

Teach the Bible

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[0 : 01] Good morning everyone. That's nice. So this morning we are continuing our theme, What Would Jesus Do? And I've been given the subtitle, Teach the Bible. The question, What Would Jesus Do? is a great question to ask ourselves, isn't it? I remember as a teenager having one of those wristbands with the letters WWJD, What Would Jesus Do? stitched in. Did anyone else have one of those? They were very much a Christian fashion statement for a while.

And I think maybe we should bring them back because they were great conversation starters. But also they reminded me when I was wearing mine to keep my thoughts, my words, my actions and reactions aligned with the way that Jesus lived his life. See as Christians we are called to live lives like Jesus, to do our best to follow his example, to be Christ-like or as Paul puts it in Ephesians 5 verse 1, to be imitators of Christ. In fact the word Christian literally means little Christ and you might have heard the old joke, if you take Christ out of Christian all you're left with is Ian and Ian won't save you.

Ha ha ha. Or if you take the word Christian out of Christianity and add an N, you're left with is inanity. It is silly, it is futile, it is useless. And so we're led to conclude, if we haven't already, that Jesus Christ is central to our discipleship journey. Different ages, stages, processes alike, we need Jesus to be the centre. And so we're led back to this question, what would Jesus do? What would Jesus do? We don't have to look far in the gospels to know that what Jesus does is he loves his neighbour, befriends the outcast, talk to the rebel, he eats with the sinner, heals the sick, casts out demons, he raises the dead, he takes a nap, he spends time alone to pray, feeds the hungry, calms the storm, and time and time again what Jesus does is he teaches the good news. Jesus' whole life is given over to teaching the good news about God. John 1, 1, in John 1, 1, John writes about Jesus, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He continues on to say, in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. If you look at the pages of this scripture in your Bibles, you'll see that John gives the word, word, a capital letter. He's signifying that he is referring to Jesus being the word, or logos in the original Greek. At the time, the Greek philosophy was that logos was the rational divine intelligence, the reason for everything. So for John to come along and say Jesus is the word, he is logos, was massive. Jesus Christ is our divine rational being. He is our reason for everything.

He is our example to look to, our example to live by. He is the word. Jesus came to teach about God, to fulfill the law and the prophets. He came to bring forth the kingdom, to show us the way.

[3 : 52] As he says in John 14, verse 6, he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. So we need to know him. We need to know the way, the logos.

And again, as we explore the way of Jesus, as we live our lives to be more like him, we come back to this question, what would Jesus do? And our subtitle today gives us an example, an answer. He teaches the Bible.

And I'd like to point out here that we can't teach unless we first study. Behind every book and commentary you read, every podcast or sermon you listen to, every seminar or workshop that you attend is hours of studying, of praying, of listening to the Holy Spirit. And it's up to us to do that ourselves as well. And by that I mean, get to know our creator. Read the Bible for ourselves, get to know it.

Get to know him. Read and listen to things that inform us. But most of all, as we read the Bible for ourselves, we need to be asking the one who authored it to be explaining it to us as well. Because we can't live off secondhand revelation. When we stop and listen to what God wants to say to each of us personally as we spend time alone with him. He will reveal things to us personally that can fuel our faith like nothing else. And that is so exciting.

In the Bible, we find wisdom. We find instruction and history and information. Through reading the Bible, we get to know God more and more. Grow in our intimacy with him. We come to know his plans and his purposes for our lives. We get to know his good, pleasing, perfect will. The Bible holds so much power for us. In Hebrews, the Bible holds so much. And we can take loads of verses from the Bible and see the power in teaching and knowing the Bible. Proverbs 22.6 says, Teach a child in the way that he should go and even when he is older, he shall not depart from it.

[6 : 28] 2 Timothy 3.16 says that all scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servants of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Romans 10.17 says that the faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of God. Psalm 119.105, Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. And even Jesus' last words in the gospel of Matthew would go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. We know Jesus sets a good example to us of teaching the word of God to everyone he encountered, from the crowded streets and the likes of Zacchaeus, to the lonely well side and the likes of the women who have been rejected by society, to every person, every crowd Jesus encountered, he took the opportunity to teach them about God. And what we read in our passage this morning is no different. As we read Jesus telling the parable of the sower to such a large crowd that he had to take a boat a little way out onto the shore so that everyone who came could hear.

In the parable, the farmer who represents Jesus goes out one day to sow his seed, representing the word of God. And in this parable, Jesus cryptically tells us about the different kind of seed, different kind of ground that the word of God can land on in different people's lives. As the farmer scatters his seed, the first lot lands on a path and is quickly eaten up by the birds. The next lot lands on rocky places where the soil is shallow and the roots can't take deep root. And when the sun comes out, it's burnt up.

The third lot, it lands on the soil with thorns so that when they grow, the thorns choke them and they die. But the last lot, the fourth lot, lands on good soil where the seed takes deep roots and it grows 30, 60, 100 times what was sown. And then before explaining what he means, as we ended on it in our reading this morning, Jesus quotes the words of Isaiah and says, whoever has ears, let him hear. We all have ears, don't we? And I read a quote from a commentary on this piece of scripture that says, the same sun that melts the wax also hardens the clay. Effectively, what it says is that for the one with a humble heart, the word of God will open up their hearts. It will melt them into the heart of Jesus.

The parables and the teachings of Jesus will be understood by those who are seeking him. But the one with a dishonest or lazy heart like clay, their hearts will be hardened against him.

[9 : 59] What Jesus is saying is, let the one who is ready and willing to seek hear and understand what I'm saying. Sounds a bit weird, doesn't it? Because surely Jesus wanted everyone who came to him to hear, for everyone to listen and understand. Surely he wanted everyone who listened to him to have their hearts and minds opened up in faith. I always hope and pray when I'm teaching and preaching that it will have an effect even on the most interested about other things in life members of the youth group.

So why did Jesus say, whoever has ears, let them hear? Why didn't he, you know, God just open up everybody's ears to listen, hear and understand? And so I spent some time wrestling with and researching around this question because it was really bothering me. And I came to the conclusion that I don't think it's that he just wanted certain people to hear and understand, particularly his disciples, but that it's about faith and how faith needs to be about a heart and a spirit movement of trust, of spending time with the one who we believe in.

Not just seeing or hearing and therefore believing. For it to be faith, there has to be trust. There has to be an element of uncertainty.

Actually, there has to be an element of, you know, one day I could find out that this isn't real, but I choose to believe because I believe in my heart that this is real. And so Jesus sheds enough light in his teaching that people can make that choice of faith, but not enough light that he's forcing anybody's minds.

Jesus could never be accused of brainwashing. And I suppose in part, at least, this was the point of his parable. Just like the seed that was choked by the weeds, the seed that was snatched up by the

birds or that that quickly withered in the sun.

[12 : 08] Those who let the anxieties and worries of life, the stresses and the heat of all of the things that we encounter, snatch up the seeds of God's word in our lives.

Those people won't hear. But those who prioritize tending to the soil of their soul so that it's rich and fertile despite everything that's going on, those people will hear and understand.

They will see and they will know. And the roots will grow deep. And the shoots will grow big and strong. I know which soil I would like to have in my heart.

And we will come back to that. But thinking about this question, what would Jesus do? When we're thinking about how do we teach the Bible as Jesus does, there are a couple of quick and easy things that I think we can learn from this passage.

And the first is that he kept it simple. Jesus talked in parables relating to the society and the culture of the day so that at least on a surface level, everybody could understand what he was talking about.

[13 : 21] The second is that he kept it available, meeting people where they were at. He put himself in a position where people would come and find him. And then he took the opportunity as it arose.

And lastly, Jesus kept it real. Teaching the Bible isn't just about standing on a stage with a microphone like this.

It's about taking opportunities to share what you believe, something of your faith with a friend over coffee or a friend on your walk to school.

It's putting yourself in positions where opportunities will arise and you can take them to tell people about Jesus. Like a Christian union or in the lunchroom, in the office, on a walk.

And we see it all the time with our youth that bring their questions to youth group because we make ourselves available to them. Jesus keeps teaching the Bible simple, available and real.

[14 : 24] And so we can take that model ourselves and apply it to our own teaching with the people that we encounter. We don't need a qualification. Remember, Jesus doesn't call the qualified.

He qualifies the called. And before we finish, I want to go back to this idea of the soil that Jesus is talking about and just take a couple of minutes to look closer about what he meant about good soil.

In preparation for a discipleship school that I went on at the beginning of 2020, we had to read a book called Rooted by Banning Liebshire and then write a book report about it.

It's the one and only book report that I've ever written and I still, to this day, don't know if I got the right idea. But the book is about the soil of our heart.

And since then, this idea of heart soil has really stuck with me. Liebshire says that there are three types of soil that are important for growing our Christian faith.

[15 : 33] And these are community, service and intimacy. Number one, we need community. We were designed to live in community.

We see it right from the outset of the Bible when God created Eve because it was not good for man, for Adam to be alone. We need people around us to encourage us, to keep us accountable, pray with us, support us in our tough times and celebrate with us in our good times.

To point us to Jesus and to help us to, as it says in Hosea 10, 12, break up our fallow ground because it is time to seek the Lord.

We need community. Number two, we need to be serving, living our lives in worship and service to God and his people because that is also what Jesus would do.

And in serving God and his people, we become more like him. We become more humble in heart and we get to serve the one who died and rose again for us.

[16 : 44] And number three, perhaps most importantly, intimacy. Into me you see. We must press into the heart of Jesus.

Spend time in the secret place with him because that is the place from where everything else flows. Whilst I was preparing this talk, I actually went back and read the book report that I wrote four and a half years ago.

And I want to share some of what I've written with you. Rooted confronted me with the harsh truth that I've not been positioning myself to be really, really rooted in the soil of intimacy as much as I like to think I have.

Chapter seven says that revival will only come when we spend time in the inner room, this secret place with God. And that there are things that God will only reveal to us when we spend time with

him there.

I realized that whilst I hunger for God, whilst I want to spend time building my relationship with him, I have not been prioritizing time spent in the inner room. And I didn't like that confrontation.

[17 : 52] But I did enjoy the simple message that chapter seven brings home. That we need to spend time in the inner room with God. It's not about kneeling down and praying long, holy prayers.

But about coming as you are into his presence. Submitting yourself to his will day after day and listening to what he wants to say to you.

And I don't share this because I've got it all sorted out in the last four and a half years. Don't believe that. Sometimes I feel more like I'm crawling in exhaustion to the inner room than I am running up the steps with zeal and joy.

But because since then it has become one of my biggest joys in life. To prioritize time with the Father in the secret place every morning.

And I'm discovering that as I do, I'm learning more about the heart of Jesus. What he says to me feels louder and clearer. And his word is opened up to me every day.

[18 : 52] And as I said in the book report, it's not about praying big, long, holy prayers. It's about coming as we are. Surrendering our whole self to the king of our heart.

And there is so much joy to be found there. The soil of our hearts is so important if we want to learn and teach about God and his Logos word.

And as I think about what that means for you and for me today, I actually feel so excited. Because where it all starts is that secret place, that inner room.

Wherever that might be for us. But it's with God. It doesn't have to be fancy. It doesn't need to have some holy aesthetic. It needs to be me and Jesus.

My heart and his word opened up. So that he can tend to the soil of my heart. So that the seed that the farmer sows will take root and harvest 30, 60, 100 times what was sown.

[20 : 02] And I feel confident that for each of us, if we can prioritize that secret place, the overflow of that will be a fresh outpouring of Jesus-shaped lives being lived.

Of the word of God being taught. And the Holy Spirit breaking out all around this town. Let's pray. Yeah, Heavenly Father, I just thank you that you love to teach your word to us.

That it's not some cryptic message, but one that you love to sit with us and explain to us. And I pray for each and every one of us here as we go away from church this morning, that you would give us courage to take your word into the situations we find ourselves this week.

That you would bring out those opportunities to share something of who you are and what you do for us with those people around us. And whatever our lives look like, whether they feel busy and chaotic, or whether they just feel slow and peaceful at the moment, Lord, would you give us those opportunities to sit with you in your secret place?

Would you tend to the soil of our hearts? And would that seed that you are planting day after day after day in our hearts, take root and grow 30, 60, 100 times what you are sowing?

[21 : 36] In your name we pray. Amen.