



**Sunday teaching & lifegroup series
for group & personal reflection...**

September & October 2023

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QUOTEABLE QUOTES

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” Corrie Ten Boom

“God never made a promise that was too good to be true.” DL Moody

“What God intended for you goes far beyond anything you can imagine!” Oprah Winfrey

“There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind.” CS Lewis

“God's highest passion is to get His children home.

His book, the Bible, describes His plan of salvation. The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God's plan and passion to save His children.” Max Lucado

**“Where I found truth, there found I my God,
who is the truth itself.” St Augustine**

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,
and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31-32



BUT NOW..... is a tiny phrase which is often found in the bible, most commonly in writings of the apostle Paul. In fact Paul uses the phrase in Greek at least 21 times! The words suggest a change, a before and an after, something was **BUT NOW** it is different. But what is it that has changed, not God, not his character or nature, but our relationship with Him? The event that has brought about this change is the death and resurrection of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ and our belief and acceptance of the salvation which He offers.

Jesus, in His earthly ministry, taught about a new relationship with God and with each other... the Kingdom of God. It was his sacrificial death and resurrection which brought about our rebirth; death to life, darkness to light, slavery to freedom and lost sheep into the fold of God's love.

The O.T. tells the relationship between God and mankind and we can see how God revealed himself over the centuries, but there was always a looking forward to a special revelation, a Messiah. The events of Easter changed everything. We believe that when we accept Jesus as our Saviour and Lord our lives are dramatically changed. This may not be an experience like Paul had on the road to Damascus, but we know that our lives are changed and if we allow Jesus, He will make us more like Himself. There was a then, **BUT NOW**.

The Christian world acknowledged this in its calendar, dating everything as before Christ, BC, or AD, in the years of Christ's reign. Even in the modern terminology BCE and CE you can't get away from the event of Christ's birth.

Some **BUT NOW's!**

- **But now** righteousness comes through faith to all who believe. Romans 3:21
- Once I was blind **but now** I see. John 9:25
- Once far off **but now** brought near. Ephesians 2:13
- Once you were not a people **but now** you are God's people. 1 Peter 2:10
- Once you had not received mercy **but now** you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:10
- Once lost **but now** found. Luke 15:24
- Once darkness **but now** light in the Lord. Ephesians 5:8

- Formerly death **but now** set free for eternal life. Romans 6:21-22
- Once disobedient to God **but now** you have been shown mercy. Romans 11:30
- There is one body **but now** God has arranged the parts in the body just as He desired. 1Corinthians 12:12-31
- You used to live like this **but now** rid yourself of anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy talk. Colossians 3:7-11
- The mystery hidden for long ages past **but now** revealed. Romans 16:25-27
- **But now** these three, faith, hope and love remain **but** the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- If we only have hope for this life, we are to be pitied **but now** Christ has been raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15: 12-22



WEEK 1. Found

Once lost **BUT NOW** found. Luke 15:11-32

The story of the prodigal son is one of the best-known stories in the bible. It comes with two other well known parables, the lost sheep and the lost coin. It tells of God the Father's love for those who have lost their way, who seek Him and ask for forgiveness. The story may also be called the Parable of the ever-loving Father. The contrast between the destitute son eating the pig swill and the restored son in his father's house with the finest robe eating a celebration feast is very dramatic. Lost **but now** found , dead **but now** alive again.

1. Read the story in two bible versions.
2. Parables in the Bible tend to have one main meaning. What do you think this story teaches us?
3. What does the word prodigal mean? Why is the expression 'praying for our prodigals' often used?
4. What did the wayward son need to do before he returned home?
5. A well known preacher, Eric Delve, tells this story with an English middle-class backdrop: "Welcome home son." "Have a bath before you see your mother." How did the father in the story greet his son?
6. Compare this earthly father in the story with our Father God when we return home to him. What can we learn about God's love from this story?
7. What can we learn from the brother's reaction in the story? What is our reaction to new Christians, new members of our church? Do we really believe that 'everything God has is for us'... v31?
8. If we really believe that those who do not have faith in Christ are lost, why aren't we more on fire to do something about it? Have we lost that passion to find the lost sheep and welcome back the prodigals?
9. Reflecting on this passage and the talk on Sunday, what are the three takeaways for you?



WEEK 2. Righteousness

No-one is made righteous by obeying the law **BUT NOW** a righteousness from God is revealed, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe. Romans 3:20-26.

The teaching of Paul in the letter to the Romans is central to our Christian belief. We cannot be reconciled or put right with God and declared not guilty by obeying the Law in the bible, because only Christ could keep the law perfectly. But there is a way to be declared not guilty -by having faith in Christ and trusting Him to take away our sins. Before Christ's coming God's people were under the law as there was no other way to approach God. Now we can be saved by our faith alone, not our good deeds or family heritage. Our faith depends on what Christ has done for us, not what we have done. Christ has paid the price, He has taken our place. We are saved by trusting in what God has done on the Cross. So that is the difference, previously a life of striving to do good and never attaining it **BUT NOW** a life of freedom trusting in the love and grace of God.

1. Read Romans 3:9-26 in a modern translation, perhaps GNB or Philip, and then delve deeper with the NIV.

2. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. Do you think this is a fair description of a life without God?

3. What was the purpose of the Law of Moses? Did the Jews of Jesus' day keep the law?

4. In what sense are we as Christians freed from the law of the OT. Do we need to bother with them at all? What would be a definition of righteous for you?

5. Why do we need to be declared righteous? Read Romans 3:9-22.

6. Is it necessary to believe in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection literally? Can't we just believe that Jesus is alive in our memories and that death is not strong enough to destroy us?

7. Can we explain in simple terms to a non-Christian what happens when we believe and have faith in Jesus?

8. Christians are sometimes called self righteous. What does this mean? Is this the same as having a strong faith without doubts?

9. We often sing the hymn:- "My hope is built on nothing less, Than Jesus' blood and righteousness." And do we really believe this?

An original verse of this hymn is:- 'Jesus, Thy robe of righteousness, Fully absolved through Thee I am, From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.' What does this mean for you...?



WEEK 3. Light in the Lord

'You were once darkness **BUT NOW** you are light in the Lord.' Ephesians 5: 8-14

The contrast between darkness and light is a common theme in the bible. Jesus in John 8:12 says "I am the light of the world". It is rooted in Jesus' relationship with His Father. John Piper states, "Jesus speaks from God and for God and as God". Apart from Jesus, we live in darkness and have limited capacity to understand who we are or what we see in the world. "The beauty of our humanity is still evident, but ugliness abounds" writes Aimee Joseph.

Light can expose the evil which goes unseen in the dark and the light can shine on what is good and beautiful.

1. Read Ephesians 5:8-14 in more than one version.
2. God created the world and said that it was good. In what way can you describe the world as in darkness? Is the world without Jesus in darkness?
3. Are our lives any better than our non-Christian neighbours? In what sense are we living in the light?
4. The Victorian hymn 'From Greenland's icy mountain' speaks about: "shall we whose souls are lighted... shall we deny the lamp of life to the heathen". How do we feel about spreading the Light of Christ to those of other faiths?
5. Read John 8:12. I am the light of the world. What does Jesus mean by this statement?
6. In John 1: 4-5, we read that the darkness has not understood it. Have you allowed the Light of Christ which can never be extinguished to illuminate your life?
7. Read John's epistle, 1 John 1: 5-7. How do we have real fellowship with each other?
8. The children sing:- "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, Shine all over Hextable, I'm going to let it shine!" As the song says, lights are for shining not hiding away, so how do we shine the light of the gospel where we live?



WEEK 4 Body Ministry

“There is one body **BUT NOW** God has arranged the parts of the body just as He desired.” 1 Corinthians. 12:12-31.

The above passage along with Ephesians 4:15-16 teaches us about the members of the church and our dependence on each other. It then goes on to discuss the various functions within the body, but insisting that these are differences in function not status.

1. Compare the New Testament teaching of body ministry with the OT practice of priests and temple worship. Which pattern of ministry has the church followed over the centuries?
2. Do we really believe and take seriously the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12:15-21.
3. What does v24 mean?
4. How can we help our church to own this teaching and not fall back into a worldly model of leader and led?
5. Does the picture of shepherd and sheep help us?
6. Surely any organisation works better with a strong leader when everybody knows to whom they are accountable?
7. In what practical ways can we encourage each other to exercise our gifts and so build up the Body of Christ?
8. What can we learn from the early church as described in the book of Acts? Could the pattern of communal living and fellowship with no church buildings work for today?
9. What is the Holy Spirit nudging you about regarding life in the body of Christ? What is your fresh resolve today?



WEEK 5. Holy Living

You used to live like this **BUT NOW** rid yourself of anger, rage, malice slander and filthy language. Colossians 3: 7-11.

Our behaviour as Christians is evidence of our new life in Christ. Scripture is clear that “faith without works is dead”, not that our good deeds save us in any way. How can we claim to be in Christ if we cling to our old way of life?

1. Read Colossians 3:12-14. How should a Christian live?
2. We are instructed to rid ourselves of certain things, an act of the will. How do we do this? What can help us? If we know that we can never achieve this perfection why attempt to try?
3. Does v.11 challenge us in our response to our present immigration crisis?
4. Some Christians are very vocal about abortion, homosexuality, transgender rights etc but seem not so worried about anger, malice, gossiping etc. Discuss.
5. V13 commands that we should forgive as the Lord forgave us. What is the significance of this reading? Is our church fellowship a forgiving place or do we harbour grudges and get stuck on things?
6. When we are born again, we become a renewed person (v10) and we grow to become more like Jesus. What can we do, on a day-to-day basis, to grow in our new nature?
7. Do the instructions in v5-9 just sound like a list of shall nots? Aren't we meant to live in freedom not just obeying a set of rules?
8. Should v16-17 be our daily rule? How can we live this into practice?



WEEK6 Salvation for all nations

The mystery hidden for long ages past **BUT NOW** revealed. Romans 16: 25-27

Previously God's rescue plan for the world, his way of salvation, was only revealed to the Jews and then only in part. God had promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him, but this promise had to wait to be fulfilled as the Jews tried to please God by keeping national purity. The early church had to learn that salvation was available to all, by faith alone. Faith that Christ died for their sins and rose from the dead, with no need to be a Jew or circumcision, no Law, no baptism, no membership of a particular church. It is summed up in Romans 10:9 "If you declare with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved".

1. Read Romans 16: 25-27 in various versions of the bible.
2. What is the mystery mentioned in v25?
3. Read Genesis 26:4 (stars in the sky) and Isaiah 42:6 (light to the nations) What do they tell you about God's plan for his world?
4. Why do you think that God kept his plan a mystery or secret?
5. Read the story of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11. How did this challenge Peter's ideas of who could come to faith in Jesus?
6. Do we believe that God is an Englishman and Jesus a blue eyed blond European? Do certain preconceived ideas affect our evangelism?
7. Look at Hextable: why may certain roads or areas not be represented in our church congregations
8. If we pray 'the prayer' and ask Jesus into our life, is that enough? Do we need to do anything else? Do we believe that we can fall away and lose our faith in Christ or do we believe that once saved always saved? What Bible verses help us understand this?
9. What needs to be different for you because of this focus?



WEEK 7 Resurrection

If we only have hope for this life, we are to be pitied **BUT NOW** Christ has been raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15: 12-22

The idea of the resurrection of the body is something in which most people in the UK believe in one form or another. The commonly held belief that when you die, you go to a place called heaven where you will meet all your old friends and family and even your beloved pets. This is a comforting belief which is preached at many funeral services but is it what the Scriptures teach?

Our life in eternity is assured because Christ rose from the dead. We learn from 1 Corinthians 15: 51-57 that Christ's resurrection has won for us an eternal life in a resurrection body. 2 Timothy 1:10 says 'God's grace has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality'. So once no hope BUT NOW an eternal life.

1. What did the Jews in Jesus' day believe happened when you died? Were different views held by Pharisees (Psalm 17:15) to Sadducees (Matthew 22:23)?
2. What was the fundamental difference between Lazarus being raised from the dead and Jesus' resurrection?
3. Discuss the various appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. Can you find them in the gospels and say what they teach us about Christ's resurrection body?
4. Read in the story of Lazarus when Jesus arrives after his death and Martha confronts Him (John 11:24-26). What does Jesus promise?
5. What does Hebrews 13:14 and Hebrews 11:8-16 teach us about this world. Can you think of one of Jesus' teachings about our attitude to this present life?
6. If we are looking forward to the life to come, why should we be concerned about this world and creating a fairer and just society?
7. What does the New Testament teach us about death and the life to come? Can you think of five characteristics of eternal life?



WEEK 8. Love

BUT NOW these three remain: faith, hope and love. **BUT** the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

Love the word we use so freely to describe our attitude to the most mundane, 'I love pizza' to the most supreme, 'I love God'. The Greeks had several different words for love, but the word used here is agape, and it is this agape love which Paul speaks about

William Barclay says 'If we regard a person with agape, nothing that person can do will ever make us seek anything but their highest good. Even if they hurt us, we love them. So agape must not be just emotional, but of the will. We love the unlovable, those who don't love us, those we don't like. It means no bitterness, no revenge, but only to seek the highest good for someone'.

This kind of love does not come naturally. Matthew 5:46 reminds us that anyone can love those who love them. We need God's grace and Christ's example to love like this when we ask for nothing in return.

Obviously, the supreme example of agape is God's love for us when He sent his son to suffer and die for us on Calvary.

1. Read this passage slowly: it is so well known that we can read it without fully comprehending it. How could you summarise v 1-3?

2. V 4-7 describes this agape love. Discuss?

3. Can you think of examples of this kind of love in the O.T. Why did Jesus say in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give you"?

4. John 13:35 is our challenge, that we will be known by our love. Does this verse provoke you? How might you put this into action...?

5. Proverbs 3:3-4. Both love and faithfulness require action not just feelings. Are we prepared to act on these commands?

6. Corrie ten Boom, the well-known Christian speaker, was a Nazi concentration camp survivor. After the war when she was preaching she came face to face with a former camp guard who had brutally killed her sister. From feelings of absolute hatred she realised her own sins and how much Christ had done to forgive her and she had to show love and forgiveness to this man. She said she had never understood God's love so intensely than at that moment. What brings us to the foot of the cross to realise that Christ died for each one of us?

7. A prominent Anglican vicar was on the BBC news a few years ago after his adult daughter had been raped in their London vicarage. He said that he could not forgive the man because he had shown no remorse. Does someone have to say they are sorry before we can forgive them?

8. In your experience do non-Christians and those of other faiths show more love to each other than Christians do?

9. How might you increase your love – God helping you?