



The Teachings

The symbol for *The Teachings* is Jesus standing on a hillside, representing the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:1-7:29)

The Story Continues

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
 Luke 10:25

Jesus teaches at every opportunity, especially when someone asks him a question. Everyone he teaches – the crowds, his disciples, and the authorities – asks him questions. Jesus' answers are likely to be more challenging than they anticipate. On one occasion, Jesus answers a lawyer's question, but the lawyer is not satisfied, so he asks still another question. Jesus responds with a story that begins, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho..." as if to say, "Let me help you discover the true answer."

Many people gather around Jesus and follow him from village to village wanting to know more about him, about God, and about themselves. Some people enthusiastically receive his teachings. To others, his teachings either sound too unrealistic or simply raise more questions. Even his closest disciples are slow to understand. It is easy to speculate that sometimes they want to ask, "Jesus, why don't you just say what you mean?" To others his teachings sound dangerous and unsettling. Perhaps getting his message across will take more than teaching.

Other people, often the religious leaders, ask questions of Jesus to start arguments, to try to trip him up, to provoke conflict, or to prove themselves superior. Jesus often answers them with stories. Some they fail to understand, others they understand all too well. Jesus is a superb storyteller and a master teacher. He knows that good teaching means involving the learner in making a personal discovery by finding the connections between the story and real life.

Jesus uses many teaching methods: parables, healings, actions, and sermons. He sees in the objects, situations, and events around him endless opportunities to proclaim God's call to righteous living and to express his own mission to save the lost. Jesus knows that those who discover the answers to their deepest questions will be as joyful as someone who recovers what was lost.

Preparing for the Search

These definitions of names and terms will be helpful in reading the passages in *The Teachings*.

Gentiles is the term used for all the nations and peoples who are not Jews. There were sharp separations between Jews and Gentiles on religious and political matters. The early church was transformed when Gentiles were welcomed and evangelized, and the distinctions between Jew and Gentile diminished.

Jericho is a city with an amazing history. At least three different sites were occupied over the centuries, beginning perhaps 11,000 years ago. In Jesus' day, Jericho was the winter capital of the kingdom and a city of great wealth and great poverty. While passing through Jericho, Jesus healed the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, and enjoyed the hospitality of the wealthy Zacchaeus.

Kingdom of Heaven is another term for the Kingdom of God. Matthew prefers to speak of the Kingdom of Heaven; Mark and Luke favor the latter term. (See the Kingdom of God in Discovery 18.)

Parable. A parable is a method of teaching in which a religious truth is made clear through the use of an analogy taken from everyday life. A parable shares the features of a simile or a metaphor, yet a parable generally is longer and involves the listener in finishing the story and making a decision. Jesus used parables extensively so that his listeners would remember both the story and the point. He wanted people to think things through for themselves.

Samaritan was originally the name given to an inhabitant of the district of Samaria in Northern Israel. During the Assyrian conquest in 721 BCE, many of the Israelites of Samaria were carried off to Assyria, and the area was partially repopulated by people from lands outside Palestine. Although they brought along their own gods and idols, they soon adopted many Jewish beliefs and cus-

toms. Following the period of the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the Jews became increasingly exclusive and they and the Samaritans became more separated. While they shared a common heritage, differences in theology and traditions created conflict. By the time of Jesus, the term Samaritan was used to identify members of a particular ethno-religious community based in the area around Mt. Gerizim. Jesus ministered to the Samaritans and many became Christian converts in the early church.

Scriptures is the word the writers of the New Testament used to refer to the sacred writings of the Hebrews. Generally, when the term “the Scriptures” is used, it refers to any of the books of the Law, History, Prophecy, and Psalms. When “the Scripture” is used, it refers to the entire collection, understood as one book.

Sermon on the Mount is the name given to a collection of sayings of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5-7. These difficult ethical teachings demand that people examine their motives as well as their actions in light of the arrival of God’s Kingdom.

Talent. According to a footnote in the *New Revised Standard Version*, “a talent was worth more than fifteen years’ wages of a laborer.” (See the note on Matthew 25:14-15.)

Tax Collectors, or publicans as they were often called, were considered nothing more than extortioners. Those who actually collected the taxes often worked for wealthy Romans who had purchased the rights to gather these revenues. Although a specific sum was levied by Rome, there was no law that limited the amount that could be collected. Therefore, publicans and tax collectors often became very rich, while the common folk fell further and further into debt.

Tyre and Sidon are two Phoenician seaports that had enjoyed a thriving economy during the days of King David and King Solomon. Jesus visited them during his ministry. They were also visited by Paul during his missionary journeys. (Matthew 15:21; Luke 6:17)

The Search Begins

The passages listed below contain some of the most well-known teachings of Jesus. As you read them make notes to help you recall and retell the major points of *The Teachings*. Indicate if the method of teaching being used is an example of storytelling, parable, personal action, wisdom teaching, or sermon. These questions can help guide your reading:

- ◆ *In what ways were the teachings of Jesus made memorable?*
- ◆ *How did individuals respond to the teachings of Jesus?*
- ◆ *What were some of the “unexpected” aspects of Jesus’ teaching?*

Matthew 5:1-20, Essentials for Living

Matthew 6:5-15, Jesus Teaches about Prayer

Matthew 25:14-30, Parable of the Three Servants

Mark 10:17-31, The Rich Man

Mark 12:28-34, The Great Commandment

Luke 10:25-37, The Good Samaritan

Luke 15:1-32, The Lost: Sheep, Coin, Son

John 4:5-30, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

John 10:1-18, Jesus, the Good Shepherd

The Search Continues

◆ *In these readings I have questions about...*

◆ *In these readings I discovered...*

Focusing the Search

Jesus not only taught about prayer, he prayed. The disciples learned to pray by observing Jesus at prayer and following his example. In the same manner, Jesus teaches us to pray. Use the exercise “Jesus Prays” to discover what you can learn about prayer from looking at both Jesus’ prayer life and the prayers of Jesus.

JESUS PRAYS

As we observe Jesus’ life of prayer and his attitude toward prayer, we are taught to pray. Read these selections from the Gospels and answer the following questions:

Matthew 6:5-6

Matthew 21:22

Mark 1:35

Mark 11:24-25

Mark 14:22

Luke 5:15-16

Luke 6:27-28

Luke 17:1-4

Luke 19:45-46

How did Jesus address God?

On what occasions did Jesus pray?

What were the settings for Jesus’ prayers?

What did Jesus teach about prayer?

Putting it Together

Jesus taught by using “picture language,” just as the prophets and teachers in Israel had done before him. Through the use of vivid stories and sayings Jesus engaged the imaginations of his listeners and left indelible images in their minds.

When you read Jesus’ words what do you see? Pay close attention to the pictures and images that appear in your mind. Use your imagination. Review one or more of these passages:

Matthew 5:14-16, Light of the World

Matthew 6:5-6, Teaching about Prayer

Luke 15:1-7, The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:8-10, The Lost Coin

John 10:1-18, The Good Shepherd

Then complete this sentence, either visually (by drawing a picture) or verbally (by writing a description).

When I read about Jesus’ story of _____ I see:

Reflection

1. Listen closely to Jesus’ words in his Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” What does purity of heart mean to you? What do you think Jesus meant by “seeing God?” What does Jesus say to you in these words?

2. Consider the two sons in the story of “The Good Father” (sometimes called the parable of “The Prodigal Son” or “The Lost Son”), Luke 15:11-32. With which son do you identify? If you were the younger, broken son, how might you have responded to your father’s welcome home? If you were the older, obedient son, how might you have responded to your father’s enthusiastic reception of your brother?