

“The Wild Gospel” by Alison Morgan

A study plan for housegroups with questions

These study notes are based on some work done by Chris Howat. Chris writes: this is my attempt to use questions to stimulate and encourage study and debate on the book “The Wild Gospel”. It went down well with our housegroup in Somerset and I hope it may be of some small use to others. If any of this material is of help, please use it.

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The Wild Gospel, Chapter 1 - Jesus and the culture of his day

Some thoughts and questions:

- What is culture?
- Can we define our culture?
- How does our culture differ from those in countries where Christianity is growing fast?
- What was the culture in Jesus' day?

The role of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots (p 40)

- What was it like to be an ordinary person in that time?
- What did Jesus do and say to “prick to cultural bubble” of the day?
- How did His teachings go down with the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots?
- How did His teachings go down with the ordinary people?
- What did the Jews expect of the Messiah?
- Why could the Jewish rulers not believe that Jesus was the Messiah?
- What is Jesus' teaching on His Kingdom (p 52 and 53)?
- What was the impact of Jesus' miracles and authority over nature e.g. calming of the seas, walking on water, water into wine, etc?
- How did Jesus' teaching on the spiritual world go down with the Pharisees, Sadducees and the ordinary people?

Jesus and our culture

- How does Jesus' teaching on the spiritual world go down with us today and how much of it is outside our culture?
- How did the spiritual world react to Jesus' actions and teaching?
- In what ways did Jesus clash with the culture of His day?
- How would Jesus clash in our culture?
- What would He say about:
 - Our Church
 - Our lifestyles
 - Our spirituality
 - Our ineffectiveness?

The Wild Gospel, Chapter 2 - Jesus and the Individual

Some thoughts and questions:

- The concept of the individual in today's society. p 71
- The place of the individual in the society of Jesus' day. The weakness of this society. p 72
- The comparison with the wall. Weathering bricks or mortar? The inevitability of the eventual collapse. p 72
- What were the requirements of acceptability in society then? p 74
- Who were the rejected ones? p 74 to 77
- "Into this world strode Jesus." What was his impact? What did he do? p 77-79
- How did Jesus minister to the people?
- Who did he speak to?
- What did he offer?
- "In all these encounters, Jesus showed scant regard for the socio-religious conventions of his culture" He treated every individual equally
- What did Jesus bring to the people? pp 83 – 84
- What did he talk about? p 84
- How could he talk to such different people as the blind beggar and the wealthy member of the Sanhedrin and what did he ask of them? p 84



Jesus' challenge to us

- The challenge to change. The importance of change. What happens to us if we resist change? p 84
- Some of Jesus' challenges to people e.g. Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the rich young man p 86
- What would Jesus' challenge to each of us be, and how would we respond to it?
- Would we accept it and all that it entailed?
- Powerful encounters with God. They did not happen in Jesus day until he brought them. p89
- Do we experience these powerful encounters with God and how do we react?
- How do others react?
- Are we in danger of ignoring them or pretending they don't occur as with the Pharisees and Sadducees?
- Luke's story of the encounter between Jesus and the lawyer. P 89 Jesus way of showing him another way

Conclusions:

- Why did Jesus break all the rules and rearrange the parameters of peoples' lives? p 90
- What did Jesus come to offer? p 90
- Why does the writer propose that Jesus "took on" the culture? p 91
- Is this true today?
- As Jesus spoke to individuals, he exploded the faulty foundations on which they were building their lives and issued a challenge for a new way of thinking and living. What implications does this have for us? p 92
- We are enmeshed in our culture. How can we look critically at the assumptions of our culture as they impinge on individuals, in order to speak truth into falsehood and bring light into darkness?

The Wild Gospel, Chapter 3 - Jesus' Teachings - A new Vision

Some thoughts and questions:

- How does Jesus' teaching differ from what we have experienced in our lives? p 100



Parables

- How do we look at the parables? p 103
- How should we look at the parables? p 103
- What is a metaphor? p103
- What is metaphoric about the phrase “the leg of a table” and why is it no longer unusual?
- Can you think of a new metaphor?
- Have the parables lost their freshness and therefore their full meaning?
- Could you “refresh” a parable to restore its full impact?
- To whom did the parables appeal? p 103/4
- Why were the parables difficult for the educated or theologians of the day to understand?
- Theology is not based on the imagination
- The parable of the dishonest accountant; do we understand its meaning? Luke 16.1- 9 p 106
- Seeing this parable in the context of the parable of the servants and the talents
- Do the parables have a coherent message?
- What did the parables say about what were then the social norms?

Beatitudes

- What did Jesus mean in the Beatitudes? For ‘blessed’ read ‘happy’ or ‘fortunate’ p 110
- “Poor in Spirit” ? Those who mourn? The meek?
- Who were supposed to be the happy ones in Jesus’ day?
- Jesus’ vision of a new reality:
 1. An invitation to face up to the harsh realities of life, p 113
 2. An invitation to see that this prevailing reality does not come from God, p 104
 3. An invitation to enter this new world, to live knowing that we are not life’s losers but life’s winners, p 104
 4. An invitation to live life a different way with a new identity and different values , p 105
- We need a new way of looking at things, a way which will make sense of the pain which surrounds us, p 106
- The whole message of the cross, p 106
- Jesus is asking these first disciples to face up to the fact that the happiness of the world is ultimately an illusion and that its value system is hollow, p 106
- What is happiness?

The Wild Gospel, Chapter 4 - The Gospel in History

Some thoughts and questions:

- Jesus' Message – The Gospel or “Good News”. Fact into Culture or Story
- Do we face a crisis? p 123
- The impact of the Gospel into the culture in the first century
- The two principles: p 124

When the Gospel is spoken perceptively into culture - **A vibrant church** – Fact into Story

When the Gospel degenerates into formulae and practices which fail to connect with the real issues of the day - **Atrophy** - Fact and Story are indistinguishable

- What happens or must happen when the story changes? p 125
- What culture are we now in? Has the story changed in the last 25 years?
- We are in the Postmodern age. What must the church do to speak creatively into this new cultural story?
- Are we doing it?
- Is the church adapting its mission and learning to speak the Gospel into the new cultural situation?
- Examples from the past: p 125 to 144

AD 30 to 300

AD 300 onwards

The Dark ages

Medieval Ages

The Reformation

The Age of Reason or the Enlightenment

The Evangelical movement

- How did the following react: p 144

The Roman Christians

The ascetics

Francis and Dominic

Luther

Wesley

What then of our own culture? What is our story about?

What are the false assumptions which have become woven into the plot of our own lives now we are in the third millennium?

How can we identify the ways in which the present “story” is preventing us from understanding the life changing fact of salvation?

“If we do not succeed in understanding this new culture and speaking relevantly into it, whole generations will be deprived of the life which Jesus died to bring them and the focus of the Christian faith will remain elsewhere”. Discuss!



The Wild Gospel, Chapter 5 - The Gospel Today: Assessing a Culture

Some thoughts and questions:

- What does the Chinese proverb mean to you? p 155
- Our faith is not a philosophy but a relationship with God. Discuss in the context of our church p 156
- How can we get a view of our own culture from outside its shell? p 156
- How does our reliance on consumerism impact on our faith? p 160
- If you were an African living at a subsistence level, how would you describe the rest of us?
- Are we able to create a culture in which there is no false security but only dependence on God?
- We live in man's environment. What is our dependence on God?
- Have we lost touch with the spiritual world?
- The language of community. What is it and why is it important? p 161
- The language of dependence on God. What is it and why is it important? p 162
- AM's first assumption: That Jesus would challenge the materialism of our whole worldview p 162
- Second: That Jesus would challenge the religious assumptions of our society and our churches p 163



The Wild Gospel, Chapter 6 - The Task of the Church: Danger and Opportunity

Some thoughts and questions:

- Quote "The church is regarded, albeit affectionately, as irrelevant, old-fashioned and boring". Is this the case and are there exceptions? p 183
- What does "preaching the gospel" mean and is it relevant to our postmodern culture? p 183
- Which churches will still be alive at the end of the century and why? p 184



Giving in to culture; the dinosaur and the chameleon p 184

- The dinosaur of Christendom. Discuss. p 185
- The dinosaur of tradition. Discuss p 186
- The dinosaur of safe refuge. Have we set up private clubs for those whose leisure interest is religion? P 188
- The chameleon of internal reform. Why is it that churches which grow are not those which spend years rewriting the liturgy but those which don't use it? P 190
- The chameleon of social action. Will social action and care for the underprivileged fill our churches? P 192
- The chameleon of pluralism. Is Christianity unique or just another faith, as good as the rest? P 194

Riding the waves of change.

- Should we learn to fashionable or relevant? P 197
- Why is language important? p 197
- Why are assumptions important? p 200
- Why is example important? p 201

The Wild Gospel, Chapter 7 - Seizing the Moment

Some thoughts and questions:

- 'We have allowed the gospel to be reduced from something subversive and life-changing to something which seems boring and conventional'. How did we allow this to happen? p 212
- How is the culture in the West changing from that based on science, rationalism, reductionism, systematisation and certainty? p 212
- What is our task in this changing situation? p 212
- How is the modern era described as a house and how did this affect the church? p 213
- How can Christians nowadays be distinguished from their non Christian counterparts? p 213
- What do people think of our church? p 214
- Where has the beautiful picture gone wrong? p 214
- How can we define Truth? p 215



The Old Testament prophets

- What did the Old Testament prophets do to speak truth into their fractured communities? P 215
- The first task of the OT prophets was to expose the hidden pain and false optimism of the society to whom they spoke. Jeremiah laments that:
 1. Prosperity has brought complacency. How does that apply to us? p 216
 2. Moral decay and a culture of exploitation have set in amongst the people as a direct consequence of the loss of gratitude. Discuss p 217
 3. Far from bringing fulfilment, disconnection from God means that a whole society now suffers from restlessness and dissatisfaction. What is the evidence that this is happening here now? p 218
- We are watching a whole society exchange the truth about God for a lie p 220
- What was Jeremiah's call? p 220
- What was Isaiah's response? p 222
- Is our faith squashed into manageable shapes and are our answers influenced by culture? p 223

New wine and old wineskins

- So where did the Pharisees go astray and what was their attitude to Jesus? p 224
- New wine into old wineskins. So what is so wrong with that and how does that speak to us today? p 225
- Are we really rejoicing in the new wine, or have we, without realising it, reverted to the carefully nurtured richness of the old? p 225
- What about the other questions asked in this paragraph?
- Have we really taken on board the warning that new wine cannot be put into old wineskins, lest they burst, and the wine be lost? p 226

Questions for the church

- What, in what we do as a church, is done simply because that's the way it's always been done? p226
- What about the other questions asked in this paragraph?
- Do we dare to take the gospel out of the box we have allowed it to settle into, and listen to God's voice afresh? p 226
- What about the other questions asked in this paragraph?
- If the gospel is to be successfully communicated, it must be expressed in the language of the culture, focussed into the assumptions of the culture and offered as an example to the culture. p 227

The Wild Gospel, Chapter 8 - Changing Individuals: Living in the Truth of Christ

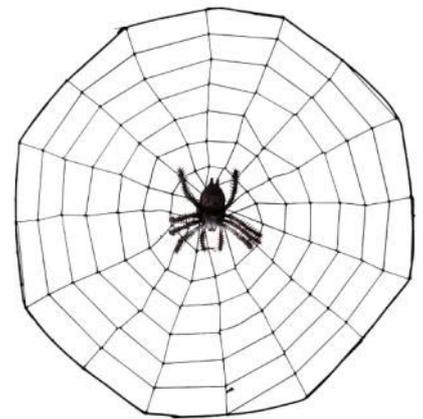
Some thoughts and questions:

Happiness

- What is happiness and how can we achieve it? p 233
- What is the world's view and why doesn't it work? p 234
- Thomas Aquinas suggested that the innate desire for happiness can only come from God, who is himself happiness. p 233

Truth

- Discuss the concept of the spider's web with us stuck like flies to the threads p 234
- How does this concept tie in with the Truth and with the promise of Freedom? p 234/5
- What is the Truth that Jesus brings? p 234 -8
- What is the Freedom that Jesus promises us? p 235
- How does the Word of God come into the equation? p 238
- The word of God is like a seed, sown by a farmer..... p 240
- Becoming a Christian is not an arrival but a departure. Why is this so? p 243
- What is the true meaning of 'The truth will set you free', p 247



Freedom

- There are examples of people who have been "set free" in this chapter. Is each one of us set free and is it obvious to others? Do we know of any who have been set free?
- What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians when he says "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" p 251
- The untruth causes us not to be free. What are the untruths in our lives? What are we going to do about them? p 255
- "Do we soldier on unaware that we are bound by beliefs we didn't even know we had, pursuing a happiness that seems partially ours and yet never quite within our grasp, and knowing at some level we have not yet found what we are looking for"? p 256
- We must have confidence in the of the truth we have received p 257
- Of ourselves, are we powerless to bring about change? p 258
- "Truth is the self-expression of God, and God is a spiritual being. Spoken by God in creation, made living in Jesus, it is now made available to us through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth himself." Talk about this. p 259

The Wild Gospel, Chapter 9 - Renewing the Church: Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit

Some thoughts and questions:

- Can you summarize this chapter in just a few sentences?
- Why is healing a spiritual matter? p 266

Looking back

- What has happened to the church since the first Pentecost? p 266 - 268
- When the church has been open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it has been effective in continuing the work of Jesus, and when it has relied on its own human resources, it has merged with its culture and lost its way. Discuss. p 268/9



The role of the Holy Spirit

- Why do you think that the charismatic renewal has resulted in growth most clearly seen in parts of the world not affected by the rationalistic legacy of modernism? p 269
- How can we, individually, be open to the Holy Spirit? p 271
- The Christian life is “about being made whole, or being saved or being healed” What does this mean? p 271
- The Holy Spirit is able to bring healing not just to the body but also to the soul. Discuss p 273
- What will listening to the Holy Spirit mean to us? p 278

A creative diversity?

- Talk about diversity in our churches, our worship and form. p 280
- What new forms of church do we know about and have experienced? p 286
- What about the children? p 287
- People are seeking spiritual experiences. How can our church satisfy these people? p 290
- Can we renew the church with our own resources? p 291/2

The Wild Gospel, Chapter 10 - Relating to the World: Living in the love of the Father

Some thoughts and questions for discussion:

- Can you summarize this chapter in just a few sentences?

Discuss the following statements:

- 'When the gospel is proclaimed counterculturally, many have found faith and the church has grown; but when the gospel has been accommodated to the culture, the church has stagnated' p 300
- 'We must be both culturally aware and countercultural. We must move with the culture without being disorientated by it'. p 301
- 'The truth that we need is love'. p 305

Thinking about the Church

- In England, research shows that it is little churches, or big churches divided into little units, that are growing the fastest. p 308
- Churches which embody truth most poignantly in the postmodern culture will be churches which are no longer primarily institutional sustained by the vertical bonds of hierarchy, but which are relational, formed through the horizontal bonds of peer relationships. p 308
- We are not selling a product but inviting people into a relationship, first with us, and through us with God himself. p 309

Finding meaning in a meaningless world

- 'We have come to live in a chaotic world whose incomprehensibility sucks meaning from our lives and leaves us in a void of uncertainty and doubt' p315
- For us, 'the theory which best explains the continued existence of the universe is the Spirit of God, breathed out at the beginning of time and articulated in a Word which still speaks today'. p 317
- 'We live in a world of dislocated meaning, a complex world in which we struggle to find a place for ourselves'. How do we cope with this? p 318
- 'We live in a world which knows that happiness is intangible, yet which stumbles on blindly trying to buy it'. What is Jesus' answer to this? p 320
- 'We find ourselves in a world in which people are increasingly spiritually aware, but the traditional framework of interpretation has been lost'. p 322

The challenge to the Church

- 'The Christianity of the modern West has, in many ways, become indistinguishable from the materialistic society of capitalism, democracy and consumerism within which it lives'. p 324
- How is it that renewal has spread in the West? p 325
- What happens when a church sees its task not as meeting social needs but in being a prophetic signpost to the community in which it is set? p 326
- Read through the last paragraph of the chapter and discuss it together. p 329



Please let us know if you have found this material helpful! [Contact Alison.](#)