

Walking in the Light

Session 2:
Seeing what I know

Last week we looked at how we already know about God. From before we were born God had a relationship with us. This week we are considering how we learn more about God.

1. Sharing your story

In the group (or in small groups) discuss with each other how you think we learn about God. In particular,

- How does Jesus Christ help us learn about God?
- How does the Bible help us learn about God?

2. Jesus revealed as God

We watch an excerpt from *Jesus of Nazareth*.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, [Jesus] went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Luke 4.16-19

Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Mark 15.37-39

3. Discussion

- A number of non-Christian historical sources tell us about Jesus. Does this help us in our faith, or is it irrelevant?
- We might describe Jesus as 'God, erupted into the world'. Do you want to see God as something divine and different, or as a human alongside us, understanding the joys and challenges of our own humanity?

4. Teaching - Revelation through the Bible

What happens in the Bible?

- *Old Testament:* Creation; Patriarchs (Abraham etc.) and their covenant with God; Moses and the exodus from Egypt; the giving of the law; Judges and Kings; division of Israel; exile to Babylon; return from exile; the Prophets.

What can we learn about God from the Old Testament?

- *New Testament:* Life and ministry of Jesus; growth of the early Church; letters of Paul et al; Book of Revelation.

What can we learn about God from the New Testament?

Is the Bible fact, fiction or something else?

- Who wrote the Bible? Evidence of different authors edited together: e.g. two creation stories at Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Sometimes bits may have been added to explain later events, e.g. II Kings 23.26-27. Although Josiah was a good and devout king, this passage has been added to show why the exile still happened. In the New Testament the Gospels show evidence of passages or stories being used in different ways. Sometimes the same story is used (such as Jairus' daughter at Matthew 9.18ff, Mark 5.21ff, Luke 8.40ff). At other times the Gospels are totally contradictory, such as the accounts of the birth of Jesus. Every Gospel emphasizes something different: for example, compare Matthew 5.1-11 and Luke 6.20-26. Are the authors giving different messages?
- Sometimes we can find support for information in the Bible. For example, archaeologists have probably identified the pool and water conduit in Jerusalem built by Hezekiah and documented in II Kings 20.20. At other times the Bible conflicts with other forms of evidence. E.g. the archaeological remains at Jericho contradict the account of the fall of Jericho at the hands of Joshua in Judges 6. Also, there is no record of the census referred to at Luke 2.1. Note as well the contradiction between Matthew's account of Jesus' birth in the time of Herod (Matthew 2.1) who died in 4BCE, and Luke's account in the time of Quirinius (Luke 2.2) who became a provincial administrator in 6CE.

5. Other faiths

Christianity is only one of many world faiths, and yet we claim that we hold a truth whose revelation has yet to be accepted by others. It seems contrary to our belief in a God who loves each of us individually that eternal life is not possible for all. What we learn about God through Christianity is not available to all because of culture or geography or language. You can be as far from hearing Christian preaching on an estate in Liverpool as you can be in a country where Christians face persecution.

[God] desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all —this was attested at the right time.

I Timothy 2.4-6

Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator... Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.

Lumen Gentium §16 (a document from the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church)

6. Next week...

In the group, talk about what you would like to discover next week. You can set the agenda...