

Glad Tidings Bible Studies for a Starting Group

Mailis Janatuinen

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1. GOD IS BORN AS A BABY

Luke 2:1–20

Background: In the 1st chapter of Luke, it is told how Mary became pregnant from the Holy Spirit without the contribution of any man. Relatives and neighbors, of course, thought that the child was Joseph's. In that culture, starting a sexual relationship before the wedding was a terrible sin and a terrible shame. Note that the Jews had been waiting for the birth of David's son, Christ the King, already for hundreds of years, because it had been prophesied in the Old Testament.

Verses 1–3

- Consider what kind of mood prevails in a country where the foreign occupier is planning general taxation and ordering all people to register on the tax roll in the city of their birth?

Verses 4–5

- The distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem is about 130 km. Approximately how many days does such a journey take if you travel by donkey or on foot?
- For the Romans, it would have been enough if one male person from each family had registered on the tax roll. Why did Mary, who was pregnant and near her time, most decidedly want to go on such a difficult journey? Why did she not want to stay in Nazareth without Joseph?

Verses 6–7. A manger means a feeding trough for animals. Based on that, it has been concluded that Jesus was born in an animal shelter, possibly in a cave.

- Think of different reasons why no one – not even Joseph's relatives – took the engaged couple under their roof?
- What kind of difficulties will arise if the baby has to be born in a cattle shelter?
- How may the young mother Mary have felt when realizing that God had not arranged a safer place for her to give birth?
- Usually a midwife washes the baby and wraps him in cloths so that the tired mother doesn't have to do it. What do you think was the reason that there wasn't even a midwife there?
- Why did the Savior of the world have to be born in such conditions?

Verses 8–9. Shepherds were discriminated against at that time because they could not "keep the Sabbath holy", i. e. not to work on the day of rest. They were also not accepted as witnesses in courts due to their alleged unreliability.

- Let's think about the life of shepherds. What might have been their joys and sorrows?
- How might the shepherds have felt about God, whose commands they could not obey?
- According to verse 9, the shepherds were terrified when seeing the angel. What were they afraid of?
- What is the thing that you are most afraid of? You may answer either out loud or quietly in your heart.

Verses 10–12

- What in the angel's words made the shepherds especially happy?
- Why does the birth of Jesus mean great joy for the whole mankind?
- The angel called the newborn child Savior. From what did Jesus come to save the mankind and in what way?
- What does it mean that Jesus is "Christ, the Lord"?
- What might the shepherds think when they heard that the long-awaited Savior is indeed sleeping in a manger?
- Why did God want to show his son to the shepherds on the very same night he was born?
- Why didn't the angel say the name and address of the newborn child's parents, but only gave a sign: the child would lie in a manger?

Verses 13–14

- What reason did the army of angels have to rejoice when God had just been born in the midst of dirt, cold, enemies and bacteria?
- How was God's glory revealed in the events of Christmas night?

Verses 15–20

- Think about how the shepherds managed to find the right animal shelter in the middle of the night without an address?
- What in the shepherds' story was perhaps most comforting for Mary and Joseph, who had a hard day behind them?
- Why didn't God send his angels to Mary and Joseph in the animal shelter, but instead sent them to the shepherds?
- The shepherds told many people about what they had seen and heard. Why do you think Jesus didn't become a celebrity already then?
- Most of the shepherds were probably already dead when Jesus began his public ministry 30 years later. How did this one encounter change their lives?

Glad tidings: Jesus was born into this world so that you too would have great joy in your life. He wants to be your Savior and forgive you your wrongdoings. These "glad tidings", however, had a high price, which Jesus himself had to pay. He started paying it in the manger and finished it on the cross.

2. JESUS MEETS A PARALYZED MAN

Mark 2:1–12

Background: Houses in Israel had and still have flat roofs. The roofs were built in such a way that two layers of wood were laid on top of supporting logs, and two layers of clay were laid between them. An outside staircase led to the roof. The owner of the house in our text was the mother-in-law of Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus, and it served as Jesus' home while he was in Capernaum. A person usually becomes paralyzed in middle age or later as a result of a cerebral hemorrhage or blockage. At the same time, he often loses his ability to speak in whole or in part. In our text, the paralyzed man does not say a single word.

Verses 1–3. Let us first think about the paralyzed man's life up to that point.

- In what ways had the family's life changed after the father became paralyzed and lost his ability to speak?
- How might the faith of this man have changed after he got sick? What about when God did not heal him despite his prayers?
- What kind of care did the paralyzed man need in his everyday life?
- At that time, there were no indoor toilets or bathrooms in houses. What was the daily life like for the family member who had to take care of the paralyzed man?
- From verse 5 it appears that the man had sins on his conscience. What kind of bad things may a person do even being unable to speak or move?
- Maybe Jesus is referring to the sins that the man had committed before he got sick. How may it have affected him that that he could not apologize to his wife or whomever for what he had done?

Verses 3–4a. Let us now think about the journey those four men made from the house of the paralyzed man to the roof of the house of Peter's mother-in-law.

- Who were the carriers – think about various alternatives?
- If an adult man is carried on a sleeping mat through a crowded oriental city, what is the most difficult part of that job?
- Why didn't those four men turn back when they saw that it was impossible to enter the house?
- Why didn't the people come out of the house so that the sick man and his carriers could have gotten inside?
- How did the sick man get dragged up the outside stairs to the roof without slipping off the mat?
- What kind of tools did the four men need to dismantle the roof and where did they get them?
- What happens to a roof when an opening the size of a man is made through it? Look at the Background information above.
- Jesus was inside the house giving a speech. What kind of remarks might have been heard from inside while the men were dismantling the roof?

Verse 5. We are now considering the short period when the sick person had already heard the words of forgiveness, but had not yet been cured.

- Four men had brought their friend to Jesus for healing. What might they have thought when Jesus did not immediately heal him, but began to talk about forgiveness of sins?
- Imagine asking Jesus for help with your most difficult problem. What if he answered you like this: "My son/daughter, your sins are forgiven." Would you become happy or angry? (If you could choose, which one would you choose: good conscience or the solution to your problems?)
- Why did Jesus act in that order that he first forgave sins and only then healed?
- What did Jesus mean when he called the paralyzed man "his son"?
- What did it mean to the paralyzed man to know that all his sins were forgiven, especially those that had been troubling his conscience?
- How did the paralyzed man's attitude towards his illness change when he now knew that he would eventually go to heaven?
- The words "when Jesus saw their faith" refer to the faith of the four carriers. When, in your opinion, did the paralyzed man himself begin to believe in Jesus?

Verses 6–7. The Jews knew from the Law of Moses that sins could only be forgiven in the temple where animals were sacrificed for the offenders.

- How could Jesus know what the scribes were thinking inside their heads?
- Why did Jesus, and only him, have the right to forgive sins without any sin offering and elsewhere than in the temple?

Verses 8–9

- Answer the question Jesus asks in verse 9.
- What did it cost Jesus to cure the man's illness? What would it cost him to forgive the man's sins?

Verses 10–12. A person usually needs long-term physiotherapy to be able to move if he has been lying in bed for years. Note that "the Son of Man" stands for "Jesus".

- What did Jesus prove of himself as he healed this man?
- How many miracles happened here?
- Why did the healed man go out the door without saying anything?
- Why did people praise God but not Jesus?

Glad tidings: In this Bible study, Jesus says to you, too: "My son/ my daughter, your sins are forgiven." He had, however, to pay a high price for his promise: for he himself was made a sin offering when he was hanging on the cross and carrying the punishment for our sins.

3. JESUS MEETS A SUCCESSFUL YOUNG POLITICIAN

Mark 10:17–27

Background: Matthew describes the man in our text a young man, and Luke says that he was in a high social position. He may even have been a member of the local parliament, that is, the Supreme Council.

Verses 17–18. Please note that in Middle Eastern cultures, running is not considered as appropriate behavior to a self-respecting man. Not kneeling in front of people either.

- What caused this successful young man to behave as unusually as verse 17 tells us?
- Why hadn't success and wealth made this man happy and content?
- Why didn't Jesus accept the man's address when he called him a "good teacher"?
- Why do we not always have certainty about what will happen to us after death?

Verses 19–20

- Why did this man have no assurance of salvation even though he had obeyed God's commandments all his life?
- Many successful men have faced great temptations, for example, concerning money and women. How had this man got over all these temptations without falling into them a single time?
- Note that according to Jesus, the commandments must also be obeyed in thoughts and words, not just in deeds. Do you think that this man had managed living so? Please give your reasons.
- Which of the commandments Jesus listed do you find most difficult to obey?
- Do you know people who could say the same about their morals as this man did? If you do, who are they?

Verse 21

- What was the thing this man was still missing?
- What were the treasures this man had on earth?
- How can our treasures be stored up in heaven?
- Compare a treasure in heaven with a treasure on earth. What are the differences?
- If you had to choose, which one would you take: a heavenly treasure or an earthly one?

Verse 22

- The young man probably had a wife, children and maybe even old parents to support. What would have happened to them if he had obeyed Jesus' commandment in verse 21?
- Could you give up your property and your bank account if that were a condition of following Jesus? Give your reasons.
- According to verse 21, Jesus looked at the young man and loved him. So why did he give the man such a hard order that he couldn't fulfill it?
- What options were left for the man when he realized that he couldn't give up his treasure?
- How might Jesus have reacted if the man had confessed that he loved money more than God and asked for forgiveness?
- So what was the biggest mistake of this young man?

Verses 23–25

- When Jesus says "rich", what kind of rich does he mean?
- Imagine that a camel were trying to push its head through an eye of a needle. Why is it equally difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God?
- The ancestor of the Jews, Abraham, was a very rich man who never gave up his possessions and still got to heaven? Why?

Verses 26–27. Here Jesus is no longer talking only about the rich, but about all the people of the world.

- Compare the two answers that Jesus gave to the rich young man and Peter (verses 21 and 27). What do they have in common, what is different?
- Jesus did not answer directly Peter's question in verse 26. What do you think would be the right answer?
- Why is it impossible for all people to be saved? Why is saving people possible only for God?

Glad tidings: The person who does not see his sins, usually leaves Jesus. If you realize that you haven't obeyed the commandments listed by Jesus, you should ask Jesus for forgiveness. You can do it by yourself, in front of a pastor / priest or at a communion table. Then you will also receive the assurance that you will inherit eternal life and go to heaven after your death.

4. JESUS MEETS A SINFUL WOMAN

Luke 7:36–50

Background: A honoured guest was welcomed in those days with a welcome kiss and. After that his feet were washed and anointed with olive oil. The Pharisees were people who wanted to live according to God's will. They also separated themselves from sinners. The woman in our text was apparently selling herself as a prostitute. She must have heard that Jesus was eating together with sinners, which other religious teachers never did. Preliminary questions

- What might have been the reasons that had driven this woman to sell herself?
- How much do you think the woman knew about true love?
- Mention as many differences as possible between the prostitute in our text and Simon the Pharisee.

Verse 36

- Take a look at the Background information and think about the possible reasons why Simon didn't give Jesus the welcome of a guest of honor?
- Why do you think Simon called Jesus into his home in the first place?

Verse 37. A bottle of alabaster full of perfume cost quite a bit of money. Women would carry such a bottle of perfume with a string around their necks.

- Think about how the woman got through Simon's outer gate into the yard, then through the door into the dining room without being stopped by someone?
- For what purpose did the woman come to Simon's house, even though she knew she would be stared at and criticized there?
- What made the woman hope that Jesus would not turn her down?

Verse 38. In that culture, women were usually wearing a scarf on their heads. They were not supposed to take it off and show their hair in front of strange men.

- Why didn't the woman say anything to Jesus during the entire visit?
- How many tears do you think are needed to wet a grown up man's feet?
- What was the woman crying about?
- When do you think was the last time this woman had cried from the bottom of her heart?
- Why didn't the woman try to dry Jesus' feet with her scarf, but with her hair?
- What did the woman want to say to Jesus by her behavior?
- How did the woman understand that Jesus didn't hate her?
- 99 men out of a hundred would have been embarrassed in such a situation. Why wasn't Jesus embarrassed at all?

Verse 39

- What do Simon's thoughts reveal about him?

Verses 40–43. Jesus shows that he has read Simon's thoughts and tells him a small parable. 500 denarii corresponds to a salary for one and a half years, and 50 denarii to a salary of one and a half months.

- How much would the average salary for one and a half years and for one and a half months be in our currency?
- Who does Jesus mean by the banker and his two debtors?
- The debt that the woman owed God is self-evident, but what about Simon? What did his debt to God consist of? (How do we see that Simon did not obey the commandment of love?)
- Why is it so much easier for us to pay attention other people's sins than our own?
- If you owe God for every mean word, deed, neglect, and lack of love, how much do you think you owe him now? (You may also answer quietly in your heart.)

Verses 44–46

- What might the woman have thought about these words of Jesus? What about Simon?

Verse 47–48

- Which came first: faith or love? Did the woman believe **first** that her sins were forgiven or did she love Jesus first and believe in forgiveness of her sins only after that? (Which answer does the little parable in verses 41–42 give to this question?)

Verse 49. Jesus' words amazed the people because the Jews could receive forgiveness only when offering an animal sacrifice in the temple.

- What happened to the debt that a woman owed to God for her sins? What about the debt that Simon owed him for his lack of love?
- In what currency did Jesus pay the debt that all the people on earth owe to God for their sins?
- If Simon had died that day, would he have gone to heaven? Justify your answer.

Verse 50

- What did Jesus want to tell to both the woman and all the others in the room with these words?
- How do you think the woman's life changed from now on?

Glad tidings: If you bring the debt of your sins to Jesus (say, at the communion table), he will say to you the same words that he said to the woman of our text: "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (verses 48 and 50). Only he can say these words because he has paid all your debt with his own blood.

5. TEACHINGS OF JESUS (A): TWO LOST SONS

Luke 15:11–32

Background: The sons in this parable may refer to people who have been baptized as children of Heavenly Father. Or they may mean people for whom God is their Father on the basis of creation.

Verses 11–12

- Consider why the younger of the brothers was not satisfied with his life, even though he had a good home and a good father?
- By making his request, the son indicated that he hoped his father was dead. Why wasn't he ashamed to act like that?
- Why did the father agree to his son's demand; he must have realized what would be the outcome (12b)?
- Why doesn't God try to stop a person who wants to leave him?

Verses 13 and 30

- What do you think about the young man's life abroad – was he happy there? Give your reasons.

Verse 14

- How is it possible that the young man didn't get a single real friend who would have remained his friend even when bad days came?
- Why is it hard to make real friends by wild living?

Verse 15–16. The work of a swineherd was the worst thing a Jew could imagine, because pigs were unclean animals according to the Law of Moses.

- Why do you think the starving swineherd was not allowed to eat even pig food?
- How could a swineherd survive in those conditions?

Verses 17–19

- What made the son come to his senses instead of committing suicide in his hopeless situation?
- In verses 17–19 we can read the confession of sin that the young man was planning to say to his father. What did he mean when he said that he had sinned not only against his father but also “against heaven”?
- What are the sins you committed against your parents and against heaven? You may answer in your heart.
- Why couldn't the young man expect his father to receive him as his son?
- What kind of people usually think they are not worthy to be called children of God?

Verse 20. The Israelite house did not stand on a hill in its lofty solitude, but along a densely populated village track. The only place where one could see a little further was the roof of the house.

- How do we know that the father had been waiting for the return of his son all these years?
- What might the father have thought when he saw his son walking towards the village in his rags and barefoot?
- What may the villagers have thought when they saw the prodigal son approaching the village in this miserable condition? What did they imagine the meeting of the father and the son would be like?
- We know that men do not run in the Middle East culture. Why, then, did the father run along the village road to meet his son?

Verses 21–24. Note that only slaves walked barefoot at that time.

- Why didn't the son tell his father what he had planned to say? Why didn't he ask to be treated as a servant?
- What did the ring and the best robe prove to the prodigal son?
- At which moment did the father forgive his son? Mention the verse.
- Why did the father want to give a big party for the whole village?

Verses 25–28

- Why hadn't the older son, unlike his younger brother, gone abroad, even though he, too, was dissatisfied with his life?
- When refusing to take part in his party, the older son humiliated his father in front of the entire village. Why didn't this “good” son love his father?

Verses 29–32

- The older son was mistaken when he thought he had fulfilled all the commands of his father. What had his father hoped most from him?
- Why did the older son consider himself a slave rather than a property owner, even though his father had promised him half of his possessions (see also 12b)?
- What kind of Christian is Jesus referring to by the older son?
- Why did Jesus stop in the middle of the story without telling us whether or not the older brother joined the party?
- In Jesus' parables, feasts always refer to heaven. According to this parable, who gets to heaven, and who does not?
- What is the message of the parable of the prodigal son to you?

Glad tidings: Jesus, too, left his Father's home, but for completely different reasons than those of the prodigal son: he wanted to fulfill his Father's will. When he was returning to his home (at the time of his death), he did not, however, get the same warm welcome as the prodigal son. On the contrary: the door of heaven was slammed in his face and he had to cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This is why the door of heaven is now wide open before every prodigal son and daughter who comes to the heavenly Father with a ruined life.

6. TEACHINGS OF JESUS B: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Luke 10:25–37

Background: The situation with this parable is a bit like a despised immigrant hurrying to the aid of an injured far-right extremist. At the time of Jesus, the Jews despised the Samaritans who were living between inside their territory. Samaritans were partly Assyrian origin and their religion was different from that of the Jews. Both, however, believed in one God and the five books of Moses.

Verses 25–27. At the time of Jesus “a lawyer” meant a person who had studied the Bible thoroughly and knew the law of Moses. Most of the lawyers were opponents of Jesus.

- Why did the lawyer want to test Jesus?
- How would you answer the first question that the lawyer asked Jesus?
- Why did Jesus answer the lawyer with another question?
- The lawyer answered Jesus’ question by quoting the double commandment of love. Why is this commandment very difficult to fulfil?
- If obeying the commandment of love is the condition for going to heaven, who will go there? Will you?

Verses 28–29.

- Look at verse 28. Does Jesus teach here that obeying the commandment to love is a condition for going to heaven? Give your reasons.
- Who did the lawyer regard as his neighbors and who did he not?
- Verse 28 shows that the lawyer was convinced of having fulfilled the law of God, including the commandment to love. How do we know he was wrong?

Verse 30: The mountain road between Jerusalem and Jericho was 25 km (about 15½ miles) long and sparsely populated, making it an ideal place for robbers and highwaymen. The beaten man was a Jew, as were the robbers, the priest and the Levite.

- What kind of assault leaves a beaten man as half dead?
- What had made the robbers so hard-hearted as to treat a fellow human being like this?
- What kind of help would the beaten man need? How long do you think he would survive if he didn’t get any?
- Imagine what kind of thoughts went through the mind of the half-dead man when he came to his senses from time to time?
- What might the injured man have thought when he heard the approaching footsteps on the road? What did he think when the footsteps passed by him?
- What was on the minds of the wife and children of this man as they waited for the father to come home?

Verses 31–32. A priest and a Levite (a kind of a church caretaker) were on their way to the temple in Jerusalem to perform their religious duties. If they touched blood or a dead body on the way, they were not allowed to enter the temple during that day. This was written in the Law of Moses, as was the commandment of love.

- Why did the priest and the Levite pass by to the other side of the road when seeing the injured man?
- How could a priest and a Levite put their religious duties above helping a dying man?
- Perhaps the priest and the Levite were afraid of the robbers attacking them, too, if they stopped to help the injured man? What should they have done if such an attack scared them?
- What would the priest and Levite have done if the one lying on the roadside had been their own son?
- How did the priest and the Levite interpret the commandment: “Love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself”?
- Do you think it is possible to love God above all things and at the same time pass by a suffering neighbor without helping him?

Verses 33–34

- Why would it have been understandable if the Samaritan had walked past the beaten Jew without helping him? Look at the Background information.
- What do you think: was the Samaritan afraid that he too might be attacked by the robbers if he stayed to treat the wounded? Give your reasons.
- Why did the Samaritan passerby decide to help a Jew, a member of the enemy nation?
- What effect did wine have on wounds? What about olive oil? Where did the Samaritan get the cloth for dressing the wounds of the beaten man? How much time did this first aid take?
- What did it require of the Samaritan to lift a half-conscious man on a donkey and carry him on a mountain road to an inn?
- How did the encounter with the beaten man affect the Samaritan’s own travel plans?

Verse 35. Two denarii was the wages of two days’ work, in other words 1/15th of the monthly salary. It was enough to live for a month in an inn.

- How much money approximately (in your currency) did the Samaritan spend to a virtually unknown man?
- What did the Samaritan want to make sure by saying these words to the innkeeper?

Verses 36–37 and 29

- According to this parable, what is the correct answer to the lawyer’s question in verse 29?
- Why didn’t Jesus proclaim the grace of God to this lawyer?

Application questions

- According to this parable, who are the neighbors you should be helping right now?
- What did Jesus himself have in common with the Good Samaritan? What about the beaten man?
- Why can we say that Jesus helped his neighbors even more than the Good Samaritan had helped the injured Jew?

Glad tidings: None other than Jesus has ever fulfilled the double commandment of love. He is the real Good Samaritan. In order to be able to help us Jesus agreed to be beaten, stripped, rejected and killed. In this way, he obtained forgiveness and eternal life for those who have broken the commandment of love many times over. For each of us.

7. JESUS MEETS THE HEAD OF A TAX OFFICE

Luke 19:1–10

Background: “A publican” means a tax collector. At the time of Jesus, the tax collectors in Israel were famous for their dishonesty. Firstly, they were in the service of the occupying power (the Romans), and secondly, they pocketed some of the tax money for themselves. No wonder they were usually rich. In verse 7 we can see how unpopular Zacchaeus was in his hometown.

Verses 1–2 and 7. Jesus is known to have visited Jericho only this one time, one week before his death.

- How did it perhaps affect young Zacchaeus that he was shorter than other boys?
- Why had Zacchaeus chosen the profession of a tax collector in the first place?
- Zacchaeus had surely been taught as a boy in his synagogue the commandment “Thou shalt not steal”! What made him ignore that commandment? (How might tax collectors have defended their behaviour for example when they were confiscating the last sheep from a poor family?)
- Zacchaeus had become the head of the Jericho tax office. What is required a man to get such a position in an important town of an occupied country?
- How might Zacchaeus have reacted to being despised by everybody in Jericho (7)?
- Zacchaeus was probably closer to fifty, because it always takes time to become a boss. This means that he had teen-age children. What might his children have thought of their father’s job?
- People often rethink their values in their fifties. At this point, what do you think Zacchaeus wanted from the rest of his life?

Verses 3–4. In general, tax collectors had nothing to do with religious people and vice versa. After becoming a publican, Zacchaeus probably stopped going to synagogue or the temple of Jerusalem.

- Think of different reasons why Zacchaeus was so desperate to see Jesus?
- A self-respecting man never runs in Middle Eastern cultures. What does it show about Zacchaeus that he behaved as unconventionally as is described in verses 3–4?
- A fig tree can grow as large as an oak. In your opinion, did the tax collector of Jericho hope to be seen in the tree or did he hope that no one would notice him there? Give your reasons.

Verse 5

- This was Jesus’ first visit to Jericho. What did Zacchaeus think when he suddenly heard his name from the mouth of Jesus who stopped under the tree?
- Eating together was a sign of friendship for the Jews. When had Jesus decided to visit the house of Zacchaeus and become his friend? Consider different possibilities.
- How might Zacchaeus have reacted if Jesus had said to him from under the tree, “If you become a good person and stop stealing, then I will come and visit you”?
- How would you react if someone said to you: “If you become a better person first, then I want to be your friend”?
- What would the citizens of Jericho have thought if Jesus had told Zacchaeus to change his ways. Look at verse 7?
- Why is it that being told to change does not change a person?
- Why was Jesus in such a hurry?

Verse 6

- What made the chief of Jericho tax office happy instead of being terribly embarrassed in that situation?
- Why was it important that the encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus was public?

Verse 7

- According to this verse, what did the people of Jericho think of themselves?

Verse 8. The best translation for this verse is: “And I will now pay back four times as much to everyone I have ever cheated.” (CEV) In other words, Zacchaeus admitted that he was guilty of stealing.

- What had suddenly changed Zacchaeus’ heart so that money was no longer his highest value?
- How much of his wealth did Zacchaeus approximately keep for himself and his children?
- What might the citizens of Jericho have thought when the head of the tax office first helped the poor of the city with a large sum of money and then went around paying back the money he had extorted from people?

Verses 9–10

- What do you think: how did Zacchaeus change as a father after becoming a believer in Jesus?
- Abraham is the ancestor of the Jews as well as the father of the Christian faith. What did Jesus mean when he said that Zacchaeus, too, is the son of Abraham? (For those interested, see also Romans 4:3–5.)
- Who was looking for whom in this text: did Zacchaeus look for Jesus or Jesus for Zacchaeus? Give your reasons.
- When, in your opinion, did Zacchaeus become a believer? Mention the verse.
- What happened to the punishment that God had prescribed for thieves in his law? Who bore it?

Glad tidings: On his way to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus visited Jericho for the sake of Zacchaeus. In forgiving him for his sins, Jesus knew that the following week he himself would have to bear his punishment to the cross. Forgiveness of sins was free for Zacchaeus and is free for us, but for Jesus it cost his life.

8. JESUS MEETS A BLIND BEGGAR

Mark 10:46–52

Background: As Jesus was leaving Jericho, he met a blind beggar who identified him as the son of David. One thousand years earlier, God had promised King David that his son would sit on the throne of Israel forever (2 Sam 7:12–16). Since then, the Jews had been waiting for a new David who would deliver them from their enemies, at the moment from Roman occupation. The Romans, of course, would not tolerate talk of Israel's former, let alone present, kings.

Preliminary question

- What do you think would be the worst thing about having to beg for a living?

Verse 46

- Think about what a normal day was like for the blind Bartimaeus.
- What does it show that this man was not called by his first name, but only by his patronymic “the son of Timaeus”?
- What had Bartimaeus learned about life, people and politics from sitting year after year along a busy road?
- Bartimaeus had heard rumours about Jesus and probably hoped to meet him one day. What were the options he could use to reach Jesus if he ever happened to come to Jericho?
- What does it show that no one had taken Bartimaeus to Jerusalem to be healed, even though the city was only 20 miles away and Jesus was known to visit it on religious festivals?

Verses 47–48. Most people did not know that Jesus was a descendant of David. He had only been called the son of David once before, and that was by a Canaanite woman outside the borders of Israel.

- Do you think that Bartimaeus himself had concluded that Jesus was the Son of David, or had he heard it from others? Why do you think so?
- Why wasn't Bartimaeus afraid of the Romans when shouting after the Son of David, in other words, after the king?
- Why did the people want to silence Bartimaeus' cry for help?
- In which two ways did the cry of Bartimaeus change when people tried to silence him?
- What should the people around him have done instead of forbidding Bartimaeus to cry out? (Why didn't anyone take Bartimaeus' hand and lead him to Jesus?)
- Why is it so easy for us too to pass by those who need help?

Verse 49

- How did Jesus show the crowds around him that he was indeed the son of David?
- Why didn't Jesus go to the beggar, but told others to bring him to him?
- Imagine how Bartimaeus felt when he heard that Jesus was calling him?
- Just a little while ago, the people had told the beggar to keep his mouth shut, but now they were saying kindly, “Take heart, he is calling you.” What brought about this change in them?

Verse 50. Probably his cloak was Bartimaeus' most precious possession, and it also served as a mattress and blanket at night.

- What does it show about Bartimaeus that he left his precious cloak lying on the ground? (What if he never found it again?)

Verse 51

- Why did Jesus ask Bartimaeus a self-evident question?
- Why was it important for Jesus to talk to exchange a few words with the blind beggar before healing him?
- What did that little conversation reveal to the people around him about a) Jesus and b) Bartimaeus?
- Today Jesus asks you the same question he asked Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?” You can answer him just in your heart.

Verse 52

- In what way did Jesus heal the eyes of Bartimaeus?
- Jesus is talking here about the faith of the blind beggar. What in Bartimaeus' behavior had shown that he had believed in Jesus all along?
- The Jerichoites had not until then regarded Bartimaeus as any kind of believer. What might they think about Jesus praising his faith in this way?
- Why did Bartimaeus want to follow Jesus to Jerusalem?

What happened then

- On the next day, all the people hailed Jesus as the son of David at the gates of Jerusalem (11:9–10). How much do you think Bartimaeus' cry from the previous day affected their behavior?
- Just a week later, Bartimaeus saw with his own eyes his benefactor being nailed on a cross. How do you think he took it?
- How do you think Bartimaeus received the rumours of the resurrection of Jesus?

Glad tidings: Bartimaeus regained the light of his eyes. Jesus, on the other hand, had to die on the cross in pitch darkness, rejected by God, so that neither Bartimaeus nor the rest of us would have to go into the eternal darkness of hell.

9. JESUS MEETS TWO MURDERERS

Luke 23:32–43

Background: In the Roman Empire, people were usually crucified only for the hardest crimes. We can therefore assume that the two men were **multiple and relentless** murderers. As Jews, they too had attended some **synagogue school** and learned the Ten Commandments, for example, “Thou shall not kill!” and “Thou shall not steal!”

A preliminary question

- Do you think that every young person runs the risk of becoming violent, or is it just a question of a certain group of people? Please give your reasons.

Verse 32

- What might the (family) relationships of these murderers have been like during their growing years?
- What could perhaps have stopped these men in their criminal careers?
- What are the values of criminals in general, compared to those of ordinary people?

Verses 33–34. Note that the crucified were first stripped naked.

- Crucifixion is considered to be the cruelest punishment that humanity has ever invented. What was it that made it extremely cruel and humiliating?
- How do you think the two murderers reacted to their own crucifixion and to those who crucified them?
- What was it about Jesus’ prayer that perhaps surprised the two murderers the most?
- Why did Jesus defend His tormentors to His Heavenly Father?
- Remind yourself of the person who has offended you the most. What would it take for you to pray for him the same prayer Jesus prayed on the cross?
- At the foot of Jesus’ cross, the soldiers threw lots out of his clothes. What do you think, why were the crucified stripped naked?

Verse 35. The Old Testament prophets had predicted that God would send to Israel a great king, the new David. In Hebrew, that king was called the Messiah, in Greek Christ. The title means “anointed.”

- The same morning the crowd had yelled that Jesus must be crucified. What had now silenced them?
- The rulers hated Jesus and wanted to discredit him as best as they could. What do you think of the insults they were throwing at him?
- Why didn’t Jesus want to help himself, even though he had always helped others?

Verses 36–37. These mockers were Roman soldiers.

- Why didn’t Jesus respond to anyone’s mockery?
- The murderers also heard the reasons for which Jesus was mocked (34, 37). What in those insults amazed them most?

Verse 38. Sometimes a tablet was attached over the head of a crucified person, with his crimes written on it. Jesus also had a crown of thorns on his head. We can call the two murderers “A” and “B.”

- What made the first murderer (“A”) believe the words on the tablet? After all, in verse 42 he admits to believing in them. What were the facts, that proved to him that Jesus indeed was a king and had a kingdom?
- Why didn’t the same evidence convince the other murderer (“B”) of Jesus’ kingship?
- If you had stood at the foot of the cross, do you think you could have believed in a king who hangs on a cross with a crown of thorns on his head, and whose kingdom is invisible? Give your reasons.

Verses 39–41

- What does it show about the other criminal (“B”) that he started mocking Jesus in the midst of his excruciating pain? What was he aiming for?
- The first criminal (“A”) suddenly began to talk to his fellow about the fear of God. Why does he think that blaspheming Jesus is an indication of a lack of fear of God?
- As a rule, criminals do not admit their guilt easily. What prompted “A” to confess that the death penalty was a just punishment for him and his comrade?
- Why didn’t the other criminal (“B”) still admit his own sins?
- How can “A” know Jesus hadn’t done any harm?

Verses 42–43. Presumably “A” thought that he would go to hell for the murders he committed.

- Verse 42 contains a very short prayer: “Jesus, Remember me!” Why didn’t “A” ask right away permission to enter the kingdom of Jesus?
- What kind of consolation did Jesus’ answer give to the repentant murderer? (What did it mean to “A” when he heard he would get to paradise on the very same day? What did it mean to “A” that he would be allowed to be in paradise together with Jesus?)
- Why didn’t Jesus speak to the murderer about heaven, but about paradise?
- At the beginning of the Bible, we read that at the gate of paradise there is an angel standing with a sword in his hand and blocking the entry to sinners. Why did that gate suddenly open for a murderer?
- Try to imagine what the last hours of “A’s” life were like. Was he happy or unhappy? Give your reasons.
- What kind of legacy did “A” leave to his own children as well as to the people who read about him in the Bible?

Glad tidings: The gate of paradise opened to the murderer because Jesus passed through the gate of hell in his stead – and in our stead. In fact, Jesus suffered punishment for all the sins of that murderer and can therefore forgive them to him. In the same way we can also get our sins forgiven, no matter how terrible they are.

10. THE RISEN JESUS MEETS HIS DOUBTING DISCIPLE

John 20:19–31

Background: Jesus spent Friday night, Saturday and Sunday night in the tomb. Sunday morning he rose from the dead. No one saw it, but two angels and the risen Lord himself announced the good news to the women who came to the tomb. At first the disciples did not believe women's story. Then came Sunday night...

Verses 19–20

- Why did the disciples lock their door? What did they fear the Jews would do to them? (Why didn't they believe in God's protection?)
- What did the disciples believe now about Jesus: who was he?
- What might the disciples have thought about the three years they had spent following Jesus?
- What does that show about Jesus that he could appear to his disciples through locked doors?
- What did the disciples realize when they saw the scarred hands and side of Jesus?
- Jesus wished his disciples peace. What exactly brought peace to the hearts of the disciples?
- What was it that brought great joy to the hearts of the disciples?

Verses 21–23

- What kind of mission did Jesus send these men on?
- Why did the disciples need the Holy Spirit for their mission?
- What does it mean in practice that first the apostles and then pastors have the right both to forgive sins and to deny forgiveness?
- What might be the situation if a pastor of a church would deny forgiveness to someone?
- The name "Thomas" comes from the Aramaic word for "twin." "Didymus" is Greek and means the same thing. How might it affect a person that he is one of the twins?
- Where had Thomas gone after the death of Jesus? Think of different possibilities. Why didn't he stay with the other disciples?
- What about the words of Thomas in verse 25 catches your attention?
- Why could Thomas not believe the words of his ten best friends who testified having seen the living Jesus?
- If you had been in the place of Thomas, would you have believed your friends' testimony? Give your reasons why or why not.
- Why shouldn't we always believe everything we are told?
- What made Thomas stay with his rejoicing friends all the next week, even though he didn't share their conviction? Why didn't he just go his own way?
- What would have happened to Thomas if he had left other disciples at this point?
- Why is it important to stay in touch with your church and your Christian friends just when you are doubting the reliability of Christian faith?

Verses 26–27

- How do we see from the text that Jesus was not a ghost or a spirit?
- What do you think: did Thomas put his finger in Jesus' wounds or not? Give your reasons.
- Thomas was similar to people of our time: he did not want to believe anything but scientifically proven facts. What, however, is the difference between Thomas and the atheists of our time?
- How, according to this text, does Jesus deal with a person who cannot believe in him even if he wants to?

Verse 28

- Thomas is the first person in the New Testament to call Jesus "God," not just "the Son of God." How had he come to that conclusion?
- How did it turn out for good in the end that Thomas had first doubted the resurrection Jesus?

Verse 29

- Why is it more blessed to believe in Jesus without seeing him than to believe in him after seeing him?
- Why is the person blessed who believes in Jesus' help even before experiencing it?
- According to tradition, Thomas became the apostle to India. Think about why he wanted to go so far away on a missionary journey? What kind of missionary might he have become?

Verses 30–31

- What was the purpose of John for writing his gospel?

A summarizing question

- Compare the lives of these two persons: the one who believes in the resurrection of the body and the one who does not? What is the difference? What about when death approaches them?

Glad tidings: Jesus still has the scars of his wounds visible even in heaven. It is in them that we can see how much he loves us. Only in heaven will we be able appreciate his sufferings for us enough and praise him for them for all eternity.