

Marvelous Metaphors

study guides

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Marvelous Metaphors: I Am the Light of the World

John 8:12,21-23,51; 12:35

¹² When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

²¹ Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.”

²² This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come?’”

²³ But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

⁵¹ “Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

^{12:35} Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going.”

Introduction

It’s difficult to explain something completely unknown to the person you are explaining it to. Imagine how hard it would be to describe snow to someone who has always lived in a desert where both ingredients of snow—water and cold—are rare! The best hope for explanation is to find something the desert dweller knows and go from there.

God wants to explain himself to his world, but the world does not naturally know him. The world is foolish due to sin and is so inferior in comparison to God. God as the perfect communicator overcomes this difficulty by his Holy Spirit and by using all the tools in language to communicate himself. In this series, Jesus uses metaphors, or pictures, to communicate who he is to his people. He begins with a universally known picture and something God invented on the first day of the world—light.

God’s Word

1. Read John 8:21-23. In these verses, Jesus shares what humans are without him. What does he say we all will do in our sin? Where does Jesus say we are naturally from?

2. Read John 8:12. Jesus says he is the light and not just a light of the world. What is the significance of this assertion?

3. Read John 12:35. How do Jesus’ words here give you urgency to live for him?

Your Life

1. Have you ever felt like you were walking in darkness? Have you ever listened to someone describe his or her own life as darkness?

2. Jesus describes himself as the Light of the world. What does light do for you each day? How is Jesus the Light for you?

3. A dark room is dangerous. As soon as a bright light is turned on, the room becomes useful. What parts of your life have been brightened by Jesus? What parts of your life still need more Light shined into them?

Reflection

1. In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus calls his followers “light” like him. Jesus is the source of light, and his followers are the reflectors. How can you reflect more of the light of Jesus in your life?

2. Consider your family and community. In general, is it getting darker and the light of Christ growing dimmer, or is the light of Christ shining more and more? Why would you say this?

3. Jesus is the Light of the world. Reflect on this statement: “This is reality and not religion.”

What else does God say?

John 1:1-9 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

Journal Applications

Sit in complete darkness for five minutes. Then write about how that made you feel and how that darkness is a picture of what you are by nature without Christ.

Write all the ways that light is useful to you. Then write about how Jesus blesses you in a similar way for each of the ways you listed.

Prayer

Light of the world—Jesus Christ—no darkness can be in your sight. I confess the darkness of my nature and the darkness of my actions. I am blind without you. Shine on me as the Light and brighten my heart with your Word of promise and the power of Baptism. Shine in me and through me so I can be a light that shares your brightness with this dark world. Amen.

God’s encouragement for you

Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Marvelous Metaphors: I Am the Vine

John 15:1-8

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Introduction

“My grandfather was a farmer. My dad had a garden. I have a can opener.” Such could have been said by many in America, but recently gardening in America, especially in urban settings, is on the increase as people look for affordable and healthy food.

In Jesus’ time almost everyone was involved in producing food. Farming was something people were familiar with and why when Jesus calls his Father a gardener and himself the vine, it was a powerful teaching picture for them. Today we may not have experience as gardeners, but we realize the work, care, and love it takes for a gardener to raise his crops. In John chapter 15, we rejoice that we are the loved and cared-for crop.

God’s Word

1. Read John 15:1. Jesus calls himself more than a vine. What does he call himself, and why is that significant?

2. Read John 15:2. What two tasks does the gardener, the Father, carry out? What is the loving purpose behind those activities?

3. Read John 15:5. Jesus says he is the vine and we are the branches. What relationship does that show between us and Jesus?

Your Life

1. What has been your experience when growing plants? How much work is it? What are the joys and frustrations? How does this apply to God’s gardening?

2. In John 15:7 Jesus says he will grant whatever we wish if we are his branches. What wish is on your heart today?

3. What are times in your life when you did not remain in Jesus? What happened?

4. What are times when you have produced much fruit for Jesus?

Reflection

1. A branch may not feel the difference between being cut to be pruned or being cut to be removed and destroyed. When “cuts” happen in your life, how can you know they come from God’s love?

2. The more a branch is connected to the Vine, the healthier it is. What is one specific step you can take to get more of Jesus’ life-giving sap flowing in your branch?

3. By nature we all deserve to be cut-off branches. How did God graft you on to the true Vine, Jesus?

What else does God say?

Romans 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”

Matthew 25:31-33 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”

Journal Applications

Think about times when you have prayed to God for something but felt the message may have not gotten through. It may have felt like you left a message but that God’s voicemail had not been set up. Write about what happened to those prayer requests. Write about the requests you are waiting on now.

Look back on the most difficult times in your life. Choose one and write about how God got you through it and used it to prune you for the better.

Prayer

Dear Gardener Father, thank you for not cutting me off and throwing me to the fire. I am by nature an unproductive branch. I thank you for sending the Vine, Jesus, and for connecting me to him as a branch through your Word, through Baptism, and through his body and blood. Continue to nourish me. Bless my Bible reading and worship. Keep me connected to you, and hear my prayers. Keep your promise to bless my wishes for your glory. Amen.

God’s encouragement for you

Matthew 13:31,32 “He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.’”

Marvelous Metaphors: I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14:1-6

¹ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Introduction

Inclusivism is a buzzword today. This is the idea that everyone should be included in everything. For example, it is a great idea to make public buildings accessible to everyone regardless of their mobility. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worked with many others to make sure that the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States were actually delivered to everyone regardless of an individual’s race. This important work of inclusivism is not done and never will be done.

But absolute truth does not allow for inclusivism in every setting. Jesus is the source of absolute truth. He spoke to Thomas to let him know that Jesus himself is the exclusive way that people get to heaven. This message is contrary to the message of the world but a dear one to Christians.

God’s Word

1. Read John 14:1-3. What did Jesus promise his disciples so that their hearts would not have to be troubled?

2. Look closer at John 14:3. The best part of heaven is not where a person is but whom they are with. Whom does Jesus say will be with us in heaven? Why is that so wonderful?

Your Life

1. What is troubling your heart right now? What is troubling the hearts of your loved ones? How are Jesus’ words a help to get through troubles?

2. How many people do you know who claim to be atheists? How many people do you know who will talk as if everyone goes to heaven?

3. When was the last funeral you attended? Think about the conversations you heard. Were people being honest about the deceased or were they talking fake funeral happy talk?

Reflection

1. What can I do when I feel troubled by life?

2. Who in your life is deeply troubled? How can you give that person what Jesus gave Thomas to help him or her?

3. Think of your family and friends. Even though you cannot see their hearts, how many appear not to have faith in Jesus?

4. When it comes to getting to heaven, how is Jesus like a map?

What else does God say?

Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

John 3:18 "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Journal Applications

Write down the first name of every close family member or friend you know whom you estimate does not have faith in Jesus. Write a short prayer for each and pray that prayer. Write a specific plan of how you are going to share Jesus with them in the next six months.

Imagine what your home would be like if it had everything you wanted. Write a brief paragraph about it. Then know that being with Jesus in heaven will be better. Write your thoughts on how heaven would surpass the greatest worldly home.

Imagine you are going to a funeral for someone who did not believe in Jesus. Think about what you would say to the family and friends that would be loving, true, and not just the simple happy talk that is often heard at funerals.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, I praise you for being the Way and connecting me to my heavenly Father by your life, death, and resurrection. I praise you for being the Truth and giving me straight talk about everything I need to know. I praise you for being the Life and calling me from the death I deserve because of my sins. Help me be a bridge to others for you. Help me speak the truth in cloudy situations. Help me live my life for others like you. Amen.

God's encouragement for you

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Marvelous Metaphors: I Am

John 8:48-58

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”

⁴⁹ “I am not possessed by a demon,” said Jesus, “but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.

⁵¹ Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

⁵² At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

⁵⁴ Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵ Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

⁵⁷ “You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

⁵⁸ “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

Introduction

Insults are everywhere. Little children don’t have to be taught how to give them. Facebook is full of them. Athletes give them in the form of trash talk. Adults have insults come to their minds for their bosses, spouses, and friends but most of the time stop them before they are spoken.

Jesus, the perfect God who loves everyone, was insulted many times. In John chapter 8, he received the worst insult a Jew could imagine in his day; he was called a Samaritan. This implied he was religiously off and should be shunned.

But Jesus did not let any insult or threat stop him from sharing what his mission is and that he is the eternal God from Creation. He proclaimed he is “I AM.”

God’s Word

1. Read John 8:48-52. What insults did the Jews heap on Jesus? Why do you think they did this?

2. Read John 8:51. What amazing promise did Jesus give even to those who were insulting him?

3. Read John 8:56. Whom did Jesus say would have loved to be with him to see what was happening? What does this say about Jesus?

4. Read John 8:58. What name did Jesus use for himself? Why is that a wonderful name?

Your Life

1. What are the worst insults you have ever endured? What hurt more—the content of the insult or who insulted you?

2. Has there been a time in your life when you insulted Jesus by calling his message crazy? Do you know someone now who openly insults Jesus?

3. Jesus was in a hostile situation. When were you in a hostile situation? How did you respond? Compare your response to Jesus' response.

4. Jesus gave glory to his Father. How can your life give glory to Jesus and his Father?

Reflection

1. What do you know about Abraham? God made incredible promises to him about the coming of Jesus. Read about Abraham and his faith in Genesis chapter 22 and think about how to grow your faith.

2. Jesus stood up and faced his insulters. How can a person know when it is time to boldly stand up and speak or when it is time to firmly walk away?

3. Jesus was rejected by his people, the Jews. He was sent for them and to them, and this rejection caused him sorrow. Are there people close to you who have rejected you? Think about how Jesus' actions can be a pattern for you.

4. Jesus' enemies were so mad about this exchange that they soon wanted to stone Jesus to death, but he miraculously walked away. They would eventually bring about his crucifixion when it was time according to God's plan. How does this control of danger apply to your life?

What else does God say?

Hebrews 6:13-15 "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised."

Exodus 3:13,14 "Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" Then what shall I tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."'"

Journal Applications

The name "I AM" for Jesus shows him to be the God of kept promises from the Old Testament. Consider how this name ties the message of the whole Bible together. Write a prayer addressing God as "I AM" and thanking him for keeping his many promises and for his unchanging nature.

Think about all the metaphors in this series: the Light; the Vine; the Way, the Truth, the Life; I AM. Choose one that is most useful for what you are going through right now. Draw a picture or diagram to illustrate that metaphor, and share it with someone who needs a greater connection with Jesus.

Prayer

Great I AM, you have always made graceful promises to your people, and you have always kept them. Grow my faith in you and your promises. Keep your promise to never let me or any of your children die eternally. Instead forgive our sins and empower us to stand up for you even when we are insulted or threatened. Make our testimony as powerful as your promises. Amen.

God's encouragement for you

Matthew 5:18 "Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."