



FACILITATOR'S NOTES AND SCRIPT

AIM for this session

- * To look at the concept of sin as a significant spiritual problem for individuals and the entire world.
- * To look at Jesus' belief that his purpose for coming to the world was to somehow deal with this problem

OVERVIEW of this session (60-90 minutes)

1. INTRODUCTION (5-10 minutes)
2. REVIEW OF HOME-READING (5-15 minutes)
3. OPENING CONVERSATION (10-15 minutes)
4. MAIN PRESENTATION (25-30 minutes)
5. PERSONAL REFLECTION (15-20 minutes)
6. CONCLUSION (5 minutes)
7. 'MINGLING' - (You may wish to allow some time at the end for people to just chat)

INTRODUCTION (5-10 minutes)

Welcome back to Session 3 of the *Discovering Christianity* series. In our first couple of sessions together we've looked at a number of issues regarding the Christian faith through the eyes of Mark.

During our *first session* we looked at the claim that Christianity makes about Jesus. The claims are that God exists, and that Jesus is that God "in human flesh".¹ We looked at three categories of evidence to substantiate that claim and those categories were:

1. THE BIBLE'S FULFILLED PREDICTIONS
2. AN INDIVIDUAL'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
3. LIFE'S UNEXPLAINABLE EVENTS

Our *second session* looked at who Jesus himself claimed to be, and those claims were the same as Christianity's: That is,

1. Jesus claims the he can forgive sins (a characteristic that only God has)
2. Jesus claims the he is "The Son of Man" (a divine Old Testament figure that saves the world)²
3. Jesus claims the he is "Lord of the Sabbath" (that is, that he is the Creator of the world)

This session aims to look at the reason Jesus believed he came to this world.

¹ The Messiah

² Daniel 7:13-14

REVIEW OF HOME-READING (5-15 minutes)

Before we look at that topic, let's have a look at the home reading of Mark 3:13 - 5:43. Were there any observations or questions that came up for you during the reading?

OPENING CONVERSATION (10-15 minutes)

Read Mark 4:35-41

1. Why do you think the disciples didn't have faith in Jesus yet (4:40)?

(Facilitator's notes)

- * It's incredible that Jesus seem so comfortable with his purpose that he can sleep in a boat during a wild storm.
- * The disciples haven't figured out yet who he is and so are naturally afraid when they're caught in a storm.
- * It would seem that the disciples so far in the story thought of Jesus as worthy of following and learning from, and also someone with extraordinary gifts in being able to heal people. They hadn't yet formed the opinion that he was God in human flesh. This comes later in the story. A reflection might be that often it takes people some time to believe in Jesus.

2. What does "having faith" mean to you?

(Facilitator's notes)

- * This is a good opportunity to explore the different meanings that your attendees associate with the concept of faith.

3. In verse 41, the Disciples ask- "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!" - What are some of the possible answers to this question that people might give today?

(Facilitator's notes)

- * Mythical person of history
- * A teacher of morality
- * A Charismatic Revolutionary
- * Someone used by the church for political power
- * A con-man or lunatic
- * God in human flesh
- * Other?
- * Facilitator: You may like to mention some Old Testament texts (e.g. Psalm 65:7, 89:9, Psalm 104:4, 107:28-30, Jonah 1:14-15) that refer to God's ability to silence storms and raging oceans.

MAIN
PRESENTATION
(25-30minutes)

OPENING

Imagine if you knew with confidence and clarity the very reason you were placed on this earth. That would give a different feel to waking up every morning, wouldn't it? When your life has purpose and meaning you bound out of bed full of excitement each morning and look forward to every day (well..... most days!) 😊

In this session, we are going to look at the reason Jesus believes he has come into this world. He has come to deal with a world-wide problem that effects everyone. Before we start, I need to warn you that some people have said that this session ends in a negative way and they leave a little depressed. If that's how you feel at the end of the session - don't worry - there is good news - but you have to wait until next session to discover it 😊

POINT 1

If you look at your handouts there are five points that we'd like to make tonight regarding Jesus' purpose. The first comes from an encounter Jesus has with religious leaders when Jesus is seen attending a party with people of questionable reputation. Let's read Mark 2:13-17

13 Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him. 15 Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) 16 But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?" 17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

In Jesus' world, "righteous" people are those who are right with God because they don't do anything bad. The religious leaders he was speaking with thought of themselves in this way. Jesus says he hasn't come to deliver a message to the "goodies" but the "baddies". He uses a medical metaphor saying that he is a doctor with some kind of medicine or antidote for those who deep down know they have made mistakes ("Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do").

That's the first point I'd like to make tonight. Why did Jesus come? **He came to "Call Sinners"** ³ (see handout and write in the blank: **Jesus Came to Call Sinners**).

³ Facilitator: It's interesting to note that Jesus says earlier on in Mark (1:38) "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came." - Jesus' preaching relates to "calling sinners". (There's no need to mention this during the presentation if it doesn't come up, but just be aware of it.)

POINT 2

A question that could be asked at this point is “What is Sin?” (and therefore, who are sinners?). To answer this let’s have a look at something Jesus says when he’s explaining that it’s not what people eat or drink that makes them “sinners” as some of the people thought back then. Turn to **Mark 7:14-23**.

14 Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. “All of you listen,” he said, “and try to understand. 15 It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.” 17 Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the parable he had just used. 18 “Don’t you understand either?” he asked. “Can’t you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? 19 Food doesn’t go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.” (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God’s eyes.) 20 And then he added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. 21 For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. 23 All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”

The first thing that I’d like you to take note of is that the attitudes and behaviours that Jesus lists as examples of sin all have something in common. Can you tell what it is?⁴ They all seem to have selfishness as their base motivation. That’s the second point I’d like to make on the handouts is that **Sin is selfish attitudes and behaviours** (see handout and write in the blank: **Sin is selfish attitudes and behaviours**).

POINT 3

It’s also important to point out where Jesus believes sin comes from. Notice in verse 21 he says that it comes “*from within, out of a person’s heart*”. The heart is symbolic for the innermost part of ourselves (that is, our very essence). Jesus is saying that selfish attitudes and behaviours are not caused by something externally but come from within our innermost being.

Isabella Rossellini, a famous actress and model once described as the most beautiful woman in the world⁵, said something a couple of years ago that seems surprising:

*“When I was a little girl people used to ask me, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Good, I would say: I want to be good. I could never be good. This feeling of badness has lived in every part of my being. Call it anxiety or despair. Call it guilt or shame. It occupies me everywhere.”*⁶

⁴ Facilitator: you may like to pause for a moment on this question and see if anyone in the group can see the common denominator in this list (it might help with the overall interaction)

⁵ She was the face of Lancome Cosmetics for fourteen years - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella_Rossellini

⁶ Quoted in an interview reported in the “The Times” newspaper, United Kingdom (4th of October, 2004)

I think what Isabella Rosellini is describing, that despite material wealth and worldwide recognition, something is wrong with her “heart”. She is feeling the guilt or shame associated with selfishness. Maybe you recognise that feeling yourself at different times in your life.

And that’s the third point I’d like to make on your handouts, that **Sin is a condition of the heart**. That is, that selfishness is at the very core of the human condition. (see handout and write in the blank: **Sin is a condition of the heart**).

POINT 4

So, why would why would Jesus think that his purpose for coming to earth was to deal with the “sin” (selfishness) of individuals? Well, Jesus was aware of the results of unchecked sin as we can see in *Mark 9:42-48* (give people time to find the reference). The background to this story is that Jesus is in a town called Capernaum in the north of the country. He is correcting the disciples on their selfish desire to be “superior” in their position over others. Jesus is using a small child as an example of humility. He says to them:

42 “But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around your neck. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands. 45 If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into hell with two feet. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It’s better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 ‘where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.’

Now, that’s very graphic imagery Jesus uses on the results of sin and the need to do something about it. He says that it is selfishness that is the difference between being a part of heaven and hell. Without going too much into the theology of these two spiritual places⁷, heaven is basically being in God’s presence and hell is separation from God’s presence. And that’s the fourth point I’d like to make this session, that **Sin separates us from God’s presence** (see handout and write in the blank: **Sin separates us from God’s presence**).

ILLUSTRATION

If you were asked to write down on this piece of paper all of the selfish thoughts and actions you had in your life, do you think there would be enough to fill this page?⁸ If you’re like me, you might need quite a few more pieces of paper! The Christian understanding of God is that he is so selflessly loving that any selfishness, even one single thought or action, causes a barrier between you and Him [*Facilitator; hold the piece of paper on top of one of your upheld palms to illustrate a barrier between us and God. We’ll come back to this illustration next session*]. And it’s this barrier of selfishness that Jesus is saying restricts entry into heaven.

⁷ The interpretation of ‘hell’ could be saved for another study.

⁸ Facilitator: You will need a blank piece of paper to use as a prop for this illustration.

POINT 5

And that's the fifth and final point for this session, that the results of sin are eternal for each of us. **That Sin has eternal consequences** (see handout and write in the blank: **Sin has eternal consequences**).

The problem though in Jesus' illustration here is that it is NOT our hand, foot, or eye that causes us to sin. It's our heart, the very core of who we are. And that is a problem for all of us. And it is the problem Jesus has come to deal with.

SUMMARY

Let me wrap up by asking that if tonight you stood before God and He asked why should He let you into heaven, what might you say? Most people would probably respond, "Well, I've done more good things than bad things in my life. That's good enough, isn't it?" Jesus says that the selfish human condition that we all have causes a barrier that is spiritually insurmountable no matter how many good things we might do in our life. That's the bad news. The good news is that entry into Heaven is not about what we do, it's what God does, and that's what we'll look at next session.

But for now, let's have a look at a couple of questions in the *PERSONAL REFLECTION* section of your handout.

PERSONAL
REFLECTION
(15-20 minutes)

1. What do you think of this idea that it is "selfishness" that causes barriers between people and God? Do you see selfishness causing any other problems in the world?
2. What might have been the motivation for Jesus' coming to deal with the problem of humanity being separated from God?
3. Romans 3:23 says "*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.*" How do you feel about being called a sinner?
4. Have you ever felt the separation from God that Jesus describes?

CONCLUSION
(5 minutes)

I hope you've found this session on the topic of sin interesting. There's some home reading before the next session (Mark 6:1 - 9:1) as well as a couple of questions on the back of your handout.

Next session we are going to look at the death of Jesus and how it deals with the problem of sin separating us from God's presence. As Mark says in his opening sentence, this is the "good news" of Christianity. I hope you're able to join us then.