



1. How to be effective in a hostile environment

Discussion guide – Series III

HOOK:

- What is one of the worst times you've ever 'put your foot in your mouth' (unintentionally said something inappropriate)?
- Has the tone of any stories in our national media, or from global media, ever left you feeling concerned that you might be judged if you expressed an opinion – because public media has become one-sided on a matter?

BOOK: Jesus' avoidance of admission that he was the Son of God

- When the question arose about who Jesus might be, he consistently called himself the 'Son of Man' rather than the Son of God. Why? (E.g. Mark 2:10, Mark 2:28)
 - Regarding what Jesus might have meant by 'Son of Man' – while it seemed he was saying 'I'm just a regular human', what does the prophecy of Daniel 7:3-14 suggest?
 - What were Jesus' words when directly asked by the Priest if he believed himself to be the Christ? (Luke 22:66-70 – quoting Daniel 7)*
- See Mark 8:26. When Jesus did miracles, why did he sometimes caution people not to tell anyone about it? (Consider Mark 1:28, but then Mark 1:45-45 and the implications of people talking)**
 - Contrast this with Mark 5:19. Why on this occasion did he say the opposite? (Consider where the man was from).
- Read Mark 8:27-31. While Jesus hid his identity from the crowds,*** he was open about it with his disciples. Why?
 - (Upon admitting he was God's Son to his disciples, what understanding did he immediately begin to clarify with them about this?****)
- Can you think of a place in the Gospels where Jesus finally admitted what he meant when he referred to himself as the 'Son of Man' (other than to his disciples)? (Read Mark 14:60-64).

LOOK:

- Optional question with footnote to support: The video included a story from the first sitting of the NZ Parliament. What does this account tell us about the way they understood the relationship between the Christian faith and our nation? Does it seem they intended for us to be an non-religious or atheistic 'secular' nation – like is suggested today? Or was it clear to them we were going to be a 'Christian' nation – while also having religious freedom (because of the Christian belief that God gave all people free will)?*****
- Do you ever feel stuck for words when a controversial topic comes up in conversation amongst friends at work or school?



- **Activity:** Make a list together of 'toxic topics', which you think are really difficult for us as Christians to discuss because of the changing views of our society.
 - o (NB: It is not necessary for your group to hold the same opinion on these topics. You only need to agree that they are difficult topics requiring special wisdom and sensitivity).
 - o Comment: These are the kinds of conversations this series is about – with Jesus as our role model.
- Have you ever attempted a conversation in which one of these topics backfired because the other person couldn't understand the reasons for your view, and judged you?
- From the video, in what different ways did Jesus relate to those who were *interested*, as compared to those who were *disinterested*, or *hostile*?

TOOK:

- What have you learnt from this discussion that you could put to use in your conversations?

Pray:

- ...for growing wisdom for how to engage those around us in meaningful conversations.
- ...for friends we desire to see consider faith in Christ.

* The title 'Son of Man' therefore had two meanings. It could refer to a human (a son of a man), or to God clothed in flesh – as in Daniel 7. Jesus chose this title because its meaning was unclear. In Matthew 26:64 Jesus quotes the fuller Scripture from Daniel 7 to the Priest. Jesus' intended meaning when saying he was the 'Son of Man' was now clear. Regarding these small differences between the Gospel accounts, we note that the Gospels are accurate summaries of events, conversations and teachings by eyewitnesses – not the full-length story or record of every word of a teachings).

** The Jews expected a military Messiah who would re-establish the nationhood of Israel, throwing off their oppressors; the Romans. So, to claim to be the Messiah might cause some to pick up weapons and begin a rebellion, which would have resulted in the Romans squashing that rebellion militarily.

*** There was a high potential for misunderstanding if he admitted to being the Messiah/Christ – because they expected a Military Messiah who'd rescue Israel as a nation from the Roman occupation. Also, if he claimed to be the 'Son of God' that would have been considered blasphemy – as eventually was the case at his trials prior to his death sentencing.

**** That he was the 'suffering servant' predicted in Isaiah 53, rather than the 'conquering King' predicted in many other Messianic prophecies. (He would be the 'conquering King' when he returns a second time!)

***** To them being 'secular' meant being non-denominational (the Government was not going to be aligned to one specific Christian denomination), while also affirming the idea of the 'separation of Church and Governmental powers' – because when they are connected it corrupts Church power. What is clear is that they saw the nation as specifically 'Christian' – as measured by values. The idea of religious freedom naturally follows from this – as is seen around the world. The Christian belief that God gave us free will means we release people to choose and practice their own religion. It is also of note that our values as a nation are very specifically Christian – as contrasted with the values naturally arising from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or Atheism. Our patterns of law and justice were borrowed from England, and are based on the idea of (a) human rights (from the belief all people are equally 'created in the image of God' – Genesis 1), (b) the Ten Commandments (from which we get both a set of clear-thinking moral boundaries and also a basis for defining what our various human rights are) and (c) Jesus' golden rule ('do unto others as you'd have them do to you'). In history, it was Alfred the Great who established this foundation for law and government in England in 890AD. From here Christian teachings on the topics of (i) equality, (ii) charity and (iii) honesty were gradually accepted by their entire culture. This context made possible and led to the remarkable levels of (i) equality, (ii) care and (iii) prosperity we enjoy today – with all comparisons noted). While many in power in our nation today do not want to recognise our 'Christian' identity as a nation, the connection is clear when measured by our values, and reminding our nation of this connection is important, because these values (and the blessings that come from them) will be unsustainable without the motivation that comes from belief in a moral and just God.