

INFORMATION OR TRANSFORMATION?
THE PEDAGOGY OF JESUS THE MASTER TEACHER
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Jesus was the world's greatest teacher. His lessons about love, forgiveness, and compassion have transformed millions of lives across the centuries. A striking example is Corrie Ten Boom (1983). During World War II she and her family joined the Dutch resistance, helping Jews to escape the Nazi death camps. Their unique old watch shop, with its odd-shaped rooms and secret chambers, afforded a perfect hiding place for those whose lives were in peril. Risking prison camp and death, Corrie and her family were convinced that their Christian duty required hazarding their lives. When they were betrayed, the full force of Nazi brutality crushed in upon them.

One concentration camp officer was particularly cruel and sadistic to Corrie and the other women prisoners. After the close of the war, she met the officer -- now a Christian -- at a church service in which she was speaking. He saw Corrie, recognized her, and asking forgiveness, extended his hand to her. She struggled to raise her hand, her heart boiling with anger. As she prayed for the ability to forgive and respond, she took his hand. How was she able to forgive? Was it mere information that she had gleaned from Jesus' teachings or

was it transformation brought about by the power of His teaching that allowed her to forgive, or was it both?

What about the pedagogy of Jesus? Was His purpose to transfer information or to transform the lives of those He touched? This paper will survey God's plan of redemption that culminated in the person and the work of Jesus Christ, examining His purpose, principles, and approach as a teacher.

Creation, Fall, and Redemption

Many of us as children grew up in Sunday School. We heard the story of Baby Moses in a basket in the bulrushes. We marveled at the bravery and skill of David as he faced and dispatched Goliath. We thrilled at the courage of Daniel in the lions' den. We were delighted that Jesus took little children on his lap and blessed them. We traveled with Paul to places like Philippi and Athens and sailed with him as he carried the Gospel to the heart of the Roman Empire.

Yet often we missed the big picture, the fact that these are not isolated stories. Rather, they are part of the chronicle of God's redemptive plan, His design that climaxed in the sending of His Son to be our Savior. Indeed, the Bible is one story, not a series of unrelated moral examples. We should grasp the truth that the hero of the Bible is not Moses, David, or Daniel, but rather God Himself, demonstrating His love in sending a Redeemer, Immanuel, truly "God with us." The story unfolds in essentially three parts – creation, fall, and redemption – revealing God's promise to rescue mankind from sin and death.

Creation

This dramatic account begins with Genesis 1:1, telling of the Eternal God beginning His creative work. The author assumes the eternal presence of God without any attempt at proving His existence. Clearly God is before all things, created all things, and is sovereign over all things. The world that God made would be characterized as “good,” yet at this point it was “formless and void” (Genesis 1:2, New American Standard Bible). An astonishing correspondence is evident between the first three days of creation and the last three. The first three picture environments and the last three tell of the corresponding inhabitants that occupy them.

The climax of creation was humankind, made in the image of God. This “image of God” included characteristics such as rational affection, self-awareness, intelligence, the ability to make choices, and -- most important of all -- the ability to relate to God. We are created to know God and experience a relationship with Him.

Adam and Eve, the first created beings, were placed in a garden, a place of security and provision. The Genesis account makes it clear that they were to live under God’s rule and walk in fellowship with Him.

Fall

We call humankind’s rejection of God’s rule and His commands “the fall.” Genesis 2:16-17 records God’s command and prohibition to the first couple. They were free to eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but they were not to

eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Created with the ability to choose, they chose to disobey God’s command. Genesis 3 tells of Satan’s deceptive temptation and Adam and Eve’s yielding to it. In essence their sin was rebellion, for they rejected God’s rule, deciding rather to make themselves the sovereign. The consequences were catastrophic. Death was introduced into human experience. Although they did not die immediately, decay and frustration became a part of human existence. The ground itself was cursed, and toil became necessary. Childbirth became an occasion of pain.

Yet in this tragic situation, a positive note was sounded. Genesis 3:15, often called the “Protoevangelium,” indicated that God already had a plan to remedy humankind’s desperate condition. It phrased the promise that One would ultimately be sent who would crush the head of the serpent. A descendant of Adam and Eve would be victorious over the serpent and would through suffering provide redemption for humankind. The rest of Scripture is the unfolding of that promise. As the story of the descendants of Adam progresses, we are continuously seeking to determine who this promised deliverer will be.

Redemption

God’s redemptive plan begins with all humankind as the source of the deliverer. As the descendants of Adam became increasingly sinful, God decided to destroy all human beings. Only Noah found favor in God’s sight (Genesis 6:8, NASB). Because of God’s grace, he was instructed to build an ark, a huge boat, to save himself, his family, and representatives of the animal kingdom from the impending flood. This early redemptive action resulted in the continuation of the

human race. Of the sons of Noah, God chose Shem to continue the redemptive line.

The line from which the Redeemer would come was narrowed further by God's choice of Abraham, a descendant of Shem. Living in Ur of Chaldea, Abraham was commanded to move to the land of Canaan (Gen.11:31, NASB). God initiated a significant covenant with him, promising that his descendants would become a great nation and that from them would come the promised Redeemer. The Apostle Paul pointed out in Galatians 3:16 that indeed the promise to Abraham anticipated and spoke of the achievement of one person rather than many.

Since Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were childless and elderly, the fulfillment of the promise seemed impossible. Yet the two walked in faith, and ultimately Isaac was born to them. Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau, and by both deception and providence Jacob became the inheritor of the promise. Jacob in the later years of his life corrected his earlier proclivities and eventually was given the name Israel.

Jacob had twelve sons. Through God's providential hand in the life of Joseph, one of those twelve sons, Jacob and his family were saved from famine and starvation and became residents of Egypt (Gen. 39-46, NASB). Joseph became the Prime Minister of Egypt, dealt generously with his brothers, and became the key for the saving of the family from which the Redeemer would come. "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:20,

NASB). In Egypt the family of Jacob became a great nation numbering perhaps two million persons.

Prior to his death in Egypt, Jacob pronounced blessings on each of his sons. The line of the Redeemer was further narrowed by his prophetic words about his son Judah. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes” (Gen. 49:10, NASB). It is generally understood that the term Shiloh means, “to whom it belongs,” an indication that God’s Messiah would come from the descendants of Judah.

As we read the accounts of the events -- conflicts, difficulties, deception, deliverance -- in the families of the patriarchs, we are reading more than family narratives. We are tracing the hand of God as He develops the path to the one who would be the promised Redeemer.

As the family of Jacob multiplied in Egypt, the reigning Pharaoh became increasingly fearful of their numbers and their power. To curb their growth he ordered the killing of all newborn male children (Exodus 1:16, NASB). However, one family was courageous enough to defy the edict of Pharaoh, choosing rather to put their infant son in the hands of God by floating him in a basket in the Nile River. We know this infant as Moses. Found and rescued by the daughter of Pharaoh, Moses grew to manhood with all of the privileges of royalty. After forty years in Egypt he was forced to flee to Midian, where God prepared him to lead His people out of Egyptian slavery. God spoke to him through a bush that burned yet was not consumed (Ex. 3:2-10, NASB), sending him back to Egypt to deliver the Israelites from bondage.

When Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites, God sent ten plagues on the Egyptians. The last and most severe was the death of the firstborn. The firstborn of the Israelite families would be protected through the blood of a sacrificial lamb. This event initiated the Feast of Passover, a celebration that pointed to the sacrifice which would be made by God's Redeemer. The exodus pictured the greater salvation of God's people from the dual enemies of sin and death made possible through the blood of a substitute sacrifice (I Peter 1:18-19, NASB). The protection of the Israelites through the Red Sea experience and the forty years in the desert underscored God's safeguarding His people, the people from whom the promised deliverer would come.

Through the leadership of Joshua, the people entered and occupied Canaan. The Israelite victories showed clearly that the land was God's gift to them and that the promise made to Abraham had been fulfilled. However, since they failed to dislodge all of the inhabitants of the land, problems developed. In instances when they wandered from faithful obedience to God, oppression by the Canaanite tribes plagued them. God chose through judges, individuals who were primarily military leaders, to draw the people back to Himself and rescue the people from their enemies. Names like Deborah, Gideon, and Samson are standouts from this period.

But the last and the greatest of the judges was Samuel. During his time the people asked for a king, and though Samuel warned them that this was rejecting God as their King, the people insisted. God gave them Saul. He began well, but ultimately his pride and disobedience caused God to reject him.

Following God's direction, Samuel anointed David, a descendant of Judah, to be the new king. Second Samuel 7:12-16 records God's covenant with David, promising that one of his descendants would rule over God's people forever. Although this pledge was partially fulfilled in Solomon, it is obvious that he did not reign forever, so it is recognized that the promise looked forward to a future deliverer. The line of redemption has been limited to Abraham, then to Judah, and now to the descendants of David.

Although Solomon's reign was the high point for the nation of Israel, his failures sowed the seeds of its ultimate dissolution. When Rehoboam succeeded Solomon, his harshness resulted in the division of the kingdom. The ten northern tribes chose Jeroboam as their king, forming the separate kingdom known as Israel. The two southern tribes remained loyal to David's line and became known as Judah. Intermittent conflict between the two kingdoms and invasion by external enemies finally resulted in the destruction of Israel and the fall and captivity of Judah. Malachi, the last prophet before the intertestamental years, prophesied the coming of one who would be the forerunner of God's Redeemer.

Jesus, the Teacher

As the intertestamental years neared their conclusion, in 5 BC the promised seed of Abraham, the prophet like Moses, the one to sit on David's throne, was born in a stable in Bethlehem. At the age of 30 He began His itinerant ministry, and soon came to be called "Teacher."

No profession was more respected than that of the teacher in the Greek society. The term Master Teacher can be used to describe Jesus Christ. "The

early church father Ignatius (ca. AD 35-107) referred to Jesus as “our only Teacher.” B.A. Hinsdale wrote in 1895 that Jesus “was the greatest of the greatest oral teachers” (Zunk, 1998, p. 17). Other writers have designated Jesus as the perfect teacher, the master teacher, the greatest teacher of all times, and the paragon of pedagogy.

Prior to examining the philosophical and psychological principles inherent in Jesus’ methodologies, it would be wise to review some of the reasons why Jesus is entitled to be called the greatest teacher of all time.

Did Jesus ever tell the disciples what He should be called? The disciples called Him, “Teacher,” and Jesus, replied, “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.” (John 13:13, NASB) It was this title by which Jesus was known among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. The title was bestowed on Jesus “because of His customary activities and because His methods of work were such as to cause Him to be classed with the teachers of His day” (Squires, p.40). The fact that Jesus was called “Teacher” indicates that His chief method of labor was that of teaching. The Greek text calls Jesus teacher 45 times in the Gospel accounts. That which Jesus did is called teaching 45 times, and those who followed Him were called disciples (learners) 214 times (Garner, 2003). Evidence is found in the New Testament of the greatness of Jesus as a Teacher. “The gospel narratives usually speak of the public ministry of Jesus as consisting of a three-fold activity; preaching, teaching, and healing” (Squires, p. 39).

One of the best examples regarding the pedagogy of Jesus is reflected in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7, NASB), His most formal address. It

depicts a time when Jesus “began to teach them” (Matthew 5:2, NASB). The Sermon, which was delivered, according to tradition, on a hillside overlooking the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, seems to present the quintessence of the teaching of Jesus. It presents the principles by which His followers should live.

“Jesus began to do and to teach” introduces Luke’s history of the Christian movement, anticipating the Pentecostal experience, Peter’s great sermon, and the beginning of worldwide evangelism. Being omniscient, Jesus did not need to write a book or discuss pedagogical principles, but it is demonstrated throughout Scripture that He had a profound effect on His followers that changed their lives forever. Jesus proved Himself a Master Teacher as He lived an unimpeachable life, taught lessons relevant and valid, and used divinely discerned principles in teaching.

In reading the literature, we find at least eleven different types of students that Jesus taught: The insecure (John 5:1-18, NASB); the experimenter (Matthew 24: 28-33, NASB); the eager student (Mark 10: 17-21, NASB); the discouraged student (Luke 24:13-35, NASB); the humiliated student (John 8:1-11, NASB); the masked student (John 4:1-30, NASB); the persevering searcher (Mark 17:40-41,47, NASB); the unpopular student (Matthew 8:1-4NASB); the gifted student (John 3:1-12,NASB); the crafty student (Luke 19:1-9, NASB); and the shy student (Mark 5:25-34, NASB).

Jesus’ methodology is not the whole story of His teaching genius. What He taught was perhaps more remarkable than the way He taught. He taught not

only by His words but also by everything He did from His life on earth to His self-sacrificing death.

Good teaching practices are also evidenced by His daily lifestyle in which He lived openly for all to observe. He not only was a great moral teacher, but much more; He was the living and reigning Son of God, the long promised Redeemer.

Jesus' form of communication is observed through His use of local language, similes, short discourses, literary genres, and words illustrated by deeds. Additionally, He communicated through His actions, silences, miracles, and His attitude toward the poor, sick, and needy. Jesus showed compassion toward His learners and was comfortable with all kinds of people He encountered.

Jesus' teachings were relational as well, whether He was teaching one student or the multitudes. The conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria is a wonderful narrative that provides its readers with an outline of the teaching methods of Jesus. This passage provides us an unusual opportunity to observe the personality of Jesus and His consideration for other people. Jesus was never impatient or tactless, nor did He ridicule or show discourtesy toward those who approached Him. We discover how the Master Teacher taught as He recognized the worth and dignity of His learners and demonstrated the qualities of an effective teacher -- character, charisma, commitment, communication, competence, courage, focus, generosity, initiative, listening, passion, problem solving, positive attitude, relationships, responsibility, security, self discipline,

servanthood, teachability, and vision. Jesus demonstrated His understanding, interest, and sincerity in the needs and problems of His students. He was available as evidenced in the time Nicodemus came to Him at night and other times when He ate with other people who were considered as “unworthy” by the Jews.

In His teaching we observe several examples of effective classroom management. When His pupils were off course, He led them to a better understanding, challenged them to make right decisions, and made them aware of consequences. Jesus used different methods of discipline wisely and effectively. An insightful example is portrayed when the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus an adulterous woman and waited for Jesus’ reply and condemnation: Jesus replied, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7, NASB). Then He wrote on the ground, ignoring them. As well, the look: One of Jesus’ brightest students, Peter, failed on the night before the crucifixion. Jesus knew the right emotional response to help Peter. He merely looked at him! The psychological method Jesus used was perfect, and Peter responded. He also used gentle rebuke and ultimate removal from the class. Judas Iscariot had wonderful opportunities to be influenced by the Master Teacher, but he was the one disciple that Jesus had to let go. Ultimately, it was Judas’ choice to leave the class, yet we always see Jesus in control of the situation.

Jesus was certainly a genius of teaching methodologies. He held the attention of enormous crowds without the assistance so heavily relied on today –

power point, internet, CD's, smart classrooms, not even an overhead! Jesus did not confine Himself to word pictures, as evidenced in His object lessons. Jesus once used a denarius to illustrate His answer to a question asked by the scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus emphasized action more than knowledge, and stressed long-term rather than immediate results. Jesus also taught by example and stimulated and maintained the learner's interest. He held the attention of His learners by speaking of familiar things, utilizing concrete illustrations, and proceeding to the abstract only when He knew the students were able to understand. The words Jesus spoke were plain and grounded in real life. His teachings were practical. Sometimes Jesus would ask a pointed question, as when he began a lesson for the scribes and Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:41, NASB)

Obviously He had full command of His subject matter. His knowledge was fresh, thorough, inclusive, and well planned. We see Jesus beginning His lessons with subjects His learners were interested in and spoke not only out of His own abundant knowledge but also out of His personal experiences. The Samaritan women needed to hear practical truths, not meaningless and complicated words. So He taught her that "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24, NASB). Additionally, the scribes and Pharisees needed words that were to the point. In Matthew 23 one finds the seven-fold, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" Even when the Sanhedrin sent officers to capture Him, they listened as He

spoke, later stating, “No one ever spoke the way this man does.” (John 7:46, NASB). When Jesus was convicting men of their sin, He aimed at their hearts to show them their own true condition before God.

Additionally, He employed a variety of maxims: metaphors (Matthew 5:15 and John 7:38, NASB), similes (Matthew 4:30-32, NASB), hyperbole (Matthew 5:29, NASB), proverbs (John 15:20, NASB) paradox (Luke 18:25, NASB), irony (Mark 2:17, NASB), contrast (Matt. 6:19-20, NASB), pun (John 3:3, NASB), and enigma (Matt. 24:28, NASB). Jesus even used humor! (Matthew 19:24 and Luke 6:42, NASB). As He taught penetrating thoughts about difficult subjects, He did so in a way that was clear and straightforward, and “the common people heard Him gladly.”

Jesus also makes use of curiosity in the teaching process. “Curiosity presents an opportunity of peculiar value for effective teaching and is a kind of felt need, a psychological hunger.” Jesus produced in His disciples the mental condition needed for the presentation of important truths. You will recall when the disciples returned from the village they were ready for their meal, but Jesus sat apart from them and did not join them. The disciples said to Jesus “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”(John 4:31-32, NASB) In this account we see Jesus going from the concrete to the abstract, from the material to the spiritual.

On occasion we also observe Jesus being democratic in His attitudes, taking the part of a servant, yet still their leader and teacher. Jesus emphasized the responsibility of each individual and pointed out the consequences of right

and wrong choices. Jesus also expected those who heard His lessons to act upon them (John 4:46-54, NASB). In this passage He told an officer to return home to his son who was healed.

That Jesus' teaching transformed lives is quite evident throughout the New Testament. The woman at the well, blind Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus, and Mary Magdalene are striking examples. But perhaps what happened in the lives of the twelve is the most remarkable. Here are men with no wealth, limited education, and varied backgrounds who have made an indelible impact on our world. Take Simon Peter, for instance, a fisherman, often impetuous and cowardly, who because he had been changed by the life and teachings of Jesus, became the confident preacher on the day of Pentecost and the courageous witness before the Jewish religious leaders. Or consider Matthew the tax collector. Though he had been an outcast from his own people, he became the author of the Gospel that stands first in our New Testament. Or consider John. He had a temper that often erupted out of control, but the New Testament and Christian history know him as the beloved disciple.

Conclusion

The message of the New Testament is that the promise of God's Redeemer was fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The long

Promised One came preaching, teaching, and healing, and paid the ultimate price for the sins of mankind on Calvary's cross.

We ask ourselves a question: Did the teachings of this promised Redeemer simply impart information or bring transformation? The Scriptures give us examples of those who chose not to let Him transform their lives. Consider the one whom we call the Rich Young Ruler (Matt. 19:16-23, NASB). He knew the Hebrew Scriptures, he had met Jesus, he received a clear command from Jesus, but he chose not to respond and went away sorrowful. He did not allow his life to be transformed.

There were those who heard the Word and they were transformed by it. Their lives were never the same again. Though there are examples of transformed lives in the Scriptures, one might look as well at the lives of Augustine, Martin Luther, William Carey, Lottie Moon, and Billy Graham.

So, our question: Does the pedagogy of Jesus inform or transform? One would have to say the teachings of Jesus do impart knowledge, but they transform a life only if the individual welcomes the Lord into his or her heart.

To quote Jesus' own words,

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its

foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of

mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who

built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash” (Matthew 7: 24-27, NASB).

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