

THE WORD OF GOD: Choosing Discipleship

Lesson 22. Life in the Kingdom

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reading of the day: John 2:23-3:21

Prepare Ahead: The background section is material for the instructor and is not meant to be used word for word. The answers to the Bible Study discussion questions are provided for informational purposes and can be read aloud and shared verbally.

References:

www.vemkar.us

Orthodox Study Bible

Memory Verse:

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

- John 3:18

Bible Study Lesson

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

For Students

Life in the Kingdom (John 2:23-3:21)

2:²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

3:¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

³ Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? ¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

¹⁸ “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Questions:

1. Read Numbers 21:4-9. Why do you think God would use a snake as the tool to kill and also to save? Has there ever been a time when you used something to help you or another that should not have been used for that purpose?
2. Jesus gives the example of the serpent being lifted in the wilderness by Moses, comparing it to His crucifixion (verses 14-15). Why would Jesus use this example? How does it relate to the cross?
3. Why is it so significant that John writes that, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (verse 16)?
4. John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible. What does it mean to believe? How do we believe? Is there a wrong way to believe?
5. Why would men prefer darkness to light (verse 19)?
6. What is truth? Is truth relative?
7. What does it mean to be born again?

For the Teacher

Background:

Green Sunday Commemorates the establishment in Jerusalem of the first Christian Church where Christ met with the Apostles in the upper room. The designation of Green Sunday may have had something to do with the season of spring. During the Divine Liturgy it has become the custom for the church to be decorated in green and for the clerics to wear green vestments.

1. **Read Numbers 21:4-9. Why do you think God would use a snake as the tool to kill and also to save? Has there ever been a time when you used something to help you or another that should not have been used for that purpose?**

God uses people and object throughout the Bible, that we do not think should be used for God's plan. He uses Moses, who has a stutter; David, who was a shepherd; Peter, who a fisherman; and Paul, who was a Pharisee persecuting the Christians. God takes the very things that may be rejected by society and transforms them into instruments for His glory. A snake's bite could be compared to the sting of death and sin, also alluding to the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

2. **Jesus gives the example of the serpent being lifted in the wilderness by Moses, comparing it to His crucifixion (verses 14-15). Why would Jesus use this example? How does it relate to the cross?**

Moses lifted up an image of a serpent to cure the Israelites from deadly bites of poisonous snakes. This miracle-working image prefigured Christ being lifted up on the Cross. As believers behold the crucified Christ in faith, the power of sin and death is overthrown in them. Just as the image of a serpent was the weapon that destroyed the power of the serpents, so the instrument of Christ's death becomes the weapon that overthrows death itself. Some traditions say that, if the serpent lay horizontally on the vertical pole, it is easy to see how this also was a visual representation of the cross. However, many traditions show the serpent being wrapped around the pole, and this is the source for the ancient figure of healing and medicine — a serpent, wrapped around a pole.

3. **Why is it so significant that John writes that, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (verse 16)?**

At this time, the Jews believed that the Messiah was going to come and overthrow the Gentile government, establish a Jewish kingdom, make the Gentiles the slaves to the Jews and save only the Jewish people. John writes and explains that Jesus, the Messiah, did not come only for the Jews, but for all mankind. He was not sent to save only a certain group of people, but everyone who believes in Him, irrespective of their history, background or blood.

Follow up question: Does this mean that Christ also came for our enemies? For Turks, Azeris, and others?

Yes, of course He did. We are called to be apostles and evangelists to these nations, even if they are our enemies.

4. **John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible. What does it mean to believe? How do we believe? Is there a wrong way to believe?**

Believing is not a mental act, a psychological thought or a statement of faith, but a lifestyle to be lived. It is not just good enough to say we believe, but we must demonstrate our faith in everything we do. This is what believing means for Orthodox Christians. Just saying we believe is not good enough, but, as we say today, we must put our money where our mouth is. John 3:16 says whoever believes, or has *faith* in Jesus Christ, will not die but have eternal life. St. James the Just, the first bishop of Jerusalem in his New Testament letter, teaches us about the harmony of faith and works, that invisible faith is no faith at all, that faith without works is a dead faith and does *not* save. He further makes a distinction between faith that is alive, working itself out, and a false version of faith that only adheres to a creed or set of beliefs. He writes, "*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.*" (James 2:19)

The wrong way to believe is just to think believing is a thought and not a way of living.

5. **Why would men prefer darkness to light (verse 19)?**

When a cockroach sees the light, it runs away to the darkness. Many people act the same way because they are either embarrassed of their sins, do not want to change their life, or they are enjoying the sin they are in and are comfortable. Doing this prevents us from growing closer to Christ and becoming what Christ created us to be.

Follow up question: Have you or do you know someone who has done something in darkness (bad) and when shown the light, refused to go into the light?

6. **What is truth? Is truth relative?**

Christ is truth (John 14:6) and truth is unchanging. Truth does not change according to what we believe, feel or want it to be, but is constant, throughout time and culture. The world today thinks everyone has their own truth. This is not truth, but an opinion. Everyone has their own opinions and thoughts, but one person's truth cannot be different from another person's truth because truth, by definition, is *a verified or indisputable fact, proposition or principle*. If we believe that Christ is truth, this means we must judge/measure everything against Christ – we must compare what we see, do and learn with what Christ taught and how He lived.

7. **What does it mean to be born again?**

The original Greek word and the Armenian word (վերստին/ver-usdeen) have two meanings. It can mean “again” and it can mean “from above”. These meanings have the same word because when you do something *again*, especially reading, you do it from the *top down*.

So, when Christ says, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (verse 3:3) it can also be translated and mean, “*unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God*”. This is accomplished when one is baptized. When we are baptized, we are born again, a second time, and we are born from above, through the Holy Spirit. This does not just mean that one can make a statement of believing in Christ, but one must be born again/from above, through baptism. It is through baptism that one becomes a member of the Body of Christ, adopted as a child of the Father, a co-heir with Christ, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ծանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

Please complete the assignment by next class.

Memory Verse:

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)