being hurt. And they will drink poison without being hurt. They will touch the sick, and the sick will be healed." He also promised in Luke 10:19: "Listen! I gave you power to walk on snakes and scorpions. I gave you more power than the enemy has. Nothing will hurt you."



The word “power” in this case has a significant meaning. Satan also has power but his power does not reach God’s power. “Power” in the Greek is “dunamis”, the root for our English word dynamite. Jesus-given power in the Greek is “exousia” which is used to indicate authority over the “dunamis” power. Now let us find out the difference between power and authority.

Today cars move on the streets with great power and speed but once a policeman signals with his tiny finger, we can see all the speeding traffic stop at once to obey the policeman’s order. What brought total obedience to the policeman? He has authority! Authority overrules power. And the Bible tells us that we are given this authority to control the power of the enemy. We can and must become men and women who live in the authority Jesus gave us. From now on, by using the authority Jesus shared with us, we should cast out evil spirits, lying spirits, seducing spirits, devils of sickness, as Jesus did, and live victorious Christian lives.

### **Closing questions**

1. Why did Jesus come to earth? (John 10:10)
2. What did Jesus give us to control all the power of the enemy? (Luke 10:19)
3. The Bible says the devil “goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”. With this knowledge how should we live our lives? (1Peter 5:8-9)

### **Application in our daily lives**

1. According to the word in 1 Peter 5:9, let us stand strong in our faith and refuse to give in to the devil.
2. Let us break free from our old selves and walk with Jesus in the abundant life and the authority He shared with us.

## **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS IX**

### **JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE**

1. Today's scripture: John 2: 13-22
2. Key Verse: Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and I will build it again in three days." (John 2:19)
3. Reference scripture: Matthew 21:12-13
4. Objectives:
  - a. Jesus literally lives in every Christian and thus being His mobile temples, we should exert every effort to live a clean life through continuous prayer. (1 Corinthians 3:16)
  - b. We should continually give thanks to Jesus who shed His blood for our sakes and died on the cross.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

- a. What kind of place did Jesus say we should not make His Father's house? (John 2:16)
- b. How many days did Jesus say it would take to raise His temple if it were destroyed? (John 2:19)
- c. How many years did it take to build the temple? (John 2:20)

### **Today's Message**

Jesus purified the temple twice. John chapter 2 records the first time and Matthew chapter 21 records the second purification. This lesson will deal with Jesus cleansing the temple and how it relates to us now in how we walk with God.

### **My House is the House of Prayer**

Jesus went up to the temple in Jerusalem to observe the Passover.

The temple was where people should have been worshipping God but it had become a noisy market place, full of cheating moneychangers and unscrupulous vendors selling animals for sacrifice at inflated prices because of the monopoly they held. Seeing this, Jesus made a scourge of small cords and drove them out saying:

"Don't make my Father's house a place for buying and selling!"  
(John 2:16)

“It is written in the scriptures, ‘My Temple will be a house where people will pray.’ But you are changing God’s house into a ‘hideout for robbers.’” (Matthew 21:13)

In those days, merchandisers sold animals for sacrifice and money changers exchanged money for the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from abroad to observe the Passover feast. Jewish men above twenty years of age were required to pay half a shekel for temple tax, but in those days the Roman currency was the prevailing currency, so they had to change their money to shekels. These merchandisers and money changers were profiteering excessively, in collusion with corrupt high priests of the temple. Those priests even deliberately found fault with the animals brought by the native Jews to force them to buy again from the vendors who were connected with them in profiteering. The people’s grievances resounded high in Jerusalem because of the profane merchandising activities in the holy temple.

When He saw the worship that was supposed to be in spirit and truth becoming perverted into religious rituals, and the temple being blemished by criminal activity, Jesus, in the solemn authority of the triune God, drove them out of the temple. Instead of the sound of prayer, praise and contrition, only the sound of the commotion from the noisy animals and hawkers filled the temple. Jesus had to take the whip to clean His temple.

Today, our Lord Jesus is in the Church, His body, and He speaks to us as well:

“God is spirit, those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 5:24)

When we worship the Lord God with purified lips and heart He will accept our worship.



Therefore, we must acknowledge the Holy Spirit, welcome His presence and usher Him into our hearts so that He will fill us and purify us. Let us remember what Jesus said:

“My Temple will be a house where people will pray.”

Let us build the altar of prayer, love the Word of God and act upon the Word of God so that we will become holy and glorious temples of God in the place where He loves to dwell.

### **Jesus in Jerusalem for the Passover**

From the time He was twelve years old, Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover every year in accordance with the law (Luke 2:41-42). After He was baptized by John He had observed the Passover feast four times. During the fourth Passover, Jesus drank the bitter cup of death on the cross. The purification of the temple which we are studying now took place six months after He was baptized by John the Baptist.

1500 years earlier God delivered the people of Israel from Egypt by sending a plague that killed the firstborn of every Egyptian family, from the palace right down to the servants' homes. But all the Israelites were saved by putting the blood of the Passover lamb on the lintel and doorposts of the homes. They ate the roasted lamb according to their instructions and escaped from Egypt (Exodus chapter 12). To remember the exodus from the land of bondage, the feast of Passover was observed in Israel; it is one of the three most important Jewish feasts, the other two being the feast of weeks or the Pentecost (Deuteronomy 16:10, 16) and the feast of shelters or tabernacles (Leviticus 23:34, 42-43). To observe this feast of Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

### **What is the relation between the Passover feast and Jesus Christ?**

Jesus came as the lamb for all humanity. He became the sacrificial lamb to bear all the sins of mankind. Jesus was without “spot or blemish”, yet He came clothed in flesh, shed blood and allowed His flesh to be torn so that the power of death, like the plague, could “pass over” all of us. Therefore, believing in Jesus and what He did for us, shedding His own blood for our sin, makes us right with God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

As He started His public ministry, Jesus went up to Jerusalem to observe the feast of Passover. This has a deep meaning because in His heart He desired eagerly that all who believe in Him should be cleansed by the price of His blood, the ultimate Passover lamb.

### **Destroy This Temple**

Seeing Jesus rebuking the merchandisers, the Jewish people questioned: “Show us a miracle for a sign. Prove that you have the right to do these things.”

The Jews thought maybe this person came as Messiah and they wanted to see the sign that He was indeed the Messiah. Jesus answered them: “Destroy this temple, and I will build it again in three days.”

By this, He meant that He would be crucified on the cross, buried and resurrected in three days.

When Jesus was asked by the same Pharisees and scribes to show a Messianic sign, He took the sign of the prophet Jonah and foretold of His death and resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40)

The first temple in Jerusalem was built by Solomon but destroyed later by King Nebuchadnezzar in BC 586. 70 years later it was rebuilt, then around the time of Christ, the temple was totally done over and improved by King Herod the great, taking this renovation over 40 years. Brilliantly glittering with golden colours, the temple was the Jew’s pride and joy. The Jews were too interested in the physical building and took too little interest worshipping the God whose presence legitimized the building. Thus a high wall of sin, hypocrisy, disobedience and distrust stood between the Jews and God. Jesus, God the Son, came to demolish this wall so that He could meet His people in the relationship of love and intimacy.

Nevertheless, because all men are sinners, in their own strength no one can go to God. Without the badge of “sin-forgiven”, he cannot see God. So Jesus came, allowed Himself to be tortured and provided the way for us to go to God.

In summary, we who believe in Jesus, the One who cleansed the temple, should also purify ourselves first, as temples of God, and then we should strive to live holy lives. We must praise Jesus, the Passover Lamb, both in our living and at our worship services. Let us rely always on the power of Jesus' blood and dwell in Jesus-given new life. His resurrection is my resurrection!

### **Closing questions**

1. What were the core issues that made Jesus so angry?  
(Matthew 23:13)
2. What kind of personal and corporate house is Jesus looking for and what are some practical steps we might take to see His wish fulfilled?  
(Matthew 21:13)
3. Is it wrong for a local church to have nice facilities or for individuals to talk about business after the church service? What is the balance in both areas?

### **Application in our daily lives**

1. God's house is the house of prayer. Do you always pray when you wake? Let us always build the altar of our prayer to God.
2. As Jesus taught, "Those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth"(John 5:24), let us always prepare our hearts in spirit and in truth before we worship our Heavenly Father.

## **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS X**

### **JESUS WORKS ON THE SABBATH**

1. Today's scripture: Matthew 12: 1-21
2. Key Verse: Matthew 12:8 "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day."
3. Reference scripture: Mark 2:23-3:5 Luke 13:10-17
4. Objectives:
  - a. To consider setting one day apart for you and your family to worship the Lord, rest and spend time together.
  - b. To realize that Jesus worked on the Sabbath just as He works today and every day.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. How was Jesus compared to the temple? (Matthew 12:6)
2. What did Jesus want more than animal sacrifices? (Matthew 12:7)
3. Who is Lord of the Sabbath day? (Matthew 12:8)

### **Today's Message**

The Old Testament's Sabbath day was to commemorate God's resting after He completed the creation of the heaven, the earth, all things in it and mankind. The Bible says: Remember to keep the Sabbath as a holy day. The reason is that in six days the Lord made everything, He made the sky, earth, sea and everything in them. And on the seventh day He rested. (Exodus 20: 8,11)

The Jewish Sabbath is still observed today as 24 hours from Friday sunset to the same time on Saturday. Since New Testament days, we have observed Jesus' resurrection day as the Lord's day for worshipping, which is the first day after the Sabbath. Today, we will study the things that Jesus did on the Sabbath.

### **Jesus Taught on the Sabbath**

On the Sabbath, Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth and read and taught the book of Isaiah. In Capernaum, He also taught people in the synagogue, and people were astonished by His teaching. Jesus' teachings were different from those of the scribes, and His teachings

were also full of authority. His teachings shook the hearts of listeners because Jesus' Word as God's Word as Jesus was a member of the triune Godhead.

Jesus came to this earth, preached the good news of the kingdom of God and taught. He taught the goodness of God and the truth of salvation, that by believing in Him we receive eternal life. He also taught that the devil's work is to rob, kill and destroy us, but that the Holy Spirit is always helping us.

Even today, God's Word is taught on the Lord's day. Jesus, through His chosen servants, is still preaching the Good news about the kingdom of God. Paul taught Timothy, his son in faith: "Be careful in your life and in your teaching. Continue to live and teach rightly. Then you will save yourself and those people who listen to you." (1Timothy 4:16)

Jesus commanded:

"Teach them to obey everything I have told you." (Matthew 28:20)

When the Word of God is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, it will become powerful enough to keep us holy and to resolutely walk in the truth of the Word.

### **Jesus did good things on the Sabbath**

Once when Jesus was teaching on the Sabbath in a synagogue, a man with an evil spirit shouted:

"Jesus of Nazareth! What do you want with us?" (Mark 1:24)

Here, calling Him as "Jesus of Nazareth", satan tried to cause the Jews to belittle Jesus because the Jewish people used to despise the Nazarenes. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit:

"Be quiet! Come out of the man!"

The evil spirit came out instantly. As we have seen here, Jesus both taught and healed on the Sabbath.

On another Sabbath, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand and the Jewish leader accused Him of breaking the Sabbath by healing the man on the day. Then Jesus answered them:

"Which is right on the Sabbath day: to do good, or to do evil?"

(Mark 3:4)

Jesus came to this world to fulfill God's will, His will is to rescue doomed sinners, save them, give them a new life, and make them His children so that they can prosper in all things.

While teaching on the Sabbath in a synagogue, Jesus healed a demon-possessed woman who had been a cripple for eighteen years. This woman glorified God immediately but the ruler of the synagogue was angered:

“There are six days for work. So come to be healed on one of those days. Don't come for healing on the Sabbath day.”

And Jesus answered:

“All of you untie your work animals and head them to drink water everyday – even on the Sabbath day! This woman that I healed is our Jewish sister. But satan has held her for 18 years. Surely it is not wrong for her to be freed from her sickness on a Sabbath day!” (Luke 13:14)

Today, too, Jesus dwells in the church through the Holy Spirit. When we gather together to worship Him and honour His name, He does the same work for us as He did during His earthly ministry. Some Christians even though they have been born again, still live in disbelief and lead the life of a slave to sin. Also many among us are suffering from a myriad of physical ailments. When we gather together and worship the Lord and honour His name, people are set free spiritually and from physical problems.

### **Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath**

The Israelites observed the Sabbath as the day of worshipping and the day of rest (Leviticus 23:3). But after they returned from the Babylonian captivity, the Sabbath became blurred to them and their activities became rituals.

To these legalistic Jews, Jesus taught the true meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is for man. The day following Adam's creation was the Sabbath. His first full day was the day of rest in the blessed garden that God had provided for him. Note here that the Sabbath was a day of peace, joy and rest for Adam, not a day of bondage, captivity and pressure. The only thing Adam was required to do on the day was to praise God and worship Him.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem to be the Saviour of His people. Through His shed blood and wounded body on the cross, Jesus paid the death penalty and dealt with the guilt of original sin. From that awesome day, He quickens and gives eternal life to whoever believes in Him. This Jesus who gave us a new life, a new hope, a new chance to begin again, was resurrected on the first day after the Sabbath.

By disobeying God, Adam and Eve lost the peace of God. They were cursed by God and their spirits died. Consequently, everything concerning their lives went wrong, and their bodies began to experience sickness. They were “cursed”. Now they would have to sweat to produce food and survive. But we, who have become Christians by believing Jesus and obeying Him, have now entered a new eternal Sabbath. We gather together, on the day commemorating Jesus’ resurrection, to worship Him and to receive peace from Him. The early church worshipped the Lord on the first day after the Sabbath (Act 2:1, 20:7) which was the day of Jesus’ resurrection. The Apostle Paul also acknowledged that the early Christians met together to worship the Lord on the first day of the week (1Corinthians 16:1, 2)

Jesus answered the Pharisees:

“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day” (Matthew 12:8)

### **Closing questions**

1. The Bible teaches that Jesus fulfilled the obligation to keep the sabbath and that we enter our “sabbath rest” when we make Him boss. (Heb 4:1-11). We are therefore not morally obligated to keep a special day (Colossians 2:16-17). However, should Christians still try to have a day set aside to worship, spend time with family and rest?

2. Just like the religious leaders of Jesus’ time missed the point about the Sabbath, we can easily get side tracked, being unnecessarily uptight and legalistic about aspects of our Christian walk, keeping us from the life of joy and positive impact He intended.

Does anyone in the group have an example from his/her own life of how he/she used to be “too uptight” in an area of his/her Christian walk and Jesus has since set him/her free.

3. How can being a Christian be overly burdensome? See if the following passage in a translation and a paraphrase sheds some light.

<sup>28</sup>Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV)

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matthew 11:28-30 The Message)

### **Application in our daily lives**

Today we have learned about the Sabbath and Jesus’ teaching that “it is good to do good things on the Sabbath”. Am I doing good things for the needy neighbours who live near me? Share with one another about experiences of helping others.

## **THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS XI**

### **JESUS CONQUERS DEATH**

1. Today's scripture: John 11:33-44
2. Key Verse: John 11:40 "Jesus said to her, 'didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'"
3. Cross Reference: Luke 7:11-17
4. Objectives: To understand Jesus' power to conquer death at any time.
  - a. To consider His command to those standing by at the raising of Lazarus: The King James Version puts it "Loose him, and let him go." Today Jesus is speaking this very same command to us.
  - b. To be reminded that no matter how difficult and quickly circumstances or tests try to overwhelm us, we have the courage to stand firm and become "Christians who fear not, but only believe."

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. What did Jesus do and say when He looked at Lazarus' tomb? (John 11:41 – 43)
2. What did Jesus command the people to do for Lazarus after he came out of the tomb? (John 11:44)

### **Today's Message**

Jesus has greater power than any religious leader, revolutionary, or philosopher. The reason is He is the only One Who thoroughly conquered death. Throughout human history, there have been many great religions, philosophies and ideas for social reformation, but none of their leaders has been able to conquer death. Only Jesus conquered death.

### **Jesus Raises the Dead**

In the four books of the gospel, there are three instances of Jesus miraculously raising the dead.

Though Lazarus' decomposed body had already begun to stink, Jesus commanded: "Lazarus, come out!" and the dead Lazarus came back to life and walked out of the tomb.

The Bible says the wages of sin is death. When Adam and Eve fell, a curse fell on all humanity. Man was sentenced to death for the price of sin. But Jesus came to give us life. While He was on earth, there was

not a single instance where He ever preached a funeral sermon, but He brought life to those who had died. Jesus gave us resurrection life too, when we were born again. Jesus Christ is the only name through whom we must be saved.

### **Lazarus, Come Out!**

Since the transgression of Adam and Eve against God, all their descendants have been living in the tomb of the flesh. Man has been living without knowing where he came from, why he is living and where he is heading. Who would quicken our dead spirits? The only One who can quicken spiritually dead mankind is Jesus Christ, who came to this world clothed in flesh, died on the cross and was resurrected after three days. When you take the words of Jesus: “Lazarus, come out!” into your heart, you can also be quickened from the dead state as Lazarus was raised. Lazarus came alive not by the Jewish laws nor because of his sister’s fervent love, but by the commanding words of Jesus. Likewise, the only One who will save us today is Jesus Christ.

### **Take Off the Grave Clothes and Let Him Go**

Jesus raised Lazarus, but He did not help in taking off the burial clothes when he walked out of the tomb. He instead commanded the people: “Loose him and let him go.” (John 11:44 in the AV), because taking off the past burial clothes is man’s responsibility. In like manner, though we are saved by the grace of Christ, the job of taking off our old garment is ours. If we want to walk freely we must loosen (take off) the bondage of sin, curse, the devil, poverty and other incumbrances. In other words, we are responsible for making our situation prosper, so we can enjoy more abundantly the new life we have already received.

We are the ones to carry out this job. The more “old garments” we take off, the more we will enjoy our salvation.



Now, let us study how we can loosen various kinds of bondage.

First, we must take off our old way of thinking.

Jesus wants us to walk freely by breaking the ties of sin that have been binding us. When we are not walking freely, it makes Jesus sad. Therefore, by the power of Jesus' cross, and using the authority He gave us, we must boldly cut off the bondage of sin and renew our minds with the thoughts: "I am forgiven! I am healed! I have obtained eternal life, so I am a winner!" and confess these facts with our lips.

Second, we must free ourselves from the bondages of anxiety and fear. Not knowing about the future, some people walk in fear. When life's problems attack and seem insoluble, we can also be easily oppressed by fear. But Jesus gave us His Word and Spirit so that we can overcome the enemy of anxiety and fear. When we hear God's Good News, faith comes in our heart (Romans 10:17), and when faith comes, a sense of insecurity and fear will leave us and God will work His miracle through our faith.

Third, we must free ourselves from the habit of pessimistic or negative language. In our daily living, we carelessly say: "It doesn't work" or "I am a failure" "I am finished" "I would die if ...". "I am not worthy" or "I can't do it." These words are the greatest enemies that destroy us. We must take off the garment of pessimistic and negative speech. We should always use positive and creative words of action.

Fourth, Jesus not only said, "Take the clothes off him" but He also said, "let him go." Our Lord Jesus does not want us to stick in one place, not advancing farther. If anyone says, "Yes, I believe" but does not act upon what he says he believes, that faith is a dead faith. Through the words of the scriptures, Jesus changes our minds and enables us to speak positive and creative words because He desires our lives to be full of God's miracles.

Lazarus came alive. He was set free from the grave clothes that bound him and returned home rejoicing. There was joy instead of tears, praise instead of sighs, songs instead of mourning. Lazarus enjoyed his life abundantly at his home, at his work, and wherever he went. This is the life Jesus wants for all of us!

## **Closing questions**

1. How could Jesus say to Martha and Mary “He who believes in me will have life even if he dies.”? (John 11:25, 26).
2. Why shouldn't we use negative words as believers? (Proverbs 18:21)
3. What was the purpose of Lazarus' sickness? (John 11:4)

## **Application in our daily lives**

1. Everyday let us strive to restrain ourselves from speaking negative words. Let us change our language habits so that we will always use active and positive words.
2. Let us cast out fear and anxiety by the power of the Word of God and Holy Spirit. Let us always heed God's Word and grow in faith.
3. Let us become believers who have faith that acts upon the words of Jesus: “Take the clothes off him and let him go”

# **THE PROMISE OF REDEMPTION I**

## **THE GOD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LOVE**

1. Today's scripture: 1 John 4:7-12

2. Key Verse: 1 John 4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

3. Cross Reference: Ezra 9:13-15

4. Objectives:

a. To live in Jesus' love and to understand our responsibility to share that same love with our brothers and sisters in the Lord and a lost and dying world.

b. To review again the righteousness of God and the provision of His redemptive work.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. From where does love originate? (1 John 4:7-8)

2. Why did God send His only begotten Son into the world? (1 John 4:14)

### **Today's Message**

Many people think of God only as a strict and merciless judge who quickly judges us all the time. But our God is righteous and at the same time His love is boundless. He promised His redemption to us sinners, and fulfilled His promise by sending His Son. Nevertheless, fallen mankind does not know God as a good God. Through the Bible, let us know His righteousness and love that has been promised and fulfilled.

### **He is righteous**

God is righteous. Throughout human history, God revealed His righteousness most of the time through His judgements. The yardstick of His judgement has been His righteousness. No man is righteous when he stands before God. All mankind, and all things in the world too, have been judged since the first man Adam fell and was judged (Roman 5:12). Mankind cannot escape God's judgement and on the final judgement day everyone from the most godly Christian to the worst sinner will stand before Jesus on Judgment Day.

God judges each person fairly and thoroughly according to what he has done. In the Old Testament days, in order for the Israelites to escape God's severe judgement when they stood before Him, they had to shed the blood of animals, and this had to be repeated every time they committed sins. The shedding of the blood of animals symbolized and looked forward to Jesus, Who would come to shed His blood for the redemption of our sins. To stand before God, man must pay the price of his sins and that price was death.

But God did not want man to be eternally separated from Him, eternally languishing in hell. God sent His Son to die in man's place. When we believe in Jesus Christ and walk relying on the merits of His atoning work, we can rightfully stand before the righteousness of God just as if we'd never sinned.

By the help of Jesus' righteousness God stretches out His arms and protects us from satan, enabling us to be more than conquerors over the evil power of the devil. This is possible because we became children of God through believing in the intrinsic worth of the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

## He is Love

God is love, out of His love He created the heavens and the earth and all things therein. He called out the fallen Adam and Eve, and "covered" them with the skins of animals that He killed, indicating that His redemption work would "cover" their sins.

In the Greek language, there are four words for love:

**Storge** - which generally tells about parental love

**Eros** - a love derived from physical gratification

**Philea** - a brotherly or familial affection.

**Agape** - a love that gives, or the sacrificial love of God.

God loves us to the point of giving Himself to us. God loves us not because He needs us but because we need His love.



Also, God's love is a one-way love. Just as Hosea forgave his adulterous wife because of his love for her, God called sin-committing Israel and also sent His Son to save His chosen children. Furthermore, God has loved us all along the way when we didn't even know Him. Lastly, God's love is the love that gives and keeps on giving to all men. God loves us just as we are. He loves us regardless of our circumstances. His love never changes; His love is the same yesterday, today and forever. He loves the sinful, the pious, the rich, the poor, thieves, prostitutes and all. The meaning of the scripture, "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son" shows how great His love is.

### **How does God Give His Love to Us?**

Because God loves us, He never forces us to make any decision but He leaves all things to our free will. Man, out of his own free will, chose to disobey God's Word, and as a result of his rebellion, he fell and became a sinner. Nevertheless, God still loved us and out of His love He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price of our sins. The Word of God declares this:

This is how God showed His love to us: He sent his only Son into the world to give us life through Him. True love is God's love for us, not our love for God. God sent his Son to be the way to take away our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

Being righteous, God does not overlook sin. Therefore, to stand before God, the price of our sins has to be paid for. Jesus Christ was born by the miracle of a "virgin" birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because He was sinless He could pay the price of our sins. By His death, Jesus did pay the price of our sins and satisfied the righteousness of God. Not only did He pay the price of our sins, but whosoever believes in Him is saved and receives eternal life. This is a wondrous and amazing love to us. That Jesus shed blood on the cross, tells us how greatly God loves us.

We should not be content with just receiving this great love from God. In gratitude, we should show love one to another, and share with others the great love that called us and saved us when we were still in sin and without Christ.

That is how much God loved us, dear friends! So we also must love each other. (1 John 4:11)

In other words, when we love each other with agape love, God's love comes and shines forth among us, which shows us God is in us and we are in Him. In order for us to love others in this way, we should commit ourselves totally to God, and that is only possible when we are really bathed in His great love. We must know how deeply and greatly our Heavenly Father loves us. To know this means we will practice His great love in all the events of our daily lives.

### **Closing questions:**

1. How does our scripture tonight, John 4:7, tie into Deuteronomy 7:7-8 and how do we apply this to how we live today? "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you... (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)
2. How do we make God's love complete and what does John mean by complete? (1 John 4:12)

### **Application in our daily lives**

1. Let us totally rely on Jesus in all the aspects of our daily living.
2. Just as the waters of Galilee flow out of its borders, let us become those who let the love of God flow out from us to other people.
3. Let us give deep thanks to Jesus Christ for such a great love that He died on the cross to save us.

# **THE PROMISE OF REDEMPTION II**

## **GOD'S COVENANT OF SALVATION WITH ADAM AND EVE**

1. Today's scripture: Genesis 3: 14-24

2. Key Verse: Genesis 3:15 I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your descendants and her descendants will be enemies. Her child will crush your head. And you will bite his heel.

3. Cross Reference: Romans 5:12-21

4. Objectives:

a. To understand the ongoing effect of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve.

b. To believe Jesus Christ is the one who redeems us from sin and death and to be grateful to our loving heavenly Father who gave us eternal life.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. What were the punishments given by God in Genesis 3:16-17 to Adam and Eve?

2. In Genesis 3:15, who is the child of the woman? (Galations 4:4)

3. What does the killing of animals to clothe Adam and Eve symbolize? (Genesis 3:21)

### **Today's Message**

Succumbing to the temptation of satan through the snake, our first parents, Adam and Eve, ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and immediately sinned, the curse and death came upon them. The moment sin entered into them their fellowship with God was broken. When God called Adam, he could not respond to God's voice nor come to God because he was too engulfed in shame to stand before Him. The wall of sin blocked the way of Adam's communion with God. We, the children of Adam, could not come forward to God either, nor respond to His merciful outstretched hands, because of our wall of sin.

But Jesus Christ came to this world and through His torn flesh and shed blood, He broke down the wall of sin that barred us from God. Jesus Christ Himself became the Way, the Truth and the Life. Through Him, the way opened for us to enter boldly the kingdom of God.

Many times and in many ways, the Bible prophesied the coming of Jesus Christ who would be crucified in our place for sin. Let us study the first promise that God made with Adam and Eve.

### **The Promise of Redemption to Eve**

Since Adam received directly from God the command not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, satan chose Eve, who had not been told directly by God, and tempted her. First, satan caused Eve to doubt God's goodness and led her to resent God's decision. Eve took the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, ate it and gave it to Adam to eat. The curse which was placed on them was what they would earn their food by the sweat of their brow. For Eve, suffering in childbirth was added.

But our God is a God of love. His righteousness is tempered with love and mercy. God appeared to Adam and Eve and gave them a word of redemption. He said to the snake: "I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your descendants and her descendants will be enemies. Her child will crush you head. And you will bite his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

Here, the "child" was Jesus Christ, who would destroy the head of the snake, satan. Why did God plan that Jesus Christ should be born of woman? The Psalmist David lamented: I was brought into this world in sin. In sin my mother gave birth to me. (Psalm 51:5) Paul also sighed: Sin came into the world because of what one man did. And with sin came death. And this is why all men must die – because all men sinned. (Romans 5:12)

As the above scriptures declare, all men, no matter who they may be, born in sin because of Adam, are under the condemnation of original sin and by their own power it is impossible for them to receive forgiveness. Man fell by the act of his own free will but he is in no way capable of saving himself by the act of his own free will, because he became a servant of sin.

Therefore our Saviour, who was coming to deliver us from sin, could not come from the seed of man who was born through the sinful bloodline of Adam. The Word of God prophesied plainly that our Saviour would be born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit: But the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son and she will name him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

### **The Fulfillment of the Promise by Jesus Christ**

As prophesied, Jesus Christ was conceived of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit and was born as a sinless man, without the original sin that had been born into mankind generation after generation.

By disobeying God, Adam fell. By obeying God even to death Jesus fulfilled God's will. Bound under original sin, no man was capable of keeping the law of God, but Jesus obeyed the laws of God, which were His thoughts continually. The Apostle Paul wrote: But when the right time came, God sent his Son. His Son was born of a woman and lived under the law. God did this so that He could buy freedom for those who were under the law. His purpose was to make us His children. (Galatians 4:4-5) Whoever believes in Jesus Christ will be cleansed by Jesus' blood, redeemed from the law and made a child of God.

At the same time, at the cross Jesus broke the power of satan, and conquered death. These children are people with physical bodies. So Jesus himself became like them and had the same experiences they have. He did this so that, by dying, He could destroy the one who has the power of death. That one is the devil. (Hebrews 2:14) Eventually he will be casted into the lake of fire (Revelation chapter 20). Until that day satan is still the prince of the power of the air and still comes to rob, kill and destroy people who do not know they can have victory over him. But the God of peace will crush satan under our feet once and for all, shortly. (Romans 16:20)

### **The Covenant and Fulfillment – Clothes of Animal Skins**

When Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, they became aware of their nakedness and they became ashamed. When a person realized he has sinned, the human tendency is to cover up the sin, so Adam and Eve began to do this. They made a covering for themselves

of fig leaves, but the leaves withered in time. Our own effort to cover up sin never lasts either. When God came to talk with Adam and Eve, He took innocent animals, killed them, and with the skins of those animals He made a covering for both of them. The shedding of blood to provide this covering was a foreshadow of the coming of Jesus who would shed His own blood to provide an everlasting covering for all sin, once and for all. Today, the only covering that can completely remove the shame and the guilt of man is the blood of Jesus Christ! No covering of human ethics or moral virtues can hide our shame and fear as a result of sin. Today “whosoever will” can be cleansed and made righteous only through the shed blood of



Jesus. As God promised through His Word, Jesus came to earth 2000 years ago. And when His atonement was completed, He declared, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) What did He finish? He delivered us from the curse of thorns and thistles. He redeemed us from the sickness that came as the wages of sin. This was the fulfillment of God’s covenant made to Adam and Eve through His clothing them with animal skins. We should live a life of thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father for His love and mercy, that we have eternal life through Jesus Christ.

### **Closing questions**

1. The blood of Jesus has a better message than the blood of what? (Hebrews 12:24)
2. Before God gave the animal skins to Adam and Eve nothing had ever died. How do you think seeing the innocent animals killed for their guilt made Adam and Eve feel?

### **Application in our daily lives**

1. Our Heavenly Father planned redemption for us from the very beginning, so He called us and redeemed us. Let us always give thanks to God for such a great and complete redemption.
2. Compare the difference between Jesus’ and Adam’s attitude toward God. Let us follow Jesus who obeyed God all the way unto death, to become a peace offering sacrifice.

## **THE PROMISE OF REDEMPTION III**

### **GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH**

1. Today's scripture: Genesis 6: 1-22
2. Key Verse: Genesis 6:22 "Noah did everything that God commanded him."
3. Cross Reference: Genesis 7: 1-5 Genesis 8: 1-5
4. Objectives:
  - a. To be certain those who believe in and follow Jesus Christ shall live with Jesus forever but those who do not believe in and follow Jesus Christ shall die in their sins and be separated from Him forever.
  - b. To learn that if we enter the ark of faith we will always have sufficient faith to rise above the difficulties in our lives. Let us always live within the ark of faith and give thanks to God.

### **Questions to answer before Connect Group**

1. Why was God sorry that He had made man on the earth? (Genesis 6: 5-6)
2. What was the Lord's opinion of Noah? (Genesis 6:8)
3. How many days did it rain? (Genesis 7:4)

### **Today's Message**

Since God cast Adam and Eve out of the garden after their fall, all mankind became servants of satan. However, God continually showed His plan of redemption towards man. Through Noah, God revealed His great truth of "salvation by faith" under His plan of grace. God also promised that His children would be saved through Jesus Christ, who is the Ark of Salvation. Today, we will study the covenant that God made with Noah.

### **Man's Sin and God's Judgment**

Just as God had promised, He blessed Adam and his offspring increased on the earth. But because they were born after Adam, they all entered the world as sinners too. Their thoughts were full of evil and rebellion against God. And people's relationships with one another were stained with hatred, hurts and murders.

After killing Abel, Cain and especially his descendants became even more wicked. Lamech, the fifth grandchild of Cain, was an extremely violent man. He killed a man who had wounded him and also killed a boy for injuring him. However, Seth was born to Adam after Abel was murdered and the children of Seth worshipped God diligently and walked with Him. Enoch, the fifth grandchild of Seth, walked with God for three hundred years and was taken up to heaven without experiencing death.

Iniquity filled the earth and God was deeply grieved. But in this whirlpool of wicked generations, there was a man who found favor with God and his name was Noah. His name means “peace and comfort” and both overflowed in his life.

Noah was a righteous man before God. This does not mean that Noah was completely sinless before Him but it means that God reckoned him to be righteous because he trusted God and obeyed His words in faith. He found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Unless a person is pleasing in God’s sight and has found grace, he cannot dare stand before God. Even though Noah was good and righteous in his every deed, if God had not given grace to him, his goodness and righteous acts would have been of no use. As Noah walked with God, He shared His plan of judgment on the wickedness of mankind, but He also showed Noah His plan of salvation from that judgment.

### **The Ark of Salvation Built by Faith**

As God had commanded in Genesis, Noah built the ark of cypress wood. It was three storeys high, 135 metres long, 22.5 metres wide and 13.5 metres high. To build this size of boat, a tremendous amount of wood, labor and working time, but most of all an unchanging faith in God’s instructions, was required. While building the ark, Noah explained to people why he was building it. He also preached to them about the coming judgement of God and urgently invited them to come to the ark before the judgement began.



No one listened to Noah's preaching. Instead, they called him a crazy man. They made fun of him and ridiculed him when he finally gathered a male and a female of every kind of animal into the ark. Nevertheless, Noah believed firmly in God who is faithful and he obeyed what he was told to do. Noah and his family not only believed God but lived accordingly. Through his faith he was recognized as a righteous man before God. Seeing that those aboard the ark were only the immediate family members of Noah, we can tell how scarce the humble men were in his days.

In time, the preparation period was over and the day of judgement arrived. As black clouds suddenly arose in the clear sky and rain drops began to fall just as God had warned, and Noah, his wife, and his three sons and three daughters-in-law got into the ark. The water began to rise. Higher and higher it rose until the ark floated over the high mountains. No doubt some of the people wanted to change their minds and enter the ark, but it was too late. All living creatures of the earth died. The rain continued for 40 days and for 150 days the earth was full of water. The ark that Noah had built by faith saved him and his family but that very same ark became proof of God's judgement to those who did not believe His words.

Noah's ark was God's covenant plan for saving those who would go into the ark. The ark foreshadowed what Jesus Christ fulfilled on the cross for mankind, that was destined to provide forgiveness of sins for all who would repent and ask for the cleansing blood of Jesus to remove their sins.

So, just as the ark was the way of salvation in the days of Noah, Jesus' shed blood on the cross is the way of salvation today from judgement to come. Today whosoever confesses Jesus as his personal Savior will be forgiven his sins by Jesus' blood and he will be acquitted of future judgement.

## **Jesus' ark of Salvation**

Noah lived through the flood but he did not see the flood because the one window of the ark was open upwards to the sky. Noah could only look upwards so it was only the sky that Noah could see. Being in the ark, he could not even see a drop of rain, much less the flood. This is an important lesson for us who are already aboard Jesus' ark of salvation: "To be victorious during your flood, do not look at the flood." Instead of looking at the flood, open the window of prayer and look into God's face. Through prayer we can only see the faithfulness, grace and love of our heavenly Father. And through this window of prayer, let us build the altar of our prayer giving Him all praise and thanksgiving, and returning the glory to Him for all He has done for us.

What shall we do now, after we have boarded the ark of salvation and have obtained eternal life? We have the answer by looking at what Noah did after he came out of the ark. The first thing Noah did was to build an altar to God. There we can see him giving thanks to God for his salvation. Our God blesses the one who seeks His kingdom and His righteousness first, so He accepted Noah's altar and was pleased. God blessed Noah with the words (Genesis 9:1) "Have many children. Grow in number and fill the earth." Noah did have many children. God also made a covenant with Noah. By placing a rainbow in the sky, God promised (Genesis 9:15): "Flood waters will never again destroy all life on the earth."

That He would not judge all living creatures by water again, meant God had boundless love for the human race.

God has said He will judge the world by fire at the end of time. But we who are already aboard the ark of salvation, Jesus Christ, on that day will watch the spectacle with amazement and awe at the power and majesty of our God.

## **Closing questions**

1. How were Paul and Silas like Noah and what is the lesson to be gleaned (Act 16:22-26).
2. In Noah's day, God judged the world by water. What will God use to judge the world at the end of time? (2 Peter 3: 6-10)
3. As the day of Jesus Christ's return approaches, what kind of people should we be? (2 Peter 3:11-12)

## **Application in our daily lives**

Compare today with Noah's day and realize the day of judgement is at hand. Let us persevere in our faith like Noah did.