



Becoming like Christ: Session 6 – Facilitator’s ppt script.

The numbers correspond with the slides. This is an edited version of the Content booklet. ① indicates an animation click is needed.

1. Intro slide
2. How should I feel about God judging me and others?
3. Heaven and earth can only be fully reunited when all that currently separates us has been destroyed, and we are fully restored. The way the Bible describes this process is *judgment*. The writer to the Hebrews says that ① “...people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...” (Hebrews 9:27) For many people throughout history, God’s judgment is something they *long for*. Jesus promises, “...will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.” (Luke 18:7-8) ① For many of the victims of history, God’s judgment will mean that for the first time their voices will be heard.
4. Yet the ① language of judgment and of hell, which Jesus uses more than all the other biblical writers put together, can cause fear and a picture of God which can make people run away from Him. It is fair to ask questions like: How could an all-good God, who IS love torture people in hell eternally? In what way is it loving to keep people alive and burning? It is important to know that ① even the early Christians wrestled with these questions in various ways – trying to bring together:
5. **The ① good hope that God will deal with evil once and for all.** It is just as impossible for light and darkness to coexist as it is for sin to come into God’s presence ① **and the revelation that God IS agape love**, and that there is no shadow side to Him at all ① **with the necessity and anguish of the cross.** *The agony of the cross was needed.* Jesus experienced the hell of separation from His Father. The longer, deeper, and more intimate the relationship, the more tortuous is any separation. God’s love is not sentimentality but expressed through action.
6. Some Christians, then and now, attempt to hold these ideas together in different ways in order to try and understand what judgment means. ① **Some believe that God will indeed judge people and fallen spiritual beings through suffering which is eternal and conscious.** (Lots of ideas we have inherited from medieval art portray this). They would interpret the images of judgment in the Bible literally. ① **Some believe that judgment will mean that some will simply cease to exist (known as ‘annihilationism’ or ‘conditional immortality’).** They would emphasise that human beings are not essentially immortal – that can only be a gift. That while the wicked are referred to as, for example, bring “destroyed forever” (Psalm 92:7), this does not have to mean that they are forever being destroyed. ① **Some believe that all creatures will go through a purifying process which will ultimately mean that everyone will be saved – in the widest sense of the word. (This is known as ‘universalism’).** They would emphasise that even though everyone will be judged by the “burning heat of God’s love”, nevertheless, as Paul wrote, the aim will be so that, “their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Corinthians 3: 13-14) While the *fruits* of our lives may need to be *purified*, this would not mean *our* complete end. The fire that lovingly purges all that it *can* and justly destroys all that it *must* is the same fire.
7. Whatever view (s) we have, it is important as disciples that we can hold them in humility and love, and that we hold on to some key ideas about our picture of God, ourselves and others: ① **Our picture of God. God IS love.** As we have seen, it is impossible for God to act against His own nature in any way towards us other than through self-sacrificial love – there is no hidden side to Him, or split personality. “...in him there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5) ① **It is clear that God doesn’t want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9).** Thus, whatever understanding we might have of judgment, if there is any way that God could save all, he most certainly would save all. Ultimately our understanding needs to be consistent with our trust in God’s character. Do we believe God to be more loving, just, fair and wise than we could ever be? **Looking towards my own judgement, and that of others.** With all these things in mind, a disciple can look forward to judgment and prepare for it: “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.” (2 Peter 3:11) ① The point of the Bible’s many and different images about judgment are less about

giving us crystal-clear information about the mechanics of the end of this age so much as inspiring us to live as disciples in the present. Rather than being anxious about those we love who have not yet placed their trust in Christ's sacrifice and victory, ① we can trust that God will judge them, like us, with love and truth more than we can comprehend.

8. If Jesus has overcome evil, why is there still so much suffering?

9. The Swiss writer Oscar Cullmann says that while Jesus' first coming *broke the power* of the enemy ① (D-Day), we are living in a time when we are still waiting for the war to be over (VE-Day) and for evil and death to be *completely destroyed*. ① We can have confidence in God's *victory* (now), but we still long for its *completion* (not yet). As disciples we are called to continue to confront evil and suffering (we explore this more in module 3) in a world in which that battle can feel as intense as ever. Paul says that this affects not only us, but the whole world which is "groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." The universe longs for 'VE-Day', when ① "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." (Romans 8: 19-22)

10. How do we become like Christ in suffering?

11. Suffering can remain the largest stumbling block to our discipleship. Yet the difficult times of our lives can also be those in which we can most learn to rely on God, allowing Him to be at the centre of our lives and to shape our characters.

12. How can God really suffer and how does this help me?

13. "Only a suffering God can help." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). It is essential for any disciple to know that, through Christ, God suffers with us. ① It helps our *understanding*, because, while no answer can fully take away or explain our suffering, our picture of God now includes one in which suffering is at the centre of who God is. It helps our *experience* of suffering because we know we are not alone in it, but God is with us. ① The picture 'The Tortured Christ' gives us a visual sense of the reality of God's agony on the cross. Through the cross, God understands suffering. Not only that, but the book of Hebrews suggests He has allowed Himself to be shaped by it: ① "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered..." (Hebrews 5:8)

14. The fact that God IS love means that God can choose to be vulnerable, without losing His power. While not understanding suffering fully, disciples can know that on the cross God shares in, and protests about, our suffering. The photo 'Corona Jesus' also speaks of how Jesus is present with us in our sufferings. In the Bible, ① God does not say, "Do not fear, I will take away all your pain." Rather, we hear, "You have no need to fear, since I am with you."

15. Does everything happen for a reason and is doubt a bad thing?

16. The phrase 'everything happens for a reason' can do enormous damage both to an individual in pain, and to our picture of God. Because if we see God as being behind every sickness and tragedy the harder it is to know that He truly loves us. ① The key verse Romans 8:28 is not saying that all things are good *in themselves*, or God's will. Rather it is saying that *whether circumstances are good or bad*, God can continue to work for our good. As we have seen, by taking the risk of being human, and being crucified, God willingly shows His true power by giving up the ability to control everything. ① His true greatness is not by being able to make "everything happen" but being able to work out His purposes *even if things do not always go His way* because of, for example, our freedom to make bad choices. In terms of the place of **doubt**, if faith is 'psychological certainty' then it will be hard for us to face events which are challenging, or to grow in trust. ① But faith in the Bible is demonstrated by Israel, whose name means "one who struggles with God". It is about keeping trust with God as a covenant-partner *in the face of uncertainty*. Jesus expressed His love for His Father by asking why He had forsaken Him. The more mature our faith, the more confident we will be with the things we cannot understand.

17. How honest can I be about my pain to God?

18. The ability to express grief, sorrow and frustration is necessary for genuine healing and wholeness, and so it is notable that Jesus gives us an example of grief, in weeping at his friend Lazarus' tomb. Because our hope is to be fully realized, Jesus shares with us in the tears at the frustration and loss of bereavement that is our experience in this age. ☹️ Tears can be a gift of healing. As well as the reality of grief, the Bible is also full of examples of lament before God. While there are sometimes elements of complaining in lament, ☹️ while a complaint is an *accusation* against God that maligns His character, lament is an *appeal* to God based on confidence in His character.

19. Many of the Psalms (over one-third of them) and the prophets ask questions, express doubts and even challenge God to be faithful and just. Job feels able to ask God, "Why did I not perish at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?" (Job 3:11) Jeremiah cries out, "Why is my pain continuous, my wound incurable...?" (Jeremiah 15:18) ☹️ Lament is a *direct* way of praying. Jesus "offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death." (Hebrews 5:7) ☹️ Lament is also a place in which we can say things that are not 'right' but need to be brought to God.

20. Do I pray to the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit?

21. Christian prayer will involve the Trinity. Paul writes that, "Through him [Jesus] we have access to the Father by one Spirit." (Ephesians 2:18) Anglican collects (written prayers) are often addressed to God "through Jesus Christ our Lord". But some are addressed to Christ, and a few to the Holy Spirit. ☹️ In prayer we can come to a loving Father, accompanied by a Saviour and Lord, and ☹️ inspired by His Spirit.

22. What does 'God's discipline' mean?

23. Jesus' brother James saw suffering as the greatest opportunity for us to grow in our discipleship: ☹️ "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1: 3-4) ☹️ Our struggles can sharpen our sense that God alone is all that matters. The more we can approach suffering as an opportunity for "the Lord's discipline" to shape us, the more we will grow as disciples. God's discipline is never punishment related to our behaviour, but it can be the way that God can use the sometimes random and meaningless suffering and difficulties we endure to grow our dependence upon Him and shape our characters, if we allow Him to do so. As Hebrews says, ☹️ "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:7-11)

24. How can I live with hope as a disciple?

25. Human beings seem wired for hope. *Genuine hope is the only source of lasting peace.* For disciples, the hope of the reuniting of heaven and earth is "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf." (Hebrews 6:19) We are offered the promise as well that we are not alone but that we are "surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses". (Hebrews 12:1) ☹️ *Genuine hope motivates us to care for the world, not use it for ourselves.* Karl Marx wrote that the church used Christian religion like a drug to keep people passive in this world by making them focus on the next. But, as we have seen, Jesus announces that God's healing kingdom has already arrived, and that our hope is not to 'go to heaven', but *to see the world transformed in preparation for when that hope will be complete.* So when someone asked Martin Luther what he would do if Jesus was returning tomorrow he replied, "I would plant a tree." If this life is all there is, the temptation to use the world and others as much as we can, clinging to as much as we can, may be greater. But hope of resurrection prevents us both from *being passive* about looking after the world – because we are seeking God's coming kingdom on earth - and means *gives us the best reason to avoid grabbing hold of it while we can.* The greater our hope, the easier it becomes to not treat the world now *as if it is all that there is.* ☹️ *Genuine hope is about living in the future promise today.* In the light of the future, one way of viewing our purpose and calling in life today is to join in with God *in making the present world look as much like it will be when heaven and earth are fully reunited.* Because, for example, in God's *future* every tribe and nation will worship together, we seek that reality as much as possible *today* by resisting racism. When Jesus offered His disciples "eternal life" He was talking about the *quality of resurrection life that begins today* – before our physical death. Vedran Smailovic is known

as the 'Cellist of Sarajevo'. During the siege of Sarajevo he became famous for playing his cello, dressed in his full orchestral clothes, in bombed out buildings, often under threat of snipers. After a mortar bomb killed 22 people who were waiting for food in a market-place in Sarajevo, he caught the world's attention by going there and playing Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor for twenty two days, once for each victim. In the same way, among the ruins of the world, disciples are called to seek God's beautiful kingdom by replacing destruction with the music of hope - with signs that evil does not have the last word.

26. Why is Jesus' ascension essential for disciples?

27. The ascension shows that Jesus' earthly work was *complete* - He had accomplished all that He needed to do. Now He could finally "sit down at His Father's right hand." ① It was the final demonstration of His victory. He returned to His heavenly glory and was lifted up by His Father with honour, receiving the "name above every name" - the reigning king over all powers in all ages. Early Christians would have been familiar with the idea that when a Roman emperor died his 'soul' would go to heaven and he would become divine. But they knew that Jesus' ascension fulfilled the glory of a divine King who rules in a completely different way. In becoming like Him in the difficulties of life, His ascension can strengthen us in at least three ways. ① *The ascension means that He is with us, wherever we are.* The ascension meant that the Spirit of Jesus could now be available to everyone. He had told his disciples that it was good for him to go away, because only then would he send them another Helper, the Spirit of truth (John 16:7-16). ① *The ascension means that Jesus takes our humanity into God and prays for us.* The resurrected Jesus was *more* human, not less, than he was before - human but *without frailty and dying*. This is a promise of genuine humanity. And we can be reassured of our eternal value by knowing that in His return to God, Jesus does not stop being human, but takes our humanity into God. Because humanity is in the heart of God, God now knows our weakness and struggles in His *experience*, and the ascended Christ can open the way for us to come as we are to God. ① *The ascension gives us the power to do the whole work of Jesus' through His gifts.* Paul connects the ascension with the arrival of the gifts God gives each of us to carry out Jesus' work on earth. He quotes a Psalm which prophesies that "When he ascended on high...he gave gifts to his people." (Ephesians 4:7) Because none of us can individually carry out the full ministry of Jesus, various gifts are shared out to everyone, for example, teaching, pastoring, leading, sharing good news, and listening to God. Only when these gifts are all present in a church community can we "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12)