

## THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

(Taken and adapted from 'The Red Bits – A Study Guide' by Michael Button)

### INTRODUCTION

If we are to be true disciples of Jesus, we shall follow His teaching. To do so we need to know what His teaching is and to know it well.

Before we get into our study of the teachings themselves, it will be helpful to form a clear picture of Jesus' role as teacher and of the ways in which He taught.

#### A. THE PLACE OF TEACHING IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

1. About 50% of the Gospels are devoted to the teachings of Jesus
2. Jesus Himself claimed to be a teacher: "*If I then, your teacher and Lord ....*" (*John 13:34*)
3. His contemporaries called Him *teacher* and *rabbi*. *Rabbi* is a Hebrew word for *teacher*. The word was derived from the Hebrew for *great* and, although it had changed its meaning somewhat by the time of Jesus, it still carried a great deal of respect. Who called Him 'rabbi' or 'teacher' in John 3:2 and in John 13:13?
4. People were amazed at the authority with which Jesus taught (Matt 7:29 and John 7:15). Rabbis invariably taught opinions of other teachers, comparing one with another, whereas Jesus stated categorically, declaring His own interpretation to be the correct one: "*You have heard ...but I say to you .....*" (Matt 5:38-39 & others). What was people's reaction to this (Mark 12:37). Why do you think Jesus was able to say this?

One significance of this is that Jews expected the Messiah, when He came, to teach with wisdom from God. The discerning Jew might, therefore, see in the power of Jesus' teaching a sign of His Messiahship.

Jesus appealed to the heart, whereas Jewish rabbis spoke only to the mind. *The common people heard Him gladly* (Mark 12:37).

Activity: For discussion or meditation: Can you see any significance in the connection of *teacher* with *Lord* in John 13:13? (*Read* Matt 7:24-27 to help you.)

#### B. WHO AND WHERE JESUS TAUGHT

Jesus came first of all to His own people, the Jews. They had been chosen by God to be the first to hear the Gospel (Acts 3:26). The only record we have of His teaching others is when He spoke to the woman at the well in Samaria, though undoubtedly He spent the two days He stayed in Samaria in teaching the citizens of Sychar. He used every opportunity to reach people where they could be found and where they would listen to His teaching.

What were the locations of Jesus' teaching on the following occasions and to whom was He teaching (as far as we can tell)?

Matt 5:1.

Mark 1:21.

Mark 2:1-2.

Luke 19:47-20:2.

Activity: Circle the letter before the correct statement. Jesus taught ...

- (a) large numbers only.
- (b) only small groups of disciples who wanted to learn deep lessons.
- (c) as many as could fit into a house.
- (d) individuals, small groups and large groups.

### C. HOW JESUS TAUGHT - His Methods

Jesus adapted His methods according to His listeners. In doing this He showed great versatility and skill in delivering His lessons in a way that was most likely to be appreciated and remembered. Methods He used were:

**1. Parables** (*read* Matt 13:34). A parable is a story in which concepts familiar to the hearers can help them visualise or understand similar concepts about something unfamiliar. Not every aspect of a parable story has a meaning. Attempts to draw too many meanings from parables have led to some incorrect and even weird interpretations of Scripture.

In one sense, parables brought enlightenment, but in another they hid the truth rather than revealed it. This is what Jesus meant when He quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10 (*read* Matt 13:13-16). It is not that God does not want people to know the truth, but stubborn refusal to learn truth prevents the hearer from seeing the parallel in the story, whereas a desire to learn the truth opens up the hearer to revelation of the parallel truth. The disciples did not always see the parallel at first, but because they wanted to know the truth they asked for revelation.

Activity: Circle the letter before the statement that best describes a parable:

- (a) A story with several meanings.
- (b) A story with a deeper meaning that everyone can understand.
- (c) A story with a deeper meaning that those who want to know can come to understand.
- (d) A story with a deeper meaning no one can understand until they get to heaven.

**2. Illustrations.** Illustrations also shine light on a spiritual truth by comparing spiritual concepts to familiar things, but they do this by means of a short phrase rather than by developing a story. The *I am* statements of Jesus are illustrations (e.g. "*I am the door*"; "*I am the good shepherd*" John 10:7 & John 10:11). So are

the *visual aids* that Jesus used when mentioning things around Him (e.g. Matt 6:28-30).

**3. Questions.** If someone asked Jesus a question, He often asked them a question in return (e.g. Luke 10:25-26). This was to cause His hearers to think about the matter. Such thought sometimes reveals we were already nearer to the answer than we realised. We are also more likely to remember it.

**4. Logic and Argument.** Jesus was not unskilful in meeting debaters on their own ground. When His opponents criticised Him, He replied in logic they were unable to dispute, such as the argument about paying taxes (Matt 22:15-22).

**5. Actions.** There were occasions where Jesus taught specific lessons by means of His actions. What did Jesus do to illustrate servanthood (John 13:12-17)?

Activity: Against each question, write 'P' if it is a parable, 'I' if it is an illustration, 'Q' if it is a question, 'L' if it is a logical argument, or 'A' if it is action.

- (a) The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees about the resurrection (Matt 22:23-33). \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) The raising of Lazarus (John 11:25-45) \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) *Knock and it will be opened to you* (Matt 7:7) \_\_\_\_\_
- (e) Paying the temple tax (Matt 17:25) \_\_\_\_\_

## D. THE SOURCES OF WHAT HE TAUGHT

**1. From God (His Father).** See John 7:16.

**2. From the Scriptures.** The Scriptures available to Jesus were what we know today as *The Old Testament*. He knew them well, quoted them frequently, taught their true meaning and argued their correct interpretation.

**3. Godly parents.** As a child, Jesus will have learned from their instruction and example (*read* Deut 6:4-7, 20-25).

**4. School.** Jewish children were taught in schools run by the synagogues. He will have been taught to read and write, with an emphasis on reading and knowing the Scriptures, especially the Law of Moses.

**5. The religious teachers of His day** (*read* Luke 2:41-49). Jesus will have been only twelve years of age, but already He was conversing with the religious teachers in the Temple.

**6. Sabbath worship.** Jesus not only taught in the synagogues, He will have heard other rabbis teach in the synagogues where He worshipped on the Sabbath.

Activity: Read these O.T. Scriptures quoted by Jesus and what He said about them. The subjects are numbered 1 to 6, but are in the wrong order. In the space after each question show the number corresponding to the subject.

- |                                 |       |                           |
|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| (a) Exodus 20:13 / Matt 5:21-22 | _____ | 1 Respect for God's house |
| (b) Exodus 20:14 / Matt 5:27-28 | _____ | 2 Living by God's Word    |
| (c) Exodus 21:24 / Matt 5:38-39 | _____ | 3 Murder                  |
| (d) Deut 6:16 / Luke 4:12       | _____ | 4 Adultery                |
| (e) Deut 8:3 / Luke 4:4         | _____ | 5 Provoking God           |
| (f) Isaiah 56:7 / Luke 19:46    | _____ | 6 Revenge                 |

**7. Personal experience and observation.** His parables and illustrations show that Jesus had knowledge of the working practices of His day, such as farming and fishing, and of the natural world around Him. Such things He will have observed as He *grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men (Luke 2:52)*. He knew human weakness, frustration, suffering, rejection and temptation through experiencing them Himself (Heb 4:15). Having grown up as a man, Jesus was able to understand men and the world in which they lived. Such understanding gave Him, not only the material for what He taught, but also an appreciation of what needed to be taught.

Activity: For discussion or meditation: Where can we learn the things we can pass on to others?

#### E. PERSONAL APPLICATION

The lessons of Jesus continue to have an impact upon millions, two thousand years later. He prepared others to carry on His teaching and gave them instruction to do so in what is usually referred to as *The Great Commission* (Matt 28:19-20). Disciples of Jesus have obeyed this commission ever since. As a result, we, and others throughout this globe, know of His teaching today. We have the privilege and responsibility to spread His teaching in our generation. Having learned from similar sources as Jesus, we can use the same successful methods that He used to *teach others also* (2 Tim 2:2).