

## Jesus the advocate

This study looks at the attitude and actions of Jesus towards those who are oppressed and broken by sin, and to those who have power. It also considers how he uses his own power.

### Learning objectives

By the end of the study, participants will:

- understand Jesus' approach to those who are oppressed
- understand Jesus' approach to those with power
- understand how Jesus uses his own power
- be able to apply Jesus' example to their own work.

### Jesus and power

**Aim** To understand Jesus' approach to power.

**Methods** Small groups, presentation, Bible study, plenary discussion

If the participants have a reasonable knowledge of the Bible, divide them into groups and ask them the following questions:

- What were the characteristics of Jesus' approach to those who were oppressed, suffering or marginalised?
- What were the characteristics of Jesus' approach to those who had power?
- How did Jesus use his own power?
- What can we learn from his approach?

Alternatively, take a selection of passages, such as John 13:1-17, John 8:1-11 and Matthew 21:12-17, and lead a study, picking out the most relevant points. Follow this with a discussion about what we can learn from Jesus' example.

### Key point

Jesus' approach to power had the following characteristics:

- **SERVICE** - Servant leadership
- **RESPECT** - Responsible use of power without the use of force
- **EMPOWERING** - Developing others to carry on the work
- **COURAGE** - Speaking out for what is true, and challenging injustice
- **INTEGRITY** - Modelling what he was advocating
- **MODEL CITIZEN** - Observing the law unless it goes against God's law
- **MOTIVATED BY LOVE** - Love for enemies and for those who are hated.

### Jesus the advocate

In 1 John 2:1 we are told that Jesus advocates on our behalf when we sin: 'If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ the Righteous One.' The examples below give some insight into Jesus' character as an advocate.

#### Jesus modelled servant leadership and was prepared to suffer for others

When James and John asked Jesus if one could sit on the right and the other on the left in his Kingdom (Mark 10:37), Jesus replied: 'For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (v45). He says that the path of his disciples is the same: 'whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all' (v42). He demonstrated his servant nature by washing his disciples' feet, and challenging them to do the same (John 13:14-15).

#### Jesus gave back dignity and value to those who were hated

Jesus associated with those who were on the edge of society. He accepted the anointing by the 'sinful woman' (Luke 7:36-50) and rebuked his disciples when they stopped people bringing children to Jesus (Luke 18:16). He also healed the blind, the sick, the demon-possessed and other 'outsiders' such as the man who was chained outside the city and the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Mark 5:1-20, Mark 5:25-34).

### **Jesus challenged corruption, hypocrisy and injustice amongst Jewish society**

When entering the temple in Jerusalem, he drove out the traders and moneylenders (Mark 11:15-17). He warned against the hypocrisy of the ruling Jewish powers: 'Be on your guard against the yeast [teaching] of the Pharisees and Sadducees' (Matthew 16:6). He criticised their ignorance of justice and mercy, their use of power for personal gain, and their leading people astray (Luke 11:37-53, Matthew 9:9-13, 12:1-14).

### **Jesus taught love for enemies**

When Jesus was in Israel, the Jewish people hated the Romans. Some of the Zealots killed Roman soldiers, and nearly all people were expecting a Messiah to come and re-establish an earthly kingdom for the Jewish people. However, Jesus taught love for enemies instead of hate: 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matthew 5:44), and said 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy' (5:7).

Another example of love and forgiveness was on the cross when Jesus cried out: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

### **Jesus obeyed the law of the land**

Jesus obeyed the law of the land where this did not go against God's law. When questioned about taxes (Mark 12:13-17) he concluded by saying 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' He encouraged Jews to obey the state. However, the main emphasis of this instruction was to 'give to God what is God's.' This means that his followers must follow God's will, upholding justice and righteousness for God's glory.

### **Jesus modelled how he wanted society to be and encouraged others to fulfil their responsibility**

Jesus loved God above everything and was obedient to his will (Luke 22:42, Hebrews 5:7-10), spending time in prayer (Mark 1:35). He loved his neighbour, which was shown in the way he treated outsiders (healing the woman who had been bleeding in Luke 8:40-48). He associated with sinners (Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10), treated women with dignity and respect (Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42) and loved his enemies (Luke 23:34). He also taught others to follow his example (Matthew 5-7, Luke 10:25-37).

## **Extra material – Passages to study**

### **John 13:1-17 Jesus washed his disciples' feet**

Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem just before the Passover, and he knew that he was about to be killed. His acts and teaching had threatened the power of the Pharisees and Sadducees and they wanted to get rid of him so that their dominant position in Jewish society would remain. Jesus used the opportunity to wash his disciples' feet. Key points are that:

- unlike most of the Jewish leaders, Jesus was motivated by love, not power or position
- he explained his actions and used them to teach and challenge others
- he modelled a lesson in selfless service, showing his followers the path that they are called to take
- he identified with those with a low position in society.

### **John 8:1-11 Jesus and the woman who was caught in adultery**

The teachers of the law brought a woman to Jesus who had been caught committing adultery. The accusers wanted to humiliate the woman and to trap Jesus. They had arranged for the man, who also committed adultery, to escape. They brought the woman out in public, ready to be stoned. Key points are that:

- Jesus did not jump in, but remained calm and in control of himself
- he did not approve of sin
- although he did not defend the woman's actions, he was willing to stand up to the powerful
- he taught forgiveness, rather than condemnation
- he was motivated by love and desire for reconciliation.

### **Matthew 21:12-17 Jesus cleared the temple**

Just after Jesus entered Jerusalem he went to the temple area and started to turn over the tables of money changers and those selling doves. He also healed the blind and lame, and the children sang praises to him. However, he rebuked the crowd, including the chief priests and teachers of the law, for their lack of faith and for allowing the temple to be corrupted. Key points are that:

- Jesus attacked exploitation of the poor
- he had no formal authority in the temple, but people listened to him because of what he did
- he knew the time to act
- he explained his actions to those around
- he tackled the causes of poverty and suffering, through healing people and challenging the oppressors
- he was willing to challenge cultural customs when they were against God's will.

Source: *ROOTS 1: Understanding advocacy*, Tearfund 2002, pages 75-78