

THE LIFE and TEACHINGS OF CHRIST

a journey through the 4 gospels



**The Gospels of
Matthew - Mark - Luke - John**

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Bruce R. Edwards

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Jesus said:

- 1. I Am the Bread of Life:** (John 6).
- 2. I Am the Light of the World** (John 8).
- 3. I Am the Gate of the Sheepfold:** (John 10).
- 4. I Am the Good Shepherd** (John 10).
- 5. I Am the Resurrection and the Life:** (John 11).
- 6. I Am the Way, Truth, and Life:** (John 14).
- 7. I Am the True Vine:** (John 15).

Preface

For over 40 years, I have had the privilege of pastoring and teaching the Word of God, guiding believers to a deeper understanding of their faith. Throughout this journey, one truth has remained central: the life of Christ is the cornerstone of our faith, setting Christianity apart from any other religion or philosophy. The purpose of this book, *The Life of Christ: A Journey Through the Four Gospels*, is to provide a clear and in-depth study of the life of Jesus Christ as told by the Gospel writers, with the goal of helping you not only understand Him but also experience a personal relationship with Him.

This book is born out of my passion for helping people comprehend the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ and His compassion for people. In the pages of the Gospels, we see the full picture of Jesus: His supernatural birth, His early years, and the start of His transformative ministry. We witness His miracles, His profound teachings, His sacrificial death on the cross, and His miraculous resurrection. These events are not mere stories; they are eyewitness testimonies that reveal the heart and mission of the Savior of the world. The Gospels give us a window into the life of Jesus as Emmanuel—God with us—living, breathing, and walking among humanity.

At the center of this journey is the supernatural life of Jesus. His miracles displayed His power over nature, sickness, and death, revealing His divine authority. His death on the cross demonstrated His sacrificial love, and His resurrection proved His victory over sin and death, securing eternal life for all who believe. The life of Christ is the source of the Gospel's power

and the foundation of our hope. As Jesus Himself declared in Luke 4:18-19:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

This book is an invitation to journey through the Gospels, exploring the life of Christ in its fullness. My prayer is that as you read, you will not only learn about Jesus but come to know Him as your personal Lord and Savior. This is more than a study; it is an opportunity to experience the life-changing power of Christ and to embrace the abundant life He offers.

The Gospels provide us with a front-row seat to the life of the One who changed history forever. Through this study, I hope to put into context the supernatural and historical reality of Jesus, helping you see Him through the eyes of those who walked with Him, listened to His words, and witnessed His works. May this journey deepen your faith, enrich your understanding, and draw you closer to the One who came to give life and life more abundantly.

It is my heartfelt prayer that this book will inspire you to follow Jesus more closely, love Him more deeply, and share His love with those around you. May you encounter the risen Christ within these pages and experience the transformative power of knowing Him. For truly, the life of Christ is the center of our faith and the source of our hope. May this journey bring you closer to the Savior who came to set the captives free and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Introduction

Who is Jesus? Why did He come? Is Jesus really God? Can we trust the Gospels? What about His miracles? Did the resurrection truly happen? These are the questions that define not only the Christian faith but the very essence of human existence. In *The Life and Teachings of Christ: A Journey Through the Four Gospels*, we explore these vital questions through the inspired accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The answers we uncover have the power to transform your understanding of Jesus and, more importantly, your relationship with Him.

The four Gospels are far more than historical biographies—they are the living testimony of those who witnessed the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each Gospel offers a unique perspective, providing us with a rich tapestry of His character, mission, and divine nature. Matthew presents Jesus as the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Mark portrays Him as the suffering servant, moving with urgency and power. Luke reveals Jesus as the compassionate Son of Man, bringing salvation to all. And John unveils the deity of Christ, the Word made flesh who dwelt among us.

As we journey through the Gospels, we will see how their distinctiveness and unity give us a fuller picture of Jesus—the One who changed history and continues to change lives today. By understanding the historical and cultural context, the unique audiences each Gospel writer addressed, and the overarching narrative they present, we can answer the

questions that have echoed through the ages: Who is this man who calmed the storm, healed the sick, raised the dead, and forgave sins? Could He really be God in the flesh? And if He is, what does that mean for you and me?

For over 40 years, I have had the honor of pastoring a church of over 15,000 members, preaching several messages every week, and teaching in Bible colleges for more than 25 years. Through countless hours of studying the Scriptures, doing detailed exegesis, and sharing the life-changing message of Jesus Christ with thousands of people, I have come to realize that understanding the Gospels is essential for anyone who wants to truly know Jesus. My experience and passion for helping others grasp the profound truths of Scripture have given me a unique perspective that I am excited to share with you in this book.

This is not just another book about Jesus; it is an invitation to meet Him, to walk alongside Him as the disciples did, and to discover the depths of His love, grace, and power. Whether you are new to the faith or have walked with Christ for decades, this book will illuminate the life of Jesus in ways that will deepen your understanding and strengthen your faith.

In these pages, you will discover:

- Why the Gospels are reliable and why their eyewitness accounts matter.
- The significance of Jesus' miracles and how they reveal His divine authority.
- The profound implications of His resurrection and what it means for your life today.

- How the parables of Jesus teach timeless lessons that inspire us to live in light of eternity.

But most importantly, this book is about helping you come to know Jesus personally. My prayer is that this journey will not only inform your mind but transform your heart. As you read, may you encounter the living Christ and experience the life-changing power of His love. He is not just a figure of history; He is the Savior who calls you to follow Him and experience the abundant life He offers.

The life of Christ is at the center of our faith. It is the defining difference between Christianity and every other religion or philosophy. As you journey through the Gospels with me, I pray that the life of Jesus will come alive in your heart and that you will come to know Him as your personal Lord and Savior. Let's embark on this journey together, discovering the One who is the source of all hope, joy, and eternal life. This book is more than an exploration of history; it is an encounter with the living Christ. Will you take the journey?

As we begin this journey, we will first take a step back to provide a concise overview of the life of Jesus, highlighting the defining moments that shaped His ministry and mission. This summary will serve as a foundation, giving us a bird's-eye view of His extraordinary life—from His miraculous birth to His profound teachings, His powerful miracles, and ultimately, His victorious resurrection. Following this, we will explore the historicity and reliability of the Gospels, examining the evidence that establishes them as trustworthy and inspired accounts. Then, we will take a closer look at each Gospel individually, uncovering their unique themes,

audiences, and contributions to the larger story of Jesus. With this groundwork in place, we will dive deeply into the narrative of Christ's life, walking through the events as recorded by the Gospel writers. Together, we will trace His journey from the manger in Bethlehem to the empty tomb, uncovering timeless truths that resonate across the ages. Let us begin by exploring the life of Jesus and the impact He continues to have on the world today.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF LIFE OF JESUS

A Journey from Eternity to Eternity

The life of Jesus is a story that transcends time, bridging the gap between the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament and the fulfillment of those prophecies in the New Testament. Told through the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—His life encompasses divinity and humanity, miracles and suffering, and ultimately, redemption for all who believe. In the pages of Scripture, we witness Jesus as the preexistent Word, His miraculous birth, His childhood, His powerful ministry, and His sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension. This story is not just the story of one man, but the story of God's plan to restore humanity to Himself. Let's take a brief journey through the life of Jesus from His miraculous birth to His resurrection as told by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Preexistent Christ: A Divine Mystery

Before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He existed in eternity as the Word, or Logos, with God and as God. John 1:1-3 boldly declares, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This preexistence of Jesus is a theological cornerstone, revealing that Jesus was not a mere human teacher, but the eternal Son of God. The Old Testament offers glimpses of this truth through prophecies and theophanies, where God appears in mysterious forms. From the burning bush to the angel of the Lord, these appearances foreshadow the incarnation of the divine Word in the person of Jesus.

The Miraculous Birth: Fulfillment of Prophecy

The Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of centuries-old prophecies. In a humble manger in Bethlehem, the Creator of the Universe was born to Mary, a young virgin. This miraculous event was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, who said, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). In the quiet of that stable, the Savior entered the world, not with the grandeur one might expect from a king, but in the humblest of circumstances, signaling His mission to save all of humanity, especially the lowly and the broken.

His Childhood: The Boy Who Grew in Wisdom

Though the Gospels provide few details about Jesus' early years, they reveal enough to offer insight into His development. Luke 2:40 tells us that "the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him." His parents, Mary and Joseph, raised Him in the town of Nazareth, and He would later be known as Jesus of Nazareth. At the age of twelve, during a trip to Jerusalem, Jesus astounded the teachers of the law in the temple with His understanding (Luke 2:46-47), signaling His divine wisdom even as a child. Yet, He humbly submitted to His parents, demonstrating His obedience and the heart of a servant leader.

The Beginning of His Ministry: Baptism and Temptation

At around thirty years old, Jesus began His public ministry, marking the fulfillment of His divine mission. His ministry started with His baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Though John was reluctant, recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus insisted, saying it was "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). As He emerged from the

water, the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove, while a voice from heaven declared, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). This moment affirmed Jesus' divine sonship and marked the beginning of His public revelation.

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. For forty days, He fasted and was tempted in ways that mirrored the struggles of Israel and all of humanity. Yet, each time, He responded with Scripture, demonstrating His perfect obedience to God's will and His readiness to face the mission that lay ahead.

The Calling of the Apostles: A Team of Misfits

As He began His public ministry, Jesus called twelve men to follow Him, a ragtag group of fishermen, a tax collector, and others from various walks of life. These apostles would serve as the foundation of His Church. Their initial understanding of Jesus' mission was often limited, but over time, they would witness His miracles, hear His teachings, and eventually become the leaders of the early Christian movement.

Jesus' choice of these men reveals much about His character and mission. He didn't call the powerful or the perfect; instead, He chose ordinary individuals, empowering them to become extraordinary through their relationship with Him. It's a reminder that Jesus sees potential in people that others may overlook, and He calls all of us, regardless of our past, to follow Him.

The Miracles: Revealing the Kingdom of God

Throughout His ministry, Jesus performed a multitude of miracles—healings, exorcisms, control over nature, and even raising the dead. These miracles were not random acts of kindness but signs pointing to the in-breaking Kingdom of God. Whether He healed the blind, made the lame walk, or

calmed the storm, each act demonstrated His authority over creation and His compassion for humanity. His miracles revealed that He was not just a teacher, but the Messiah, sent to restore what was broken by sin.

The most profound of these miracles was the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44), which foreshadowed His own resurrection and confirmed that He had the power to give life to the dead—both physically and spiritually.

The Crucifixion: The Ultimate Sacrifice

As the Gospels move toward the climax of Jesus' earthly ministry, we see His suffering, death, and ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world. The religious leaders, threatened by Jesus' popularity and His challenge to their authority, conspired to arrest Him. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, submitting His will to the Father, despite the agony He knew He would face.

Jesus was betrayed by one of His own disciples, Judas Iscariot, and arrested. After a series of trials, He was condemned to die by crucifixion, a brutal Roman execution. On the cross, Jesus bore the weight of humanity's sin, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:5: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities." His death was the ultimate act of love, as He took the punishment that we deserved, offering forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

The Resurrection: Triumph Over Death

Three days after His crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead, just as He had promised. His resurrection was the decisive victory over sin, death, and the grave. When the women arrived at His tomb to anoint His body, they were greeted by an angel who proclaimed, "He is not here; He has risen!" (Luke 24:6). Jesus appeared to His disciples and many others, proving that He

had conquered death. His resurrection was the guarantee of eternal life for all who believe in Him.

The Ascension: Returning to the Father

After spending forty days with His disciples, teaching them about the Kingdom of God, Jesus ascended into heaven. As His followers watched, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. The angels appeared and promised that He would return in the same way He had gone (Acts 1:9-11). The Ascension marked the end of Jesus' earthly ministry but the beginning of the work of His Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry His message to the ends of the earth.

Conclusion: A Savior Who Transcends Time

From His preexistence to His Ascension, the life of Jesus is a story of divine love and sacrificial service. His life is the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, and His death and resurrection offer hope for all who believe in Him. Jesus' life challenges us to follow Him, to embrace His teachings, and to live out the love He modeled. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Indeed, the life of Jesus is the greatest story ever told, a story that continues to change lives today, as we await His glorious return.

HISTORICITY OF GOSPELS

What is the historical reliability of the Gospels? Do they faithfully preserve the eyewitness testimony of Jesus's life and ministry? Are they the products of collaboration, adaptation, or independent authorship? How does that influence the reliability of the Bible? To answer these questions let's take a look at what the gospels tell us about the places, people, culture, and events during the first century.

Let's start with where the Bible tells us Jesus grew up. It was in the small town of Nazareth, located on a hill in Galilee. It was a modest place, located about fifteen miles west of the Sea of Galilee and thirty miles east of the Mediterranean. Jerusalem lay nearly a hundred miles to the south. Though unremarkable on its own, Nazareth overlooked a vibrant region with larger, more significant towns nearby.

To the south lay Beth Shan, a bustling city adorned with grand Greek-style columns lining its main street. This street, oriented to catch the last rays of the setting sun, reflected the city's Hellenistic culture. Beth Shan, though situated in the land of Israel, catered to sun worshippers, offering a civic center, public baths, and even darker corners where human flesh was bought and sold.

Further to the west stood Maritime Caesarea, a magnificent port city built by Herod the Great. Its Roman aqueduct, stretching twenty miles from Mount Carmel, brought fresh water to the city and cast dramatic shadows over the sand dunes. The amphitheater in Caesarea was a marvel of engineering, where whispers from the stage could be heard clearly by 5,000 people seated at the very top.

Closer to Nazareth, there was Sepphoris—a city blending Jewish traditions with Greek and Roman influences. Although Nazareth was in Israel, the culture surrounding it was deeply

Hellenistic, as evidenced even in Jerusalem, where more than half of the tomb inscriptions were written in Greek. This was the world Jesus grew up in—a Jewish boy in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4), surrounded by the influences of a foreign culture.

The Carpenter of Nazareth

Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, was a carpenter—an artisan and small businessman. By Jewish custom, every man, regardless of status or education, was expected to have a trade. This was a far cry from the Greek perspective, which looked down on manual labor. After Joseph's death, which likely occurred when Jesus was between twelve and thirty, Jesus would have taken on the responsibility of supporting His mother and younger siblings through His carpentry work.

The Arrival of John the Baptist

After centuries of silence, John the Baptist burst onto the scene. For 400 years, Israel had not seen a prophet, and for 200 years, they had been under foreign domination. John's arrival was electrifying. His message was simple yet powerful: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

These words stirred deep hopes among the people. For them, "the kingdom" didn't mean the church—it meant the reign of God. And if God's reign was near, then Rome's rule was on the brink of collapse. John's fiery preaching, wild appearance, and unwavering call for repentance drew throngs of people to the wilderness.

When asked if he was the Messiah, John denied it. "There is one coming after me who is mightier than I," he declared. Then, one day, Jesus came to be baptized by John. At that moment, the Spirit descended upon Him, marking the beginning of His public ministry.

The Quiet Start of Jesus' Ministry

Jesus' ministry began quietly. He traveled through Galilee and Judea, performing small miracles, teaching individuals like Nicodemus—a prominent Pharisee—and a Samaritan woman at a well. Gradually, He gathered disciples.

But then, everything changed. Suddenly, Jesus began healing multitudes and teaching great crowds. His miracles were undeniable. The blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, and the demon-possessed were set free. These acts sparked widespread amazement and uncontrollable gossip.

A Radical Teacher

What set Jesus apart wasn't just His miracles—it was also the company He kept and the authority with which He spoke. He dined with tax collectors, sinners, and outcasts, breaking societal norms. The nobodies loved Him for it, but the somebodies—particularly the religious authorities—were less enthusiastic.

Jesus also spoke with a boldness that unnerved the Pharisees. While rabbis typically quoted others to establish authority, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you..." His words carried the weight of someone who didn't just interpret truth but embodied it.

His miracles further stirred controversy. When He healed, He did so as if the power was His own. "I am willing," He said to the leper. "Be clean." Such actions led some to believe He was dangerous, even blasphemous. Envy and opposition grew among the leaders, setting the stage for the climactic events that would follow.

The Beginning of the Gospel Story

And so, the Gospels begin—not just as a record of Jesus' life but as the unfolding of the greatest story ever told. From His

humble beginnings in Nazareth to His revolutionary teachings and miraculous works, Jesus turned the world upside down. He challenged cultural norms, redefined holiness, and revealed the heart of God.

Over the coming weeks, we will dive deeper into the life and ministry of Jesus, exploring the profound truths of the Gospels and their relevance to our lives today. Let us embark on this journey together, with open hearts and expectant spirits, ready to learn from the One who changed history forever.

Jesus frequently withdrew from the crowds to spend time with His disciples. Yet, even His disciples often struggled to understand His teachings. At times, they seemed just as perplexed as the masses. To aid their comprehension, Jesus used parables—stories that were easy to remember yet encoded with deeper truths. These parables served a dual purpose: they helped His disciples grasp His teachings while confounding His opponents, leaving them unsure of His true message.

After months of training His disciples, Jesus returned to the public eye, this time heading south to Jerusalem, the temple districts. For many of His disciples, it may have been their first visit to the grand city. The temple courts were awe-inspiring, stretching about 1,500 feet in length and 1,000 feet in width—roughly 35 acres. The polished marble floors gleamed underfoot, and the temple itself, adorned with gold, shone so brightly that people claimed it could blind you if viewed at sunset.

But while the temple's exterior radiated grandeur, Jesus saw the corruption within. This supposed house of prayer had become a den of thieves. In a dramatic act, He cleansed the temple, overturning money tables and driving out the animals. How did one man accomplish such a feat? Was it the sheer force of righteousness that left others stunned and compliant?

Or was it the guilt of those who knew He was right? Whatever the case, His actions were bold and unmistakable. He didn't just disrupt business; He challenged the entire system, calling for the temple to return to its true purpose.

This act earned Him powerful enemies. While some Pharisees debated His teachings and even admired His wisdom and miracles, others saw Him as a threat. However, it was the high priests—those with vested commercial interests in the temple—who became His most determined adversaries. They resolved to eliminate Jesus, twisting His words and actions to convince Pilate to authorize His execution.

The day of Jesus' crucifixion was anything but ordinary. Even for Roman soldiers accustomed to grim executions, this one stood out. Jesus died unusually quickly; crucifixions often lasted days, but His life ended in mere hours. Nature itself seemed to mourn: darkness covered the land for three hours, an earthquake shook the ground, and tombs opened. Even in His final moments, Jesus ministered—teaching, forgiving, and converting. His extraordinary composure and actions led a Roman centurion to declare, "Surely this was the Son of God."

His disciples, however, struggled to make sense of it all. Grief-stricken and confused, they failed to grasp the full significance of His death and the reports of His resurrection. When Jesus appeared to two of them on the road, they didn't recognize Him at first. He gently questioned their sadness, and they explained, "We had hoped He would redeem Israel." Only later did they realize who He was. Over the next few days, He appeared to others—first to individuals, then to groups, including one skeptic who needed to touch His wounds to believe. Eventually, He appeared to over 500 people at once. Though some still harbored doubts, most were convinced enough to dedicate their lives to His mission, spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth. They lived and died for the

truth of His resurrection, carrying forward what truly is the greatest story ever told.

However, this story has not gone unchallenged. Critics have long questioned the historicity of the Gospels, arguing that they were written decades after the events they describe by people who never met Jesus. Some, like Stephen Mitchell in his book *The Gospel According to Jesus*, claim the Gospels are riddled with inconsistencies and fabrications. Mitchell, quoting Thomas Jefferson, likens the task of finding the “authentic” Jesus to sifting diamonds from dung hills, discarding miracles and supernatural elements as later inventions. Groups like the Jesus Seminar have even gone so far as to vote on the authenticity of Jesus’ sayings, assigning colors to indicate their likelihood of being genuine. By their reckoning, less than 20% of Jesus’ words are “probably or certainly” authentic.

This skeptical approach raises significant questions. Why would anyone execute a man who merely taught, “Love your enemies,” “Turn the other cheek,” or “Blessed are the poor”? Such a benign figure wouldn’t have provoked the ire of the religious and political authorities. The sanitized, non-miraculous Jesus constructed by these scholars lacks the power to explain the revolutionary impact He had on His followers and the world.

C.S. Lewis famously addressed this skepticism with his “trilemma” argument: Jesus claimed to be the Lord. If this claim were false, He was either a liar—one of the most despicable deceivers in history—or a lunatic, sincerely deluded about His own divinity. Few find either option palatable. The only remaining possibility is that He truly is Lord. To dismiss this claim as mere legend—the fourth “L” often proposed by skeptics—requires ignoring the early and widespread belief in His divinity and the willingness of His followers to die for their faith.

Ultimately, Christianity stands or falls on the truth of this story. It's not just the greatest story ever told; it's the greatest true story ever told. If it's merely a legend, then our faith is in vain. But if it's true, then it demands our attention, our belief, and our devotion.

Who Wrote the Gospels?

The question of who wrote the Gospels is more than a matter of curiosity—it's foundational to understanding their credibility. If the Gospels were written decades after the events they describe, far removed from the original locations, by people with no firsthand knowledge or access to reliable records, the argument for the Gospels as “legend” gains traction. However, if the Gospels were authored by individuals who witnessed the events, collaborated with others who were present, and wrote within a reasonable time frame after the events, the “legend” argument falls apart. Instead, we find strong grounds for trusting the Gospels as accurate historical records of Jesus' life and ministry.

The Historicity of Jesus

To examine the historicity of Jesus, let's imagine we're in a graduate-level history seminar at a secular university. What would historians accept as trustworthy sources about His life?

Certain facts about Jesus are virtually indisputable. He existed, grew up in Nazareth, became an itinerant preacher, gathered disciples, encountered opposition from authorities, and was ultimately crucified. These are not contentious claims—they're widely accepted, even by secular scholars.

But the remarkable part of Jesus' story begins after His crucifixion. Something extraordinary happened that transformed His movement. Despite His ignominious death, the movement not only survived but grew exponentially. Within 280 years, Christianity became the dominant religion

of the Roman Empire, despite relentless persecution. By the end of this period, an estimated seven million Christians existed—roughly 14% of the Roman population—willing to endure the loss of property, imprisonment, and even death for their faith. Secular historians cannot deny the seismic impact of Jesus’ life and the early church.

The Influence of Jesus

What kind of influence did Jesus have? Was He a transformative thinker like Plato or Karl Marx, whose ideas changed the world? Or was His influence more akin to that of leaders like Martin Luther, Abraham Lincoln, or Alexander the Great, whose personalities and actions shaped history?

Both are true to an extent, but the key to Jesus’ influence lies in something far greater—His resurrection. This singular event is the centerpiece of His impact. It transformed a group of disillusioned, fearful disciples into bold men and women who changed the world. They were willing to die for what they believed because they knew it was true. People may die for lies, but no one willingly dies for what they know to be a lie.

Even Roman historians like Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Julius Africanus, as well as Jewish sources, provide references to Jesus’ life and influence. While these sources are limited, they corroborate His existence and impact. Yet, the primary sources for understanding Jesus’ life remain the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Evaluating Other Sources

What about other sources, such as the Gospel of Thomas? This text contains sayings of Jesus, some of which align with the canonical Gospels, while others are troubling or inconsistent—for instance, the claim that a woman must become like a man to be saved. Other apocryphal texts, like

the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, narrate stories about Jesus' childhood, filling in gaps left by the canonical Gospels.

One such story describes Jesus as a boy fashioning sparrows from mud, only to clap His hands and bring them to life after being reprimanded for working on the Sabbath. Another tale recounts Jesus striking a boy dead for annoying Him and later resurrecting him to appease his parents. These apocryphal accounts, while colorful, lack the historical reliability and theological coherence of the canonical Gospels. As one early church historian noted, "The church has four Gospels; heresy has a great many."

The Gospels as the Main Source

The four canonical Gospels remain the most reliable and comprehensive sources for understanding the life of Christ. They were written by individuals intimately connected to the events they describe or by those who carefully compiled eyewitness accounts. Unlike fragmented or fantastical apocryphal texts, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John provide a coherent narrative that aligns with the Old Testament prophecies and the historical context of Jesus' time.

As one early church historian put it, the church has four Gospels, heresy has a great many. There are over 50 fragments or whole stories of parts of the life of Christ. Some of them just have Jesus' words, like the Gospel of Thomas, others have deeds from some part of Jesus' life, like an entirely different book, "The Infancy Gospel of Thomas," that only tells about Jesus' early days.

Again, gospels like the Gospel of Thomas are just words of Jesus, a lot of them close to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and with some very strange things too, like a woman has to become a man to be saved.

What we are left with, then, are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are the foundation. How can you be sure that you can trust them, that they're reliable, that these things really happened? First, in Bible times, training was largely memory work. That is to say, Jewish students were required to memorize the words of their rabbis. They were ready to graduate when they could quote verbatim the essential teachings of the rabbis under whose training they sat.

The Trustworthiness of the Four Gospels

What we are left with, then, are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are the foundation. How can you be sure that you can trust them, that they're reliable, that these things really happened? Can we trust them as an accurate record of the life of Jesus? How do we know that these accounts truly reflect what happened and aren't just fabrications or embellished tales?

First, we must recognize the historical context in which these stories were preserved. In Jesus' time, much of education was rooted in memory. Young Jewish students were taught to memorize the sayings and teachings of their rabbis. Their goal was to graduate only when they could quote their rabbi's words verbatim, preserving the accuracy of their teachings.

Second, it was perfectly acceptable to paraphrase or condense a story to make it easier to understand or remember. But there was one cardinal rule: no fabrications. Stories could be summarized, but no one was allowed to add details or create new elements that weren't true. This was especially important for historical accuracy. A case in point is the so-called "Acts of Paul," a later work that attempted to expand the legacy of Paul. Although it was written with good intentions, it was eventually discredited and removed from the historical record for its fabrications.

Historical Accuracy and Written Records

Third, despite what some might say, there were indeed written records during this period. Scholars like E.E. Ellis point out that it wasn't uncommon for students to write down teachings on whatever materials they had available—even if it was the sleeve of their shirt! In a world where the average person owned only a handful of garments, writing was still a viable method of preserving important teachings. While it may seem strange by modern standards, this shows that recording information was an accepted and practiced tradition.

Fourth, Jesus spoke in memorable ways. He used poetic language and powerful parables that stuck with those who heard Him. Even today, we remember the stories and teachings that resonated deeply with us. Likewise, the events of Jesus' life—such as His miracles and teachings—were memorable enough to leave an indelible mark on the minds of those who witnessed them.

Memories That Last a Lifetime

Finally, Jesus' life was filled with events that were impossible to forget. Think about your own life for a moment: Are there moments so significant that you could never forget them, no matter how much time passed? I know I have a memory I'll never forget. Back in 1972, as a teenager, I was wrongfully taken into police custody for the murder of a policeman. The circumstances were wild, and although I was innocent, the experience left a vivid imprint on my mind. I can still recall the officer's appearance, his exact words, and the feel of the gun pointed at me. It's an event I could recount in detail, even after all these years.

Now, if you witnessed the lame walking, demons being cast out with a word, or storms silenced in an instant—do you think you would ever forget those moments? I don't think so. For those who walked with Jesus, these events were burned into

their memories, and there was no reason for them to forget. These Gospels weren't just stories—they were the records of people who gave their lives for the truth they had witnessed.

The Unshakeable Foundation of the Gospels

The Gospel writers were eyewitnesses or closely connected to those who were. Their accounts, though sometimes written years after the events, are deeply reliable. They tell the true story of Jesus: a man who claimed to be Lord, who lived a perfect life, and whose death and resurrection offer the world the hope of eternal salvation.

In the end, the Gospels are not just old stories. They are reliable accounts of the life of Jesus, passed down faithfully through the ages. They remind us that Jesus truly was who He said He was, and that His life, death, and resurrection changed the world forever.

Conclusion

The Gospel accounts are not mere works of pure myth or fabrications. They are historical documents rooted in the social, religious, and cultural contexts of their time. Yet, like any ancient historical source, they come with inherent limitations, including questions of authorship, transmission, and interpretation.

To categorically dismiss the Gospels as wholly unreliable is to overlook the valuable insights they offer. Through careful analysis and critical examination, we can glean a profound understanding of the historical Jesus—a figure whose influence has reverberated through centuries.

The four gospels give an accurate portrayal of people, places, customs, and events in the land of Israel in the first century. We know that the people mentioned are historical characters—they actually did exist. In addition, the places

match up geographically with what we know about first century Israel.

The customs fit well with the times. Events recorded are also consistent with what we know occurred. The gospels are not only accurate, they are minutely accurate. Consequently, their testimony concerning anything they record should be taken seriously.

Therefore, when all the evidence is considered, we find that the gospels match up with the known history of that time. The people were real people, the cities existed, the customs were exactly as stated, and the events actually occurred. When all of the evidence is analyzed without prejudice or preconceived bias the four Gospels are historically reliable records of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The Reliability of the Gospels

The Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—stand as the cornerstone of Christian faith, but why can we trust them? Let's explore the reasons, grounded in history and logic, that affirm their reliability.

The Power of Trained Memory

In the ancient world, people relied heavily on their memory to pass down information. Oral traditions were not casual or haphazard; they were precise and carefully preserved. Communities developed techniques to ensure accurate recall, and individuals were trained to memorize teachings and events with remarkable fidelity.

Additionally, Jesus' teaching style supported this process. He spoke in memorable ways, often using poetry, parables, and striking imagery. His words were crafted to stick in the minds of his listeners. Memorable events, like miraculous healings, also engraved themselves in people's minds, ensuring they were not easily forgotten.

Historical Standards and Written Records

The Gospels were written during a time when history-writing was taken seriously. Fabrication and falsehoods would have been unacceptable, especially in a culture that valued eyewitness testimony. Written records were also kept, further reinforcing the accuracy of the accounts. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul distinguishes between his own words and direct quotes from Jesus, underscoring the care taken to preserve Jesus' teachings.

Preserving Jesus' Unique Voice

The Gospels reflect Jesus' distinct way of referring to Himself. He frequently called Himself the "Son of Man," a title used

over a hundred times in the Gospels but rarely outside of them. In Acts 7, when Stephen is martyred, he uniquely refers to seeing "the Son of Man," reinforcing that this phrase was not invented by the early church but was authentically tied to Jesus.

The care with which the early church preserved Jesus' words is evident in their consistency and specificity. If the term "Son of Man" had been fabricated, we would expect it to appear more broadly in Christian writings. Instead, it remains uniquely tied to Jesus, demonstrating the meticulous effort to preserve His voice.

Living Witnesses

Another compelling reason to trust the Gospels is the presence of living witnesses. When the Gospels were circulated, many people who had encountered Jesus were still alive. If the stories were false, they could easily have been refuted. For instance, if there had never been a man named Jairus whose daughter was raised from the dead or a widow whose son was resurrected, people in those towns would have known and discredited the accounts. The widespread acceptance of the Gospels suggests that their claims were verifiable and credible.

The Sacrifice of the Disciples

The disciples of Jesus gave their lives for the truth of the Gospel stories. People do not willingly die for something they know to be a lie. Their sacrifices lend weight to the authenticity of their testimonies. Furthermore, even secular historians acknowledge the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth as a man who had a ministry, gathered crowds, and was crucified. The Gospels provide the details that complete this narrative, supported by historical and archaeological evidence.

Archaeological Evidence

The physical geography and landmarks mentioned in the Gospels align with archaeological discoveries. Locations such as the Pool of Siloam, Solomon's Colonnade, and Jacob's Well have been identified and validated. These tangible proofs affirm the historical context of the Gospel accounts, giving us confidence that the events they describe occurred in real places.

Ultimately, presenting the reliability of the Gospels clears the ground for meaningful conversations. While evidence alone cannot compel faith, it provides a foundation for engaging with skeptics and inviting them to consider the truth. The Holy Spirit does the work of persuasion, but our role is to ensure the Gospels are not dismissed as mere fables.

The Land of Palestine and Its People

To understand the Gospels, it is essential to grasp the land and culture in which Jesus lived. The physical and social landscape of Palestine shaped the events recorded in the New Testament.

A Small and Divided Land

From 5 BC to 70 AD, Palestine was a small and divided territory under foreign occupation. It consisted of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Judea proper measured only thirty by fifty miles, smaller than some U.S. states like Rhode Island. Despite its size, the land was further divided into sub-districts, influencing daily life and governance.

The geography of Palestine varied significantly. The coastal regions were flat and fertile, ideal for agriculture. A few miles inland, mountains rose, leading to a central plateau where Jerusalem stood at 2,500 feet above sea level. Just a short distance from Jerusalem, the terrain dropped dramatically to

the Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth. This diversity created distinct zones within a compact area, shaping the livelihoods and cultures of its inhabitants.

A Dry but Livable Climate

Palestine's climate was dry but not barren, resembling parts of Colorado. Rainfall varied by region, with Nazareth receiving around twenty inches annually, while Jerusalem saw about fifteen inches. The southern regions, including the Dead Sea area, were arid wastelands. Water was precious, and its scarcity influenced both daily life and biblical metaphors. Forests were sparse, with trees scattered widely, making them more symbolic than practical.

A Densely Populated Region

Palestine was densely populated, possibly one of the most crowded areas of the Roman Empire. Villages were just a few miles apart, allowing the disciples to travel light, knowing they could find provisions nearby. Of the estimated four to five million Jews in the ancient world, only about 500,000 lived in Palestine. The rest of the population included Gentiles—Greeks, Romans, Scythians, and others—making it a multicultural region.

A Multilingual Society

Most people in Palestine were bilingual, speaking both Greek and Aramaic. Greek was the dominant language of commerce and culture, as evidenced by tomb inscriptions in Jerusalem, the majority of which were written in Greek. While the Jewish population was religiously aware, their devotion varied. Much like modern America, many identified with their religion culturally rather than practicing it devoutly.

Social and Religious Leaders

Palestinian society was structured around various groups. The high priests, appointed by Roman authorities, wielded political power but were often seen as collaborators. Their wealth and influence contrasted with their lack of spiritual leadership. In contrast, the Pharisees and scribes were respected for their dedication to the Law. Though their numbers were small—about 6,000 in a population of a million—their influence was significant due to their perceived holiness and commitment to applying God's Law to daily life.

The Pharisees' meticulousness extended to everyday actions. For example, they debated whether spitting on the ground on the Sabbath could inadvertently cause a seed to germinate, thus constituting work. While their intentions were to honor God's commands, their legalism often missed the heart of the Law, leading to tensions with Jesus' teachings.

Understanding the Religious and Political Landscape of Jesus' Time

The world of first-century Judea was a complex interplay of religious factions and political rulers. To better grasp the context of Jesus' ministry, we need to understand the prominent groups and figures that influenced the society of His time. These included the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes, and Roman authorities, each playing a significant role in shaping the cultural and spiritual climate.

The Pharisees: Guardians of the Law

In a book called the *Mishnah*, there are about forty pages of rules designed to prevent any violation of the Sabbath. This meticulous approach exemplifies the Pharisees' effort to give the law of God a "concrete application." While their intentions were noble, their approach often veered toward legalism.

Their Beliefs and Practices

The Pharisees believed in eternal life and the imperishability of the soul. They held that God rewards those who do good and punishes evildoers. They advocated for living simply and generously, emphasizing the importance of following the written law of Moses and the oral traditions that interpreted it for contemporary situations.

According to the Pharisees, life was a balance between divine grace and human merit. They believed God granted people a good impulse alongside a bad one. By following the good impulse and adhering to God's law, they thought one could live a life pleasing to Him. This worldview combined sovereign power with human responsibility, leading to a strong emphasis on obedience and rule-keeping.

Admirable Yet Flawed

The Pharisees fasted twice a week, drinking only water from sunup to sundown, to demonstrate their reliance on God. In many ways, they were admirable—noble in their dedication to preserving Jewish culture and resisting Greek and Roman influences. However, their confidence in their own ability to please God and their prioritization of rules over relationship with Him revealed their legalistic tendencies.

Their legalism ultimately led to opposition to Jesus, whose teachings challenged their rigid interpretations. Despite their zeal, the Pharisees' emphasis on human effort overshadowed the grace of God, making them the group most frequently confronted by Jesus in the Gospels.

The Sadducees: Literalists and Aristocrats

The Sadducees claimed to adhere strictly to biblical authority, often positioning themselves as the true followers of God's

Word. In contrast to the Pharisees, they rejected oral traditions and focused on a literal interpretation of the Scriptures.

Their Beliefs and Influence

The Sadducees denied the supernatural. They did not believe in angels, demons, the resurrection of the dead, or an afterlife. For them, adherence to the law of Moses brought rewards in this life, and that was the end. This perspective aligned with their connections to the priestly and ruling elite, as well as their aristocratic and wealthy status.

Their worldview was practically deistic: God had given the law and left humanity to its own devices. Unsurprisingly, the Sadducees were tightly connected to the high priests and the political establishment, often prioritizing material wealth and power over spiritual matters. As a result, they were unpopular among the general populace.

Herod the Great: Builder and Tyrant

No discussion of first-century Judea would be complete without mentioning Herod the Great, the king during Jesus' birth. Renowned for his architectural achievements—including the construction of the new temple—Herod was equally infamous for his paranoia and cruelty.

A Ruthless Ruler

Herod's ambition was evident even in his youth. One story recounts how, unarmed and bathing, he intimidated four sworn enemies into fleeing rather than attacking him. This reputation for fearlessness and skill earned him the title "Herod the Great."

However, his later years were marked by paranoia and brutality. Herod ordered the execution of his favorite wife and three of his sons, fearing they were plotting against him. His

cruelty extended to the infamous massacre of the children in Bethlehem, a decree entirely in line with his character.

A Legacy of Fear

As Herod approached death, he locked 200 Judean leaders in a hippodrome, ordering their execution upon his death to ensure mourning throughout the land. This vicarious mourning plan epitomized his desperate desire for control and legacy. Despite his contributions to infrastructure, Herod's reign is remembered more for his tyranny than his achievements.

The Roman Procurators and Governors

The Roman governors played a pivotal role in maintaining control over Judea. Among them, Pontius Pilate stands out for his interactions with Jesus. Pilate's rule exemplified the delicate balance Roman authorities sought to maintain between appeasing the Jewish population and asserting their dominance.

Pilate's Provocations

In 26 AD, Pilate ordered Roman standards bearing the emperor's image to be brought into the temple district of Jerusalem, inciting outrage among the Jews. When they refused to disperse, even under threat of death, Pilate relented and removed the images. This incident highlights the Jews' unwavering commitment to their faith and Pilate's occasional concessions to avoid rebellion.

However, Pilate's record also includes numerous acts of cruelty and disregard for Jewish customs, illustrating the oppressive nature of Roman rule.

Caligula and the Jews' Defiance

Emperor Caligula's reign brought additional challenges for the Jewish people. Known for his vanity and megalomania, Caligula ordered his image to be installed in the Jerusalem temple, demanding worship from the Jews.

Jewish Resistance

The Jews' response was resolute. They threatened to let the land starve by refusing to plant or harvest crops rather than compromise their faith. Petronius, the Roman governor overseeing Judea, was moved by their determination and justice, ultimately writing to Caligula to reconsider the order.

Herod Agrippa's Diplomacy

Herod Agrippa, son of Herod the Great, played a key role in persuading Caligula to abandon his plan. Hosting a lavish feast for the emperor, Agrippa leveraged his relationship with Caligula to secure a reversal of the decree, demonstrating that even within a corrupt system, diplomacy could achieve justice.

Conclusion

The religious and political landscape of first-century Judea was marked by diverse ideologies and power struggles. The Pharisees' legalism, the Sadducees' materialism, and the cruelty of rulers like Herod the Great and Caligula created a complex backdrop for Jesus' ministry. These dynamics highlight the radical nature of Jesus' message of grace, love, and the kingdom of God, which stood in stark contrast to the legalism, corruption, and oppression of His time. The historical and archaeological evidence affirms the trustworthiness of the Gospel accounts, while the unique dynamics of Palestine's land and people illuminate the challenges and opportunities of His time. Together, these

insights strengthen our confidence in the message of the Gospels and deepen our appreciation for the world in which they were written. The reliability of the Gospels and the cultural context of Palestine provide a rich backdrop for understanding Jesus' life and ministry.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

Unified Yet Unique

All four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are inspired, truthful, and essential for salvation. Each has a shared purpose: to testify about the person and work of Christ. However, their testimonies are not just historical accounts; they are written with the intention of persuading readers to believe in and follow Jesus.

Think of it like a celebrity endorsement. Imagine an athlete promoting a product they genuinely use and believe in. Their endorsement is heartfelt and designed to inspire others to follow suit. Similarly, the Gospel writers genuinely believe in the truth they present. Their purpose is not merely to inform but to transform lives through the message of Jesus.

Some critics argue that the Gospels, written with a specific purpose, might be unreliable. However, having a purpose does not negate reliability. Everything we do has intent, and the Gospels' intent is clear: to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world.

We are going to compare the four gospels from three different perspectives.

1. Approach. We are going to analyze how each take a different approach.
2. Purpose. We will compare the purpose of each writer takes.
3. Story about Jesus. We will examine how each communicate their version of the life of Jesus.

1. Different Approaches

When it comes to teaching the life of Christ, there are various approaches. One common method is to blend all four Gospels into a single, unified narrative, jumping between John, Luke, Mark, and Matthew to highlight the most interesting or relevant parts. While this can be engaging, it overlooks the distinct voice and perspective each Gospel offers. Luke has his unique style, as do Matthew, Mark, and John. Each writer selects what they find most significant for their intended audience.

Another approach is to divide time equally among the Gospels. For example, dedicating ten lectures to each Gospel ensures a balanced overview. However, this method can become repetitive. For instance, the feeding of the 5,000, a story present in all four Gospels, would be studied four times. Instead, we'll use Matthew as our primary guide. Matthew's structure is more accessible to modern readers and lends itself well to classroom settings. After studying Matthew, we'll spend time examining the unique messages of Mark, Luke, and John.

The four Gospels in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—offer unique perspectives on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Each Gospel serves a distinct purpose, reaching different audiences and emphasizing various aspects of Jesus' character, mission, and divine nature. While the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) share many similarities, the Gospel of John stands apart due to its distinct style and theological depth. Understanding the distinctiveness of each Gospel and their interrelationship helps us gain a fuller understanding of Jesus' life and mission. Here is a look at how each writer approaches their story about Jesus.

Matthew: The Gospel to the Jews

The author of the first Gospel is Matthew, also known as Levi, a tax collector who answered Jesus' call to discipleship (Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). As one of the twelve apostles, Matthew had a front-row seat to Jesus' ministry, and he later became a key figure in spreading the message of the Gospel. Matthew's writing is particularly aimed at a Jewish audience, seeking to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the long-awaited Messiah.

Matthew's Gospel is notable for its frequent citations from the Old Testament, which underscore the continuity between the Hebrew Scriptures and the life of Jesus. He explicitly shows that Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection fulfill the prophecies, thereby addressing the concerns of Jewish Christians who may have felt uncertain about the relationship between their heritage and the emerging Christian faith. Key passages such as the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17) highlight Jesus' rightful place as the descendant of David and Abraham, reinforcing His Jewish credentials.

In contrast to the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew contains extensive teaching material, including the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the parables of the kingdom, and detailed instructions for the disciples. Matthew's Gospel is often referred to as the Gospel of teaching, as it focuses on imparting the ethical and spiritual principles of the Kingdom of God. The "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:18-20 encapsulates the Gospel's missional purpose, emphasizing the call to go and make disciples of all nations.

Mark: The Gospel of Deeds

The second Gospel, written by John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37), presents a strikingly different focus. Mark is the shortest of the Gospels and emphasizes the actions of Jesus over His words. Often described as the Gospel of deeds,

Mark's account is fast-paced and action-oriented, marked by the frequent use of the word "immediately" (42 occurrences), conveying a sense of urgency and movement. This is particularly fitting for Mark's primary audience—the Romans—who were a people of action and efficiency, accustomed to the rapid pace of life and military conquest.

Unlike Matthew, who places great emphasis on Jesus' teaching, Mark focuses on the mighty works of Jesus—His miracles, healings, and exorcisms. Mark records 19 miracles but only five parables, highlighting the dynamic, supernatural nature of Jesus' ministry. This Gospel also uniquely features the Messianic Secret—Jesus often commands those He heals or delivers to remain silent about His identity (e.g., Mark 1:34, 3:12). This secrecy underscores Mark's portrayal of Jesus as the suffering servant, a theme that he emphasizes throughout his narrative.

Mark is also the Gospel most concerned with the passion narrative, devoting a significant portion of the text to the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. Mark presents Jesus as the suffering servant prophesied in Isaiah, reinforcing the theological idea that the Messiah must endure suffering and death to fulfill God's plan of salvation.

Luke: The Gospel to the Greeks

Luke, the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14), was a Gentile and the only non-Jewish author of a Gospel. His writing is meticulous and well-structured, displaying the characteristics of a highly educated individual trained in classical Greek. Luke's Gospel is directed to a broader Greek audience, presenting Jesus as the Son of Man, emphasizing His humanity and compassion for the marginalized, such as women, the poor, and the sinners.

Luke's Gospel is unique in its detailed portrayal of the childhood of Jesus (Luke 2:40-52), offering a glimpse into His

early years and His natural growth as a human being. Unlike Matthew and Mark, who focus more on the adult ministry of Jesus, Luke places significant emphasis on His birth and early development, highlighting His perfect humanity alongside His divinity.

Luke's account also stands out for its rich theological and ethical content, including a greater number of parables (e.g., the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son). These parables are designed to illustrate the Kingdom of God and the moral responsibilities of discipleship. Furthermore, Luke emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and the Church, making the Gospel a powerful testament to the ongoing work of the Spirit.

Luke's Gospel is addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), and he writes with the intention of providing an orderly and accurate account of the life of Jesus, based on eyewitness testimony. This account is part of a two-volume work, with the second volume being the Acts of the Apostles, which chronicles the early history of the Church and the spread of the Gospel.

John: The Gospel of Belief

The fourth Gospel, written by the apostle John, stands apart from the Synoptic Gospels in its style, structure, and theological depth. John's Gospel is often referred to as the Gospel of belief, as its primary aim is to persuade readers to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and to receive eternal life through Him (John 20:31). While the Synoptic Gospels focus on the historical narrative of Jesus' life, John's account delves deeply into the theological significance of His actions and words.

John's Gospel contains no parables and only a few miracles, but each miracle is presented with profound theological implications. For example, the turning of water into wine at

the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) serves as a sign of Jesus' divine authority and His ability to bring transformation. Similarly, the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44) points forward to Jesus' own resurrection and His power over death.

One of the unique features of John's Gospel is its emphasis on the identity of Jesus, particularly His pre-existence and divinity. The opening chapter of John is famously known for its theological prologue, declaring, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This high Christology sets John apart from the Synoptics, where the identity of Jesus is often more subtly revealed. John's Gospel also emphasizes the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father, as seen in the frequent "I am" statements (e.g., "I am the Bread of Life," John 6:35), which underscore Jesus' divine self-revelation.

John's account is less concerned with chronology and more focused on theological reflection, providing a deep exploration of who Jesus is and why He came. His Gospel, therefore, serves not only as a historical record but as a theological treatise, aiming to lead readers into a transformative relationship with Jesus through faith.

Conclusion

Each of the four Gospels offers a unique portrait of Jesus Christ, shaped by the authors' theological aims and the cultural context of their audiences. Matthew's Gospel highlights the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Mark's fast-paced narrative emphasizes the actions of Jesus, portraying Him as the mighty servant. Luke's Gospel, with its emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, presents Him as the compassionate Son of Man, while John's theological reflections reveal the divinity of Christ, urging readers to believe in Him as the eternal Word made flesh.

Together, the four Gospels provide a multifaceted and complementary view of Jesus, allowing us to see both His humanity and divinity, His teachings and deeds, and His role in fulfilling God's plan of salvation for all people by taking their own unique approach. Through these accounts, we are invited to encounter Jesus not only as a historical figure but as the living, resurrected Lord who offers us eternal life through faith in Him.

2. The Purpose of Each Gospel

Each Gospel writer outlines their purpose. Let's explore these briefly before focusing on Matthew.

Mark: Proclaiming the Good News

Mark begins with, "The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The term 'Gospel' here means 'a decree of joyful tidings.' In ancient times, this term was used for announcements of great significance, such as the birth of an emperor's son. Mark's use of the term indicates the global importance of Jesus' life and mission. From the first verse, Mark sets the stage: this is a world-changing announcement about Jesus, the Savior, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

Luke: Providing Certainty

Luke's purpose is clearly stated in his introduction: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us... Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke emphasizes careful research and eyewitness testimony. He writes for Theophilus, likely a new believer seeking a deeper understanding of his faith. By presenting an orderly account, Luke aims to strengthen Theophilus' confidence in what he has learned.

John: Inspiring Belief

John's Gospel concludes with these words: "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). John's goal is straightforward: to inspire belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, leading readers to eternal life.

Matthew: Treasures New and Old

Unlike Luke and John, Matthew does not explicitly state his purpose. However, we can glean his intent from two key passages.

Bringing Out Treasures

In Matthew 13:52, Jesus says, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." Here, Matthew portrays himself as a teacher presenting treasures to his audience. The 'new treasures' represent the teachings of Christ, while the 'old treasures' symbolize the riches of the Old Testament. Matthew bridges the old and the new, showing how Jesus fulfills the promises of Scripture.

Making Disciples of All Nations

Matthew's second purpose is evident in the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). Matthew writes to equip his readers with the knowledge and tools to disciple others, spreading Jesus’ teachings to all corners of the earth.

3. The Life of Jesus

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the foundational texts of Christianity, each offering distinct perspectives on the life, ministry, and divine identity of Jesus Christ. While the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) share many common elements, particularly in the narrative of Jesus’ life, John’s Gospel presents a different theological and literary approach. By examining each Gospel in greater depth, we can better understand how they focus on different aspects of Jesus’ life, His divine mission, and His relationship with humanity. Each Gospel emphasizes different features of Jesus’ identity and purpose, revealing the fullness of who He is and why His life matters for believers across the world. Let’s get started with Matthew.

Matthew: Jesus as the Fulfillment of Prophecy and the King of the Jews

Matthew’s Gospel, more than any other, ties the life of Jesus to the Jewish Scriptures, portraying Him as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew writes primarily for a Jewish audience, seeking to prove that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah—the King who was promised to come from the line of David. This is evident from the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17, where Matthew traces Jesus’ lineage back to Abraham and David, underscoring His Jewish heritage. This genealogy serves not only to authenticate Jesus’ messianic credentials but also to highlight the unfolding of God’s promises through Israel.

Matthew's frequent references to Old Testament prophecies further emphasize the continuity between the Jewish faith and the new revelation in Christ. For example, Matthew frequently quotes Isaiah and other Hebrew prophets to show how specific events in Jesus' life fulfill these ancient predictions (e.g., the virgin birth in Matthew 1:22-23, the escape to Egypt in Matthew 2:13-15, and the crucifixion in Matthew 27:35). The Gospel's heavy focus on the Jewish context also shapes the way Matthew presents Jesus' teachings, notably through long discourses such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), where Jesus expounds on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, Matthew portrays Jesus as the authoritative teacher and new Moses, highlighting His role as the bringer of a new law. The discourse on the Kingdom of God, which runs through Matthew, stresses that Jesus' arrival marks the beginning of the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for Israel and the world. Matthew places considerable emphasis on the "Kingdom of Heaven" to show that Jesus is not just a spiritual teacher but also the ruler of a new kind of kingdom—a kingdom not of this world but of divine righteousness, peace, and joy.

Mark: The Gospel of Action—Jesus as the Suffering Servant

Mark's Gospel is often called the "Gospel of action," as it portrays Jesus in a very dynamic, fast-paced manner. The frequent use of the word "immediately" (42 occurrences in Mark) accelerates the narrative, emphasizing that Jesus' ministry is one of constant movement, urgency, and purpose. Unlike Matthew, who provides long teachings and discourses, Mark highlights the action of Jesus—His miracles, exorcisms, and healings—demonstrating His authority over nature, demons, and disease. For Mark, the central focus is on what

Jesus *did* rather than what He *said*, and His miraculous works authenticate His divine mission.

Mark presents Jesus as a man of action and power, but also as a figure marked by suffering. This theme of suffering is central to Mark's Gospel and is evident in his portrayal of the Passion narrative. Mark devotes a significant portion of his Gospel (Mark 8:31-16:8) to the final days of Jesus, highlighting the suffering and death of Jesus as the climax of His mission. In this way, Mark stresses that the Messiah must suffer, die, and rise again to fulfill God's redemptive plan (Mark 10:45). The cross is not an afterthought in Mark but the very essence of Jesus' mission. The theological idea of the suffering Messiah is a key theme that distinguishes Mark from the other Gospels.

The Gospel's simplicity and urgency reflect Mark's intention to communicate the gravity of Jesus' mission to a Roman audience, accustomed to action and strength. Mark's narrative style, full of movement and immediacy, mirrors the power and urgency of Jesus' message. The emphasis on deeds over words reinforces the idea that the Kingdom of God is not just a concept to be discussed but a reality to be experienced through the power of Jesus.

Luke: The Son of Man—Jesus as the Compassionate Savior of All

Luke, a physician and traveling companion of Paul, writes with a deep sense of compassion and human understanding. His Gospel presents Jesus not only as the Savior of Israel but as the Savior of all people, with a special emphasis on the marginalized, the poor, the outcasts, and women. Luke's perspective on Jesus' humanity is profound. He portrays Jesus as the "Son of Man" (a title Jesus uses for Himself), emphasizing His deep identification with human beings and His sympathy toward their suffering.

Luke's Gospel is the only one to give detailed accounts of Jesus' birth and childhood (Luke 1-2), portraying Jesus as a perfectly normal human child who grows in wisdom and stature, yet is divinely appointed for a higher purpose. The careful attention to Jesus' early life contrasts with the more adult-centric narratives of Matthew and Mark. Luke presents Jesus' life as one of perfect humanity, making Him the ideal model for every human being, no matter their status.

Luke's Gospel is also distinct for its focus on social justice and the inclusive nature of Jesus' mission. In parables such as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus teaches about mercy, forgiveness, and love for the outsider. His Gospel emphasizes the value of humility, repentance, and the radical love of God for all people, especially those whom society deems unworthy.

Luke's portrayal of Jesus also highlights the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's activity is evident throughout Luke's narrative, from the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35) to His empowerment for ministry (Luke 4:14) and His promise of the Spirit to His followers (Luke 11:13). In this way, Luke shows that Jesus' ministry is both empowered by the Spirit and oriented toward the Spirit's work in the world through the Church.

John: The Word Made Flesh—Jesus as the Divine Son of God

John's Gospel stands apart from the Synoptic Gospels in both style and content. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus on the historical events of Jesus' life, John's Gospel focuses more on the theological significance of those events. John presents Jesus as the eternal Word (Logos) made flesh, emphasizing His divinity from the very beginning. The opening prologue of John (John 1:1-18) establishes the pre-existence of Jesus, identifying Him not merely as a man but as the eternal Word

who was with God and is God. This high Christology sets John's Gospel apart from the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus' divine identity is revealed more gradually.

In John's Gospel, the focus is less on the actions of Jesus and more on the meaning of His actions. His miracles, or "signs" as John calls them, are intended to point to deeper spiritual truths about Jesus' identity. For example, the turning of water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11) symbolizes Jesus as the source of spiritual abundance, while the healing of the blind man (John 9:1-12) demonstrates His power to bring light to the world. John's Gospel also features seven "I am" statements (e.g., "I am the Bread of Life," John 6:35), where Jesus directly reveals His divine identity and His role as the source of spiritual sustenance and eternal life.

John's account does not include parables but focuses on deep theological discourses, such as the conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) about the new birth and the conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-26) about living water. These conversations go beyond the narrative to address the spiritual significance of Jesus' mission. The Gospel's closing chapters, particularly the Last Supper (John 13-17) and the Passion narrative (John 18-19), further highlight Jesus' relationship with the Father and His deep love for His disciples, revealing the profound theological truths about His nature and mission.

John's Gospel, though less concerned with chronology and the exact details of Jesus' life, presents a profound theological reflection on Jesus' identity as the divine Son of God, urging readers to believe in Him for eternal life (John 20:31).

Conclusion: The Full Picture of Jesus

Taken together, the Gospels offer a multifaceted portrait of Jesus Christ. Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy; Mark portrays

Jesus as the powerful yet suffering servant; Luke emphasizes Jesus' humanity and compassion for the marginalized; and John reveals Jesus' divine nature, inviting readers to believe in Him as the Son of God.

Each Gospel contributes a unique theological perspective, and together they provide a comprehensive understanding of Jesus' life, mission, and identity. The Gospels are not merely historical accounts but are theological documents that invite believers into a relationship with Jesus. Through these accounts, we encounter the fullness of God's revelation in Christ—both His humanity and His divinity—and are called to follow Him in faith and obedience.

So, let's get started on our examination of each of the Gospel writer's portrait of the life of Jesus from their vantage point. We will also be adding some more background information and insight for each of the gospel and their writers.

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew: The Gospel with a Unique Perspective

Does Matthew's Gospel have a distinct angle? Many scholars argue that it is the Gospel written specifically for the Jews—and there is significant evidence to support this claim. From its focus on Jewish customs to its frequent Old Testament references, Matthew's Gospel speaks deeply to a Jewish audience. However, Matthew's purpose transcends cultural boundaries, calling all believers to embrace Christ's mission. Let's explore the unique aspects of this Gospel and what they reveal about Matthew's intent.

A Gospel Tailored for a Jewish Audience

Matthew's writing is steeped in Jewish tradition and culture, making it particularly resonant with Jewish readers. He includes numerous references to Jewish customs, far more than any of the other Gospel writers. For instance, Matthew delves into topics such as Sabbath regulations, handwashing rituals, fasting, and temple taxes. Even his account of debates about divorce mirrors the exact phrasing used by Jewish rabbis of Jesus' time. While other Gospels address broader questions, Matthew's focus is razor-sharp: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce for any and every reason?" This phrasing would have immediately struck a chord with Jewish readers familiar with rabbinic debates.

Another clear indication of Matthew's Jewish emphasis is his frequent use of Old Testament references. Figures like David, Jonah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are mentioned far more in Matthew's Gospel than in the others. Even the terminology Matthew employs reflects sensitivity to Jewish sensibilities. For instance, instead of "the kingdom of God," he often uses "the kingdom of heaven," out of reverence for the Jewish tradition of avoiding direct mention of God's name.

Establishing Jesus' Jewish Identity

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is another nod to his Jewish audience. He traces Jesus' lineage back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, emphasizing Jesus' rightful place in the line of Jewish kings and His fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. In contrast, Luke's genealogy goes back to Adam, reflecting his broader, Gentile-focused audience.

Matthew also highlights Jesus' interactions with Jewish law, underscoring His role as the Messiah who fulfills the Scriptures. For example, Matthew alone records Jesus saying, "I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Yet, even in this Jewish-centric narrative, Matthew includes moments that foreshadow the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan—such as the visit of the Magi, non-Jewish leaders who come to worship Jesus, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies.

Not Just for the Jews: A Gospel for the World

While Matthew clearly appeals to Jewish readers, his Gospel is not exclusively for them. Jesus' ministry, as presented by Matthew, begins with a focus on Israel but expands to include the entire world. In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus instructs His disciples to go only to the lost sheep of Israel. However, by the end of the Gospel, His command changes dramatically: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This shift underscores the universal scope of Jesus' mission.

Matthew's Gospel challenges any notion that Jesus belongs to one group alone. In Matthew 15:21-28, a Canaanite woman persistently seeks Jesus' help for her demon-possessed daughter. Initially, Jesus seems to dismiss her, even likening her to a dog—a term that might have resonated with His disciples' prejudices. But her unwavering faith earns His admiration, and He grants her request, much to the disciples'

shock. This powerful story confronts exclusivity and reveals that Jesus' mission transcends cultural and ethnic boundaries.

Disciples of "Little Faith"

One of Matthew's recurring themes is the disciples' lack of faith. The Greek term *oligopistos*, meaning "little faith," appears repeatedly in Matthew's Gospel. The disciples are portrayed as ordinary people who struggle to understand Jesus' teachings and often falter in their faith. Yet, their journey is one of transformation.

Take, for example, the story of Peter walking on water (Matthew 14:22-32). In the middle of a stormy night, Peter steps out of the boat in faith but begins to sink when fear overtakes him. Even as he flounders, he cries out, "Lord, save me!" This moment captures the essence of the disciples' faith: a mixture of boldness and doubt, yet always turning to Jesus for rescue.

By the end of Matthew's Gospel, these "men of little faith" are no longer timid followers. They are apostles—messengers sent by God to change the world. Their transformation offers hope to all believers, showing that even small faith can grow into something world-changing.

The Call to Make Disciples

Matthew's Gospel concludes with a powerful charge: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This command goes beyond evangelism; it calls for intentional discipleship. Leading someone to Christ is important, but the greatest calling is to nurture them to full maturity—equipping them to lead others to Christ in turn. This process of multiplication is the heart of Matthew's message and the ultimate goal of the Gospel.

The Beginning of Christ's Ministry:

One of the remarkable features of all four Gospels is their shared focus on making Jesus' identity crystal clear from the start.

- **Mark** begins by proclaiming, “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).
- **Luke** affirms that Jesus is the Son of the Most High, the Savior, and the Light for all people (Luke 1–2).
- **John** declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Each Gospel sets out to establish that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and God Himself come to dwell among us.

A Unique Introduction: Matthew's Genealogy

At first glance, Matthew's opening genealogy might seem mundane or tedious, but it's packed with theological insight and purpose.

- **Jesus is the Christ:** He is the anointed one, chosen for God's mission.
- **The Son of David:** This title not only establishes Jesus' Jewish heritage but also His royal lineage as the King of Israel.
- **The Son of Abraham:** Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's seed.

Even the inclusion of four Gentile women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba—reveals key truths about Jesus. These

women, with their diverse backgrounds and checkered pasts, underscore Jesus' humanity, His connection to sinful humanity, and His mission to redeem all people, Jew and Gentile alike.

Revealing Jesus' Identity

In the opening chapters of Matthew (1:18–2:12), we learn even more about who Jesus is:

- **Conceived by the Holy Spirit:** Jesus is both fully human and fully divine.
- **His Name is Jesus:** This name, meaning “Savior,” points to His mission of saving people from their sins.
- **Immanuel, God with Us:** Quoting Isaiah 7:14, Matthew emphasizes that Jesus' presence is both a blessing and a stark reality for those who reject Him.

Jesus' identity is deeply rooted in Old Testament prophecies, which Matthew highlights repeatedly. He is the promised Son of David, the fulfillment of the Emmanuel prophecy, and the light of revelation to the Gentiles.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

Matthew is meticulous in showing how Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies.

- **The Seed of Abraham and Son of David:** Jesus embodies God's covenant promises.
- **A Light to the Gentiles:** This prophetic hope, echoed in Isaiah and Luke, finds fulfillment in Christ.
- **God Dwelling Among Us:** John's Gospel echoes this theme, describing Jesus as the one who “tabernacled”

among His people (John 1:14), fulfilling the Old Testament's hope of God's presence.

The Gospels collectively proclaim Jesus as God, fully human, and the realization of the Old Testament's deepest longings.

Jesus in Real Time and Space

The Gospels don't just establish who Jesus is; they also ground His life and ministry in real history.

- **Historical Context:** Luke references rulers like Caesar Augustus and Tiberius, situating Jesus' birth and ministry in identifiable time periods.
- **Herod's Reign:** Herod's paranoia, even to the point of murdering babies, aligns with what we know from extrabiblical sources.
- **Human Vulnerability:** When Herod sought to kill Him, Jesus didn't summon an angelic army. Instead, His family fled to Egypt, showing His genuine humanity.

These details underscore that Jesus' life was not a mythical tale but a historical reality.

The Visit of the Magi

Matthew 2:1–12 recounts the visit of the magi, offering insights into the characters involved and their responses to Jesus' birth.

- **Herod:** A paranoid and power-hungry king, Herod was willing to go to murderous lengths to protect his throne.
- **The Magi:** Likely Persian astrologers, these men traveled great distances—possibly over a year—

following a star that led them to worship the King of the Jews.

The magi's journey highlights the global reach of Christ's mission. While Herod responded to Jesus with hostility, the magi demonstrated faith and reverence.

Gifts Fit for a King

Unlike others, the magi didn't just visit Jesus—they brought extraordinary gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Over the centuries, scholars have speculated about the symbolic significance of these offerings. Some suggest myrrh, used for embalming, foreshadowed Jesus' death and burial. However, it's unlikely the magi intended such symbolism. They simply brought the finest and most valuable items they could offer.

Gold, a universal symbol of royalty and wealth, was the ultimate gift for a king. Frankincense and myrrh, among the most prized and expensive spices of the ancient world, demonstrated their desire to present only the best. In today's terms, their gifts might be likened to presenting a treasure chest of gold, a top-of-the-line communication system, and a luxury car. These were offerings worthy of the Savior they had traveled so far to honor.

Four Responses to Christ

Matthew's Gospel introduces Jesus as God, the fulfillment of prophecy, and fully human. Yet Matthew also highlights the varied responses to Jesus, which mirror how people respond to Him today.

1. Herod: Hostility and Hatred

Some, like Herod, respond with open hostility. Herod was consumed with hatred toward God, determined to destroy His work and eliminate any perceived

threat to his power. Although such people may be few, their destructive intent remains a reality.

2. **The Indifferent Crowd: Avoiding Disruption**

The people of Jerusalem represent those who value comfort above all else. Their attitude was essentially, “I hope this doesn’t cause me any trouble.” Many today share this sentiment. One person once admitted, “I’d be a Christian if it didn’t involve tithing—that’s just too much.” For such individuals, following Christ is too costly if it disrupts their status quo.

3. **The Scribes: Knowledge Without Action**

The scribes knew all the right answers but failed to act. They had theological knowledge and could quote Scripture, yet their faith was stagnant. This group, common even now, may believe in Christ intellectually, but their belief lacks life-changing impact.

4. **The Magi: Faith in Action**

Surprisingly, it was the magi—foreigners with limited knowledge—who responded properly. They acted on what little they knew, seeking and worshiping Jesus with all their hearts. Their example reminds us that faith is not about how much we know but what we do with what we know.

Preparing the Way: John the Baptist’s Ministry

As Jesus’ life unfolded, John the Baptist emerged to prepare the way. His ministry was rooted in a clear and urgent message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” While some may have expected a call to overthrow Rome, John’s focus was on personal repentance and spiritual preparation.

Drawing from Isaiah's prophecies, John called people to straighten their paths, repent of their sins, and demonstrate loyalty to God. His baptism symbolized cleansing and a readiness for the coming Messiah.

Four Traits of True Repentance

1. **Urgency**

John warned, "The ax is already laid at the root of the trees." God's judgment was imminent, and repentance couldn't be delayed.

2. **Sincerity**

John condemned superficial repentance, saying, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Empty rituals meant nothing without genuine change.

3. **Decisiveness**

Baptism was a radical step, symbolizing a clean break from sin. Few were willing to take this decisive action, as it required humility and public acknowledgment of their need for cleansing.

4. **Concrete Action**

Repentance wasn't abstract. John called the rich to share their wealth, tax collectors to practice honesty, and soldiers to reject corruption and be content with their wages.

Jesus' Baptism

When Jesus came to be baptized, John was stunned, saying, "I need to be baptized by You." But Jesus insisted, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." By being baptized, Jesus identified with humanity's need for repentance, even though He was without sin. This act foreshadowed His ultimate identification with sinners on the cross.

The Temptation of Jesus

After His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. While some struggle with the idea that Jesus, being God, could be tempted, it's important to remember that His temptation was real because He was fully human. Temptation appeals to something inherently good but distorts it, offering it at the wrong time, in the wrong way, or under the wrong circumstances.

Three Temptations, Three Victories

1. Bread for a Hungry Savior

After 40 days of fasting, Jesus was famished. Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread, appealing to His physical hunger. But Jesus refused, choosing obedience to God over satisfying His immediate need.

2. Testing God's Care

Satan urged Jesus to throw Himself from the temple, tempting Him to test God's promise of protection. But Jesus rejected this, refusing to manipulate His Father's care for selfish reassurance.

3. Earthly Power Without the Cross

Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. This shortcut avoided the suffering of the cross, but Jesus chose God's will over worldly power.

In each instance, Jesus demonstrated unwavering loyalty to God. His victory over temptation revealed His faithfulness and His role as the second Adam—the one who succeeded where Adam and Eve failed.

Lessons for Us

It's crucial to distinguish between temptation and sin. To be tempted is not to sin; it is the moment of decision. Acting on temptation—or entertaining it too long—leads to sin. Eve's fall in the Garden began when she weighed Satan's lies against God's truth, exalting her own judgment above God's. In contrast, Jesus resisted temptation immediately and decisively.

Temptation often involves good things taken in the wrong way, at the wrong time, or from the wrong source. For example, sexual desire is good within marriage but becomes sin when pursued outside of God's design. Jesus faced similar temptations—bread, knowledge, and power—but He remained faithful, proving Himself to be the true and faithful human.

The Cross

When Jesus said “No” to Satan, He was saying “Yes” to the cross. Each temptation offered a way to achieve glory without suffering, but Jesus chose the harder path. He refused to make bread from stones, ensuring His ministry wouldn't be reduced to material provision. He rejected testing God's protection, embracing a life of faith and trust. Finally, He declined Satan's offer of power, choosing instead the path of suffering that would lead to redemption.

Through His obedience, Jesus not only triumphed over temptation but also set the stage for His ultimate victory over sin and death. His example calls us to follow His path of loyalty, trust, and faithfulness to God.

The Temptation Concluded

Before we leave the topic of Jesus' temptation, let us reflect on one final, profound truth. In this pivotal moment, Jesus

revealed Himself as the true man, the victor over Satan, and the one resolutely committed to going to the cross. At the same time, He demonstrated that He was the true Israelite—faithful where Israel had faltered. In Matthew’s Gospel, especially in chapter 4, we see a deliberate effort to portray Jesus as passing the tests that Israel had failed. This contrast is illuminated by how Jesus responds to Satan: by declaring, “It is written...” Each response draws from the Old Testament, showing how Scripture itself reveals the keys to overcoming temptation. To fully grasp these moments, it’s essential to examine the Old Testament passages Jesus quotes and the context surrounding them.

Jesus - The Lamb of God and the True Israelite

Through these temptations, Jesus revealed Himself as the true man who resisted where Adam fell, and as the true Israelite, faithful where the nation failed. He embodied the perfect obedience that neither humanity nor Israel could achieve. In doing so, He fulfilled His role as the Lamb of God, prepared to take away the sin of the world.

Unlike Israel, Jesus did not grumble, hoard, or demand signs. He did not seek shortcuts to His mission. The temptations offered Him a bloodless path to glory, but Jesus chose the way of the cross. He recognized Satan’s schemes and remained steadfast, gaining victory over the adversary and setting the stage for His public ministry.

Some Unanswered Questions

These temptations also raise intriguing questions. When Jesus said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test,” could He have been hinting at His own deity? Perhaps. It’s possible that Satan, being limited in knowledge, didn’t fully grasp who Jesus was. While Satan likely understood by the end of the Gospel story, there are hints that he was confused. For

example, Satan's role in orchestrating Jesus' crucifixion—ultimately his own defeat—suggests a lack of foresight.

Another question arises from the third temptation: Did Satan really have the authority to offer Jesus the kingdoms of the world? Yes, it was given to him by Adam in the garden of Eden, but things were about to change. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God signaled the arrival of God's reign, diminishing Satan's power. By refusing Satan's offer, Jesus affirmed His commitment to God's plan and continued to strip away Satan's influence. In the end Jesus would take the keys of death, hell, and the grave. All authority would be regained by the work of Jesus on the cross. All part of God's plan of redemption.

The Victor Over Temptation

Jesus' victory over temptation is a profound reminder of His faithfulness, obedience, and ultimate mission. He succeeded where Israel failed, resisted where humanity faltered, and overcame where Satan schemed. These moments of testing prepared Him to begin His ministry, announcing the kingdom of God and paving the way for His ultimate victory on the cross.

As we reflect on these temptations, let us remember the example of Jesus. He teaches us to trust God's Word, prioritize a relationship with Him, and resist the urge to demand signs or shortcuts. In doing so, we too can overcome the trials we face, empowered by the one who has already won the ultimate victory.

Conclusion: A Gospel for All

The Gospel of Matthew stands out for its structured approach, blending the old and new to reveal the full picture of Jesus as the promised Messiah. While each Gospel has its unique voice and purpose, Matthew's emphasis on teaching and

discipleship makes it an ideal guide for understanding the life and mission of Christ. It begins with a focus on the Jewish people but expands to encompass the entire world. It reminds us that Jesus is not a possession of any one group but the Savior of all humanity. Through its emphasis on faith, discipleship, and the fulfillment of prophecy, Matthew's Gospel challenges us to share the Good News and make disciples who will continue the work of Christ.

Like the disciples, we may start as people of little faith, hesitant and unsure. But through the transformative power of Jesus, we can grow into people of great faith, equipped to carry out His mission. Matthew's Gospel is not just a story—it's a call to action. Will you answer it?

MARK

Introduction

I love Mark. It is the shortest of the gospels, yet it often tells of Jesus' ministry in more detail than either Matthew or Luke. Each gospel has its own purpose, audience, and emphasis. While Matthew and Luke focus heavily on ethical teaching and discipleship, John is deeply theological, and Mark centers almost exclusively on Christ—His actions, emotions, and journey to the cross. Together, these four Gospels provide a comprehensive picture of Jesus' life and ministry. Remember I am going through all four gospels in order to present the life of Christ. Jesus is at the center of our faith, so it is important we know Jesus!

The reason for different reports is to give us a more complete picture of Jesus. Each writer wants the reader to know the truth about Jesus and become a disciple. To accomplish this purpose, each Gospel is aimed at a certain audience. So, in the day written they were fashioned for a specific audience. Today we have the benefit of each writer's perspective.

Four Gospels, Four Faces

The Book of Kells, a ninth-century manuscript, depicts each Gospel with a symbolic image: a human face (Matthew), an eagle (John), an ox (Luke), and a lion (Mark). These images highlight the distinct characteristics of each Gospel. Matthew portrays Jesus as the teacher and rabbi. John, the eagle, soars into theological heights, emphasizing eternity and intimacy with Christ. Luke, represented by the ox, emphasizes Jesus bearing the burdens of humanity, showcasing His compassion

for all people, whether Jew or Gentile, man or woman, rich or poor.

Mark is symbolized by the lion, capturing the Gospel's energy and urgency. Mark's narrative roars forward with force, swiftly moving toward the cross. His writing is vivid, action-packed, and emotionally charged.

The Gospel of Mark: Destination, Style, and Audience

Mark's Gospel is thought to have been written for the Romans. Historical accounts and references like 1 Peter 5:13 suggest that Mark was in Rome with Peter. The presence of Latin phrases, explanations of Jewish customs, and translations of Aramaic words indicate that Mark's audience was unfamiliar with Palestine. Romans, known for their focus on action and efficiency, would have been drawn to Mark's fast-paced, action-oriented style.

Mark's graphic details make his Gospel stand out. For example, only Mark mentions that Jesus slept on a pillow during the storm, that His transfigured clothes were whiter than any launderer could make them, and that the 5,000 sat on green grass. Mark also vividly captures emotions: the disciples' terror during the storm, Jesus' frustration with their lack of faith, and His weariness with repeated misunderstandings.

Mark's Unique Themes

One of Mark's central themes is often referred to as the "Messianic Secret." Throughout the Gospel, Jesus frequently instructs people not to reveal His identity. For example, after Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, Jesus orders him to keep it

quiet. This theme reflects the limited understanding people had of Jesus' mission before His death and resurrection. Even Peter, despite recognizing Jesus as the Christ, rebukes Him for predicting His crucifixion. Jesus' identity and mission only became fully clear after His resurrection.

Mark also highlights the disciples' repeated misunderstandings. Despite witnessing miracles like the calming of storms and the feeding of thousands, they struggle to grasp who Jesus is and what He is doing. For instance, after the first feeding of 5,000, they marvel but fail to understand. When a similar situation arises with the feeding of 4,000, they're equally perplexed. Similarly, the disciples face two stormy incidents at sea, yet they fail to comprehend Jesus' authority over nature.

The Painful Misunderstandings of the Disciples

Mark's Gospel doesn't shy away from showing the disciples' flaws. They argue over who will be the greatest immediately after Jesus predicts His betrayal and death. James and John ask for prominent positions in Jesus' kingdom, ignoring His teaching about servanthood. Even their attitude toward children reveals their misunderstandings. While Jesus welcomes and blesses children, the disciples dismiss them as unimportant.

At times, Jesus directly confronts their lack of understanding. In Mark 8:17-21, He asks a series of pointed questions: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" The barrage of rhetorical

questions leaves the disciples silent, exposing their spiritual blindness.

Glimmers of Hope

Despite their failures, the disciples demonstrate one redeeming quality: they stay with Jesus. They may not understand, but they bring their confusion to Him instead of walking away. This persistence offers hope to readers who might also struggle to fully grasp Jesus' teachings. It reminds us that faith doesn't require perfect understanding but a willingness to follow and learn.

Mark's Rapid Pace and Repetition

Mark's narrative moves swiftly, often using words like "immediately" and "straight away." This creates a sense of urgency, drawing readers into the action. The frequent use of "and" (Greek: *kai*) links events together seamlessly, propelling the story forward. Occasionally, the pace slows with the word "again," emphasizing repeated lessons the disciples fail to grasp.

The Theology of Mark

In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples struggle to understand who Jesus truly is until the end of the narrative. However, it is not as though no one understands Him. Interestingly, some of the most profound demonstrations of faith come from minor figures—characters who appear briefly but leave a lasting impact. These individuals often exhibit greater faith and understanding of Jesus than His own disciples.

The first minor figure we meet is a leper who declares to Jesus, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” This statement reveals an unwavering belief in Jesus’ power to heal. Similarly, a father approaches Jesus, pleading with Him to lay hands on his daughter so that she may live. Another example is a woman who believes she will be healed simply by touching Jesus’ cloak. These moments illustrate the kind of faith Jesus calls for when He begins His ministry with the command, “Repent and believe.”

Notably, the words “disciple” and “believe” never appear together in the Gospel of Mark. While the disciples struggle with doubt and confusion, these minor characters consistently demonstrate faith. For instance, a Phoenician woman refers to Jesus as “Lord” and humbly asserts, “Even the crumbs that fall from Your table will be enough for me.”

A Father’s Honest Faith

One of the most detailed accounts involving a minor figure is the story of a father whose son is possessed by an evil spirit (Mark 9:14-29). This episode occurs just after the Transfiguration, as Jesus descends from the mountain to find His disciples embroiled in an argument with teachers of the law. The father steps forward, explaining, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. I asked Your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” His frustration is evident, as he assumes that the disciples, as agents of Christ, should have been able to help.

Jesus’ response is sharp: “You unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?”

Bring the boy to Me.” As the boy is brought forward, the demon reacts violently, throwing him into a convulsion. Amid the chaos, Jesus calmly inquires about the boy’s condition, learning that this torment has afflicted him since childhood. The father then utters a desperate plea: “If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

Jesus seizes on the father’s words: “If You can?” The question is not about Jesus’ ability but the father’s faith. In response, the father cries out, “I do believe; help my unbelief!” This heartfelt admission reveals the tension between faith and doubt, but it is enough for Jesus. He casts out the spirit, and though the boy appears lifeless, Jesus takes his hand and lifts him up, restoring him fully.

This powerful moment foreshadows the cross. Just as the boy is saved from the brink of death, so too will Jesus’ death and resurrection bring redemption to all who believe. The father’s imperfect faith underscores an essential truth: salvation does not require perfect faith, only a reliance on Christ.

Some Unlikely Models of Faith

The minor figures in Mark’s Gospel teach us that even a little faith can lead to redemption. These individuals show us that anyone can be a disciple, regardless of their background or understanding. In contrast, the twelve disciples demonstrate how challenging it is to follow Jesus, to grasp His identity, and to remain faithful. Their struggles warn us not to take discipleship lightly. Yet, the minor figures bridge the gap for us. They may not fully understand, but they trust in Jesus’ power and mercy—a trust we are called to emulate.

The Climax of Mark

To fully appreciate Mark's theology, we must consider its ending. In Mark 15:39, at the moment of Jesus' death, a Roman centurion declares, "Truly this man was the Son of God." This revelation comes from an unlikely source, underscoring the theme that those outside the inner circle often grasp Jesus' true identity.

Mark's original ending, as found in Mark 16:8, is both startling and unconventional. The women who visit the tomb encounter a young man who tells them, "He has risen! He is not here. Go, tell His disciples and Peter." Yet, the text concludes with the women fleeing in fear, saying nothing to anyone. This abrupt ending leaves the story open and unresolved.

Why does Mark end this way? Perhaps to compel us to finish the story ourselves. We know the women eventually told others, as the church exists today because of their testimony. But Mark's Gospel challenges us to confront the resurrection personally. How will we respond? Will we believe? Will we proclaim His victory?

The Cross - the Heart of Mark's Gospel

Mark's Gospel races toward the cross, emphasizing that Jesus' identity is fully revealed in His death and resurrection. This focus highlights humanity's desperate need for Christ's redemptive work. Jesus goes to the cross alone, abandoned by His disciples, making His sacrifice all the more poignant. Even in His resurrection, He stands alone as the victor over sin and death.

Mark's open-ended conclusion mirrors Jesus' storytelling style. Just as the parables of the prodigal son and the great banquet leave room for interpretation, so does Mark's Gospel. This approach invites us to engage with the story, relying on the Holy Spirit to illuminate its meaning. Mark's account faithfully presents Jesus' life and mission, drawing us to encounter Him and compelling us to carry His message forward.

Conclusion: The Call to Radical Faith

The Gospel of Mark starkly portrays the human need for Christ and the transformative power of faith. Few characters in the narrative remain faithful to Jesus, and His journey to the cross is marked by loneliness and sacrifice. Yet, His resurrection offers hope and redemption. Mark leaves us with a question: Will we finish the story? Will we proclaim His resurrection and live out His call to radical loyalty? The Gospel's urgency and openness challenge us to respond, drawing our attention to the One who calls us to Himself.

LUKE

Introduction

The Gospel of Luke stands out among the four Gospels for its emphasis on historical reliability and detailed investigation. From the very beginning, Luke assures his readers that his account is rooted in historical events. Luke 1:1-2 states, “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us. They were handed down to us by those who, from the first, were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.” Notice the emphasis on history—eyewitnesses and the careful handing down of information.

The term “handed down” is not casual; it’s a technical term implying deliberate and meticulous preservation. It’s akin to a family tradition where stories are retold with precision, ensuring that nothing is lost over generations. Luke’s account, he asserts, is guarded and handed down carefully by those who were not only witnesses but also “servants of the Word,” individuals deeply committed to preserving the truth.

Luke himself undertook a careful investigation. For example, Luke 2:19 mentions, “Mary treasured these things up in her heart.” It’s plausible that Luke interviewed Mary directly, capturing the intimate details of Jesus’ birth. His orderly account—theologically or topically structured rather than strictly chronological—aims to provide certainty about the events he narrates (Luke 1:3-4).

Historical Accuracy Under Scrutiny

Luke's commitment to historical accuracy has not gone unchallenged. Critics like F.C. Baur in the 19th century argued that Luke's writings were influenced by a philosophical framework, suggesting they were composed well after the events they describe. Baur proposed that the Gospel of Luke and Acts were products of theological synthesis, placing their composition between A.D. 150-200.

However, archeological evidence turned the tide. Sir William Ramsey, initially a skeptic influenced by Baur's theories, set out to disprove Luke's reliability. Ramsey's investigations into the historical details—names, titles, and places—instead confirmed Luke's accuracy. For example, Luke's mention of “politarches” as rulers of Thessalonica (Acts 17:6) was validated by inscriptions found in the city. Ramsey's discoveries led him to embrace Christianity, famously concluding that “every person is found just where he ought to be” in Luke's narrative.

The Purpose of Luke's Gospel

As shared earlier Luke want to provide clarity, but he also want to provide evidence for historical reliability and insights for spiritual maturity. Addressing Theophilus, likely a Greek reader, Luke writes, “so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4). Certainty here is not just intellectual assurance but a foundation for faith.

Luke's Gospel begins with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, emphasizing Jesus as the culmination of Jewish hopes. Interestingly, while Luke is often considered the

Gospel for Gentiles, it is deeply rooted in Old Testament themes. This connection underscores the organic relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Luke presents Christianity not as a break from Judaism but as its fulfillment, with Jesus as the faithful Jew who brings salvation to the world.

Salvation in Luke: Concrete and Transformative

Luke's portrayal of salvation is tangible and transformative. Consider Mary's song (Luke 1:51-53), where she proclaims, "He has performed mighty deeds; He has scattered those who are proud; He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." This is not merely about spiritual deliverance; it's about real-world change. Similarly, Zechariah's prophecy (Luke 1:68-75) speaks of salvation from enemies and the ability to serve God without fear. These themes resonate with political and social liberation as much as they do with spiritual renewal.

Preparation for Ministry

Luke 3 and 4 detail the preparations for Jesus' ministry, beginning with John the Baptist's call to repentance. John's role is to prepare people to encounter God's work. Luke's inclusion of a genealogy tracing Jesus' lineage back to Adam highlights Jesus' role as the Savior for all humanity, not just Israel.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

One of Luke's distinctive themes is the role of the Holy Spirit. From the announcement of Jesus' birth ("The Holy Spirit will come upon you," Luke 1:35) to His baptism ("The Holy Spirit

descended on Him like a dove,” Luke 3:22), the Spirit is central to Jesus’ identity and mission. Luke 4:1 describes Jesus as “full of the Holy Spirit” and “led by the Spirit” into the wilderness. Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus begins His ministry, performing miracles and proclaiming the good news.

The Connection Between Old and New

Luke’s Gospel bridges the Old and New Testaments. By grounding Jesus’ mission in the promises made to Abraham and David, Luke emphasizes continuity. Christianity is not a departure from Judaism but its fulfillment. This connection is vital for understanding the roots of Christian faith and identity. Luke invites Gentile readers to see themselves as grafted into the rich heritage of Israel, inheriting the promises made to God’s people.

Themes in Luke

Setting the Stage: Historical Reliability and Jesus’ Mission

Luke chapters 1-4 lay the groundwork for two central ideas in the Gospel of Luke: the historical reliability of the text and the great theme of Jesus’ ministry—preaching good news to the poor and oppressed. These early chapters establish Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, the one anointed to bring hope and restoration to those in need.

The Identity of Jesus: "Who Is This?"

Chapters 4-9 of Luke are dominated by the question of Jesus’ identity. Again and again, this question arises: “Who is this?” Initially, the answer seems simple—Joseph’s son. But as Jesus

performs miracles and makes bold claims, the question deepens.

- **Jesus Forgives Sins:** In chapter 5, a paralytic is lowered through the roof, and Jesus declares, “Your sins are forgiven.” This leads the religious leaders to ask, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”
- **Jesus Raises the Dead:** In chapter 7, Jesus raises a widow’s only son from the dead. The people’s reaction? “A great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help His people” (Luke 7:16). The term “great prophet” recalls Old Testament figures like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, who combined miraculous deeds with the proclamation of God’s Word.
- **The Pharisees’ Doubts:** When a sinful woman anoints Jesus’ feet with her tears and perfume at a Pharisee’s house, the Pharisees question His prophetic identity. Jesus, fully aware of their doubts, addresses them directly and demonstrates His knowledge of the woman’s heart, proving He is indeed a prophet.
- **The Disciples’ Wonder:** During a storm on the sea, Jesus calms the winds and waves. The disciples, awestruck, ask, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

The question persists, even reaching Herod the Tetrarch in chapter 9. Herod, who had beheaded John the Baptist, hears reports of Jesus and wonders who He could be. The suspense builds for both the disciples and the reader.

Peter's Confession: The Turning Point

Finally, in Luke 9, Jesus directly asks His disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Peter answers correctly: “You are the Christ of God.” Yet even with this declaration, the disciples struggle to understand what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. Jesus begins to teach them about His impending death, but Peter resists, unable to reconcile the idea of a suffering Messiah. The transfiguration follows, where God’s voice confirms, “This is my Son; listen to Him.” Jesus is not only the Christ but also the Son of God, and He alone defines His mission and identity.

The Journey to Jerusalem: Lessons on Discipleship

From Luke 9:51 onward, Jesus resolutely sets out for Jerusalem, a journey that spans ten chapters and serves as a training ground for His disciples. Throughout this journey, Jesus addresses crucial themes that remain relevant for discipleship today.

True Greatness

The disciples argue about who among them will be the greatest. Jesus redirects their thinking, teaching that greatness lies in serving others. “I am among you as one who serves,” He says (Luke 22:37).

Loving Your Neighbor

When a Samaritan village refuses to welcome Jesus because He is heading to Jerusalem, James and John ask if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy it, mirroring Elijah’s actions in the Old Testament. Jesus rebukes them,

emphasizing mercy over judgment. This theme is further illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus defines a neighbor as anyone in need, regardless of race, religion, or social status.

Prayer and Dependence on God

The importance of prayer is highlighted through parables like the friend coming at midnight. Jesus teaches His disciples to persist in prayer, trusting God's faithfulness.

Money and Possessions

Luke repeatedly emphasizes the proper use of wealth, as seen in the parable of the rich fool. Jesus warns against greed and calls for generosity, teaching that true riches are found in God.

The Universality of Discipleship

Perhaps Luke's most revolutionary theme is that anyone can be a disciple. Jesus' ministry extends to people from all walks of life: men and women, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, the righteous and sinners. His miracles demonstrate this inclusivity, touching the lives of paralytics, lepers, Roman officials, and even oppressors of the Jewish people. Faith, not social status or ethnicity, is the criterion for discipleship.

Women in Luke: Radical Inclusion

Luke gives special attention to women, showcasing their integral role in Jesus' ministry. In Luke 8:2-3, we learn of women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve, supporting them out of their own means. This was a radical departure from cultural norms, where women were often excluded from religious circles.

In Luke 10, the story of Mary and Martha further underscores this point. While Martha busies herself with preparations, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, adopting the posture of a disciple. When Martha complains, Jesus affirms Mary's choice, highlighting that women, like men, are called to hear and obey God's Word.

Jesus' interaction with the woman in Luke 11 also challenges societal norms. When a woman in the crowd declares, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you," Jesus responds, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." In Jesus' kingdom, a person's value is not determined by their role or relationship but by their response to God's Word.

Uniqueness of Luke

The Gospel of Luke, particularly chapters 9-19, stands out as a treasure trove of unique material not found in the other Gospels. This distinction allows readers to delve deeply into Luke's specific spiritual and theological emphases, providing insights into his portrayal of the Christian life. While all four Gospels share a common foundation—belief in the triune God, faith and devotion to Him, and the call to repentance and community—each Gospel offers a unique perspective on following Jesus. Let's explore what sets Luke apart, especially in comparison to Matthew and Mark.

Matthew: Living in Jesus' Presence

Matthew highlights the enduring presence of Jesus in the believer's life. From the beginning, Jesus is called "Emmanuel" (God with us), and at the end, He promises, "I

will be with you always.” This theme weaves through Matthew’s Gospel, emphasizing that the Christian life, both individually and corporately, is lived in Jesus’ presence. Another prominent theme in Matthew is the choice of obedience. The Gospel repeatedly challenges readers to choose between two paths: serving God or serving man, the broad or narrow way, good or bad fruit, truth or falsehood. These dichotomies underscore the importance of intentional discipleship.

Mark: The Strenuous Path of Discipleship

Mark presents a more austere picture of discipleship. His Gospel rushes toward the cross, reflecting the urgency of Jesus’ mission. The central call to discipleship in Mark is clear: “Take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow Me.” This teaching, while present in the other Gospels, is particularly forceful in Mark. Jesus’ power is evident, but so is the opposition He faces. The way of the cross dominates Mark’s narrative, offering a sobering yet inspiring view of what it means to follow Christ.

Luke: Celebration of Joy

In contrast, the Gospel of Luke is filled with joy—a theme woven throughout the narrative. From the joyous proclamations of angels at Jesus’ birth to the disciples’ elation at encountering the risen Christ, joy permeates Luke’s Gospel. This joy is not superficial or circumstantial; it stems from repentance, conversion, and faith. For example:

- The angels and shepherds rejoice at Jesus’ birth (Lk. 2).
- The 70 disciples return with joy from their mission (Lk. 10).

- Heaven celebrates the repentance of one sinner (Lk. 15).
- Zacchaeus experiences joy as Jesus visits his home (Lk. 19).

Luke uses vivid language to describe this joy, such as “hearts burning within” and “filled with happy fire.” The source of this joy is clear: the forgiveness and blessings of God, as encapsulated in Acts 3: “Repent, that seasons of refreshing may come upon you.”

A Leisurely Pace

Another distinctive feature of Luke is its relaxed narrative pace. Unlike Mark’s rapid-fire “immediately” or Matthew’s structured alternation of teaching and miracles, Luke takes his time. Phrases like “it came to pass” and “in those days” create a sense of reflection and pause. For instance, the journey to Jerusalem spans ten chapters, allowing readers to absorb Jesus’ teachings on discipleship. This measured pace underscores the centrality of Christ’s ministry as the turning point of history, with all time leading up to and proceeding from it.

Divine Timing and Necessity - “Today”

Luke’s Gospel emphasizes divine timing through the recurring use of the word “today.” This term appears 20 times in Luke and Acts, compared to only eight in Matthew, once in Mark, and not at all in John. Key moments include:

- “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you” (Luke 2:11).
- “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

- “Today, salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9).
- “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

These instances highlight God’s perfect timing and the centrality of Christ’s ministry in His divine plan.

“It Is Necessary”

Luke also frequently uses the phrase “It is necessary” (Greek: *dei*) to underscore the inevitability of God’s plan. For example:

- “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34).
- “Did you not know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49).
- “The Son of Man must suffer many things...and be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Luke 9:22).

These statements reinforce that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection were not accidental but central to God’s redemptive plan.

The Testimony of the Old Testament

Luke’s Gospel bridges the Old and New Testaments, showing how the entire Bible points to Jesus. For instance, Jesus explains to the disciples on the road to Emmaus how the Scriptures testify to Him. Beyond specific Messianic prophecies, the overarching narrative of the Old Testament—through judges, kings, prophets, and priests—cries out for a Redeemer.

Foreshadowing Christ

The failures of human leaders in the Old Testament highlight the need for a perfect Savior. Judges repeatedly fall short, kings like Saul and David are flawed, and even the best priests' sacrifices are insufficient. Luke presents Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment:

- The High Priest who offers a once-for-all sacrifice.
- The King who defeats sin and death.
- The Prophet who proclaims God's truth.

As Jesus declares in Luke 24:46-47, "The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations."

Conclusion: A Kingdom for All

Luke's Gospel is more than a historical narrative; it's an invitation to trust in the certainty of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. His meticulous research, reliance on eyewitnesses, and theological depth provide a robust foundation for faith. Whether addressing historical critics or inspiring believers, Luke's Gospel remains a testament to the enduring truth and transformative power of the life of Christ.

Luke paints a vivid picture of Jesus' identity and mission. He is the Christ, the Son of God, and the Savior of all people. His teachings and miracles reveal a kingdom that transcends boundaries of gender, race, and social status. Through His journey to Jerusalem, Jesus models servant leadership, calls

His disciples to radical love, and invites everyone to follow Him.

The themes in Luke challenge us to examine our own discipleship. Do we seek greatness through service? Do we love our neighbors without prejudice? Do we trust God with our resources? Above all, do we recognize Jesus for who He truly is and follow Him with our whole hearts? As we reflect on these questions, may we, like Mary, choose what is better and sit at His feet, listening to His Word.

JOHN

Introduction

The Gospel of John is the fourth Gospel in the Bible and is believed to be the last to be written, likely around A.D. 75-90, when the apostle John was nearing the end of his life. Each of the Gospels presents a unique theme or purpose statement, often found at the beginning or end of the text. For instance, Luke's Gospel emphasizes that Jesus came to preach good news to the poor and release captives (Luke 4). Mark begins with the declaration that his book is "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Matthew concludes with the Great Commission, urging disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

John's purpose is explicitly stated in John 20:30-31: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing, you may have life in his name." While this statement is familiar, examining the original Greek offers deeper insights.

The Purpose of John's Gospel

As we shared earlier John wanted to make sure everybody was sure about their faith in Jesus. In fact, he wrote so that "you may believe." (20:31) I believe he is encouraging those as they begin their faith as well as strengthen our faith as we walk out our faith. The Gospel of John is equally effective for deepening and confirming the faith of believers. The Gospel operates on two levels: a straightforward narrative and a

deeper, more complex layer filled with allusions, hints, and themes inviting meditation.

Interestingly, a strict translation of the Greek phrase would read, “you may believe that the Christ is Jesus.” This wording could carry different implications. For those unfamiliar with the Gospel, the declaration “Jesus is the Christ” introduces who Jesus is. However, John may also be addressing Jews or others awaiting a deliverer, affirming that the long-expected Christ is indeed Jesus. Thus, John’s Gospel is accessible to both new readers and those familiar with Old Testament prophecies. Its simplicity is ideal for beginners, while its depth enriches seasoned believers.

The Reliability of John’s Gospel

Some critics question the reliability of John’s Gospel, arguing that John, writing 50 to 70 years after the events, might have forgotten key details. However, certain experiences are so profound that they remain emblazoned on one’s memory for life—especially when guided by the Holy Spirit.

To illustrate this, consider a story from my own family. My father, born in America, went to Italy with his father, an opera singer, in 1915. Later, they traveled to Russia to aid my great-grandfather during the Bolshevik Revolution. While there, they were detained by the Communist government for twelve years. My father eventually escaped around 1935—an almost unheard-of feat at the time. Even now, at 81 years old, he recounts vivid details of those years, such as hiding their American citizenship document in an asbestos cup within a furnace. Despite minor variations in his retellings, certain details, like the seven-round revolver a secret police colonel

waved at him, remain consistent. Upon investigation, I found that such revolvers did exist, proving the accuracy of my father's memories.

Likewise, John's Gospel is filled with vivid, sensory details that authenticate his account. For example, John remembers the odor from Lazarus' tomb ("He stinketh") and the arrangement of the grave clothes in Jesus' empty tomb. These details, combined with John's eyewitness testimony ("what we have heard, seen, and touched" in 1 John 1:1-4), underscore the reliability of his Gospel.

John's Poetic Prologue

John opens his Gospel with a profound prologue in chapter one, structured as a chiasm—a poetic form where themes are mirrored and reflected. The prologue introduces foundational truths about Jesus:

1. **Preexistence:** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).
2. **Incarnation:** "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).
3. **Rejection:** "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11).
4. **Belief and Adoption:** "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

The central theme of the chiasm is belief and adoption—aligning with John's purpose statement that by believing, we

have life in Jesus' name. The prologue masterfully sets the stage for the rest of the Gospel.

Writing for Diverse Audiences

John faced the challenge of writing for both Jewish and Gentile audiences. He grew up in Judea but spent his later years in Gentile regions like Ephesus. His Gospel appeals to both groups by blending elements familiar to each.

Reaching Gentiles

John begins with “In the beginning was the Word,” using the Greek term *logos* for “word.” This term resonated with Greek philosophers, who viewed *logos* as the rational principle organizing the universe. However, John surprises them by declaring, “The Word became flesh.” This bold claim introduces Jesus as both divine and incarnate, captivating Gentile readers.

Engaging Jews

For Jewish readers, John incorporates subtle allusions to the Old Testament. For example, “In the beginning” echoes Genesis 1:1, while “made his dwelling among us” references the tabernacle, symbolizing God's presence with Israel. John also identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God, fulfilling the sacrificial system. These connections enrich the Gospel for those familiar with Jewish scripture while remaining accessible to Gentiles.

Symbolism and Depth

John's Gospel is rich in symbolism, which adds layers of meaning. His first miracle, turning water into wine,

symbolizes the Messianic age. Jesus' declaration, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), evokes Psalm 23 and contrasts with the "bad shepherds" of Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 9. These symbols resonate deeply with Jewish readers while conveying universal truths understandable to Gentiles.

Themes in the Gospel of John

Nicodemus and the Quest for Understanding

Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus did not unfold as he had anticipated. A Pharisee and a respected leader, Nicodemus likely expected a straightforward theological discussion. Instead, Jesus confronted him with profound truths that left him bewildered. While Jesus was undoubtedly polite, He prioritized what Nicodemus needed over what he wanted. The familiar terms "born again" and "Son of Man" that we now understand were utterly foreign to Nicodemus. For instance, when Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up," Nicodemus was likely baffled. This dialogue, though cryptic to Nicodemus at the time, serves a deeper purpose for John's readers—helping us grasp the significance of Jesus' mission.

A pivotal moment in this chapter is John 3:16, a verse often debated in terms of who is speaking. It is likely an editorial comment by John rather than a direct continuation of Jesus' words. John explains, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus typically referred to Himself as the "Son of Man" rather than "the Son," as He carefully veiled His divine identity during His earthly ministry to avoid misunderstandings. This commentary by John aims

to clarify Jesus' message, ensuring readers are not left as confused as Nicodemus.

Nicodemus' journey from confusion to belief mirrors the experience of many nominal Christians today. Just as Nicodemus had to confront his spiritual need, so too must we recognize that cultural Christianity or moral behavior is insufficient. Growing up in a Christian home or practicing kindness does not equate to salvation. The Gospel challenges individuals to move beyond surface-level understanding to genuine faith.

Contrasting Encounters: Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman

In John 4, Jesus engages with a Samaritan woman at a well, presenting a striking contrast to His interaction with Nicodemus. Where Nicodemus was a Jewish male leader—respected, educated, and self-assured—the woman was a marginalized Samaritan, rejected by society and burdened by her past. Nicodemus approached Jesus seeking intellectual discourse, while the woman was astonished that Jesus, a Jewish man, would even speak to her.

The setting underscores the radical nature of Jesus' ministry. Many Jews avoided traveling through Samaria, but Jesus deliberately chose to engage with this outcast. The woman came to draw water at noon, an unusual time that likely reflected her social isolation. When Jesus asked her for a drink, she was stunned. Cultural barriers—Jew vs. Samaritan, male vs. female—made such a conversation unthinkable. Moreover, her five divorces rendered her an outcast even

among her own people. Yet Jesus, known for uplifting society's marginalized, persisted in reaching her heart.

Using water as a metaphor, Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." While the woman initially misunderstood, thinking Jesus referred to physical water, He revealed a deeper truth: the living water of eternal life through the Holy Spirit. Salvation, Jesus explained, is not about human effort but about an overflowing, internal transformation. The woman struggled to grasp this at first, but her eventual testimony led many in her town to believe. Her story illustrates how Jesus meets individuals where they are, offering them exactly what they need.

Signs and Faith: The Royal Official's Son

In John 4:46-54, Jesus performs a miraculous sign by healing a royal official's son. The official, desperate for his child's life, implored Jesus to come to his home. Instead of accompanying the man, Jesus simply said, "Your son will live." Remarkably, the man took Jesus at His word and returned home. On his way, he learned his son had been healed at the exact moment Jesus spoke. This account highlights a progression of faith: the man believed Jesus' promise even before seeing the result, and his faith deepened when the miracle was confirmed.

This story stands in contrast to many who demanded signs before believing. It offers a hopeful example of trusting Jesus' word without requiring immediate proof. Faith, as demonstrated by the official, begins with trust and is solidified by experience.

Misunderstanding the Signs: The Lame Man and the Bread of Life

Not all responses to Jesus' signs were positive. In John 5, Jesus healed a man who had been lame for 38 years, a miracle that should have inspired gratitude and faith. However, the man's reaction was perplexing. When questioned by religious leaders about carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he shifted blame to Jesus without even knowing His name. Later, when Jesus warned him to stop sinning lest worse consequences follow, the man informed the authorities about Jesus, potentially endangering Him. This response reveals a failure to grasp the deeper significance of the miracle—a tragic misuse of a divine sign.

Similarly, in John 6, Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, a miraculous provision that pointed to His identity as the Bread of Life. Yet the crowd's response was shallow. Instead of seeking spiritual nourishment, they pursued Jesus for more physical food. When He taught that true satisfaction comes from feeding on Him—believing in His sacrifice—many found His words too difficult and abandoned Him. This chapter underscores that signs are meant to inspire faith, not mere fascination or self-interest.

Dividing the Crowd: The Bread and Water of Life

As Jesus continued to teach, His words increasingly divided His audience. In John 6:52-69, He used vivid language, declaring, “My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” While many were repelled by this hard teaching, His disciples remained loyal. Peter's response captures the

essence of true faith: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Genuine discipleship involves trusting Jesus even when His words are challenging or difficult to understand.

John 7-8 further develops the theme of Jesus as the source of life. At the Feast of Tabernacles, a celebration of God’s provision, Jesus proclaimed, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” This invitation reinforced His role as the provider of spiritual sustenance and the giver of the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Signs and the Transition to Glory

The Final Sign: The Resurrection of Lazarus

The Gospel of John divides into two major sections: the "Book of Signs" and the "Book of Glory." The final sign in the Book of Signs is the resurrection of Lazarus, an event that both reveals the power of Jesus and sets the stage for His eventual crucifixion. In John 11:45, we read that after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, “Many of the Jews put their faith in Him, but some went to the Pharisees to report what Jesus had done.” This miraculous act polarized opinions. While some believed, others saw Jesus as a threat. The Pharisees, alarmed by His growing influence, convened a meeting and expressed their fears: “If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

At this moment, plans to kill Jesus became more concrete. The signs were undeniable, but they did not compel universal faith.

Instead, they provided opportunities for belief. For the Pharisees, however, these signs stirred envy and fear, driving them to plot against Jesus.

Entering the Book of Glory

John 12 marks the transition into the "Book of Glory," a section that focuses on Jesus' impending death and resurrection. In John 12:23, Jesus declares, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." He compares His death to a kernel of wheat: "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." This metaphor illustrates that Jesus' death is not an end but a means to abundant life for many.

Despite the profound purpose of His death, Jesus acknowledges the emotional weight of the moment: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour" (John 12:27). Jesus' glorification involves both great suffering and great purpose. By being lifted up on the cross, He would draw all people to Himself, as He proclaims in John 12:32. His death, burial, and resurrection would glorify the Father and bear much fruit for the kingdom of God.

Preparing the Disciples

As Jesus prepares for His death, He shifts His focus to instructing His disciples. This section of John emphasizes community, humility, and perseverance. One powerful example is the washing of the disciples' feet in John 13. During the preparation for the Passover, there was no servant

to wash their feet—a task considered the lowest of duties. None of the disciples volunteered, so Jesus Himself took up the towel and basin. He told Peter, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” This act symbolized spiritual cleansing and set an example of humility and service.

After washing their feet, Jesus said, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:14-15). Through this act, Jesus demonstrated that true leadership involves humility and a willingness to serve others.

The Command to Love

In addition to modeling humility, Jesus emphasized love. His death would demonstrate His complete love for His disciples, and He expected them to love one another in the same way. He said, “Love one another as I have loved you” and “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 15:12, 14:15). Loving one another would be the evidence of their love for Him. This mutual love would sustain them during the trials ahead, including persecution.

Jesus also taught them how to persevere. He urged them to “abide in the vine” (John 15:4), to stay connected to Him, the source of their strength. He promised the help of the Holy Spirit, who would guide and empower them. He assured them, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Through unity, prayer, and reliance on the Spirit, they would be equipped to face the challenges ahead.

The Resurrection Narratives

The resurrection of Jesus is the centerpiece of the Gospel, and John's account unfolds in three parts.

The Women Discover the Empty Tomb

First, the women discover the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene, confused and heartbroken, assumes someone has taken Jesus' body. She runs to tell Peter and John, who rush to the tomb. John arrives first but hesitates to enter, while Peter boldly goes in. They see the grave clothes and the folded headcloth—evidence of the resurrection. Though they do not yet fully understand, they begin to believe.

Mary Encounters the Risen Jesus

Second, Mary encounters the risen Jesus but initially mistakes Him for a gardener. When He calls her by name, she recognizes Him. Jesus instructs her not to hold on to Him but to go and tell the disciples, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). Her testimony marks the first proclamation of the resurrection.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Third, Jesus appears to the disciples, offering them peace and showing them His wounds. He breathes on them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). However, Thomas is absent during this appearance. When the others tell him they have seen the Lord, he famously declares, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25).

Thomas' Encounter with the Risen Jesus

A week later, Jesus appears again, this time with Thomas present. He addresses Thomas directly: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27). Overwhelmed, Thomas responds, "My Lord and my God!" This declaration is one of the most profound confessions of faith in the entire Gospel.

While Jesus meets Thomas' demands, He also offers a gentle rebuke: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). This statement shifts the focus to future generations of believers who will rely on the testimony of the apostles and the written Word. Jesus' patience with Thomas demonstrates His compassion, but it also underscores the importance of faith without physical proof.

Believing Without Seeing

John concludes his Gospel by emphasizing the purpose of the signs: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). While many saw Jesus' miracles firsthand, not all believed. The written testimony now serves as the foundation for faith.

Some may think it would have been easier to believe if they had witnessed Jesus' ministry in person. However, John counters this notion. He reminds us that many who saw the signs misunderstood or rejected them. Blessed, therefore, are those who believe without seeing. We are in an era where faith

comes through hearing and reading the testimony of those who walked with Jesus. We walk by faith and not by sight. This blessing is for all generations, including ours.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John is a masterpiece of theological depth and literary brilliance. Its dual purpose—to inspire belief and deepen faith—makes it accessible to all readers, from seekers to seasoned believers. By blending vivid eyewitness details, poetic structure, and cultural relevance, John presents a compelling portrait of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

John masterfully bridges the signs Jesus performed, and the glory revealed through His death and resurrection. From the raising of Lazarus to the ultimate victory over the grave, every sign points to the truth of who Jesus is. The call to faith remains the same: to believe in Him as the Christ and to find life in His name. Through this Gospel, readers are invited to believe and, by believing, to experience life in His name.

In the next several chapters we are going to focus on several key teachings and events in the life of Jesus as presented by each of the gospel writers from their perspective. Topics such as what is the Kingdom, teachings and lessons from the Kingdom of God, lessons from the sermon on the mount, the miracles of Jesus, and His death and resurrection, as well as other insights all from the life of Jesus. We will use **Matthew** as our primary source and guide as we navigate through these incredible revelations and add additional insights as shared by the other gospel writers. Let's get started.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom of God: Proclaiming the Kingdom

When we consider the start of Jesus' ministry—His birth, temptations, and early teachings—it's essential to focus on His first proclamation: *"The kingdom of God is at hand."* Just like a preacher beginning their ministry or a leader launching a new series, Jesus' first words set the tone for His entire mission. This message was central to His life and work. Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God over 100 times in the Gospels, using the term about 125 times. It was His most frequent message.

All four Gospels emphasize that Jesus began His ministry by proclaiming the kingdom. In Mark 1:14-15, He says, *"The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news."* Matthew's Gospel begins similarly in 4:17, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."* Matthew further stresses the significance of the kingdom, saying in 4:23 that Jesus traveled through Galilee, teaching in synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom. Even after His first round of ministry, Matthew reiterates this message in Chapter 9, underscoring its importance. In Luke 4, when asked to heal all the people of a town, Jesus replies, *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also."* His mission was to announce the arrival of the kingdom, not merely to heal physically.

Defining the Kingdom

To understand the kingdom of God, we must first clarify what the term means. There are three ways the kingdom is

described in Scripture: as “*the kingdom*”, “*the kingdom of God*”, or “*the kingdom of heaven*”. All three expressions refer to the same concept. The term “*kingdom of heaven*” was often used to avoid directly invoking the name of God, as many Jews found it offensive to speak His name casually. However, they all point to the same reality: the reign of God.

In modern terms, the idea of a kingdom can be confusing, especially in countries without monarchies. We might imagine a kingdom as a distant fairy tale, a place with castles and royalty. Historically, though, the term referred to the territory that a king ruled—the fields, farms, rivers, and lakes under his control. A kingdom was a concrete, physical realm. But the kingdom of God is not about territory. It is about God’s reign over our hearts and lives—the moral and spiritual rule of God.

A useful illustration of this can be found in the Lord’s Prayer. When we pray, “*Thy kingdom come,*” it’s immediately followed by, “*Thy will be done.*” These two requests explain each other. For God’s kingdom to come is for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus’ parables of the kingdom similarly show that the reign of God is not about size or location but about the transformation of hearts and lives.

The Kingdom in the Old Testament and Jesus’ Day

While the specific phrase “*kingdom of God*” doesn’t appear in the Old Testament, the concept of God as King is deeply embedded in its pages. The resistance to Saul’s kingship, for example, stemmed from the concern that an earthly king might overshadow God’s rule over Israel. The phrase “*kingdom of God*” was something new in Jesus’ time, and it was central to His ministry.

However, this concept was often misunderstood. Jesus' listeners frequently thought of the kingdom in material terms. For instance, when Jesus spoke of His reign, His disciples argued over who would have the highest position. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, many expected an immediate political takeover, believing the kingdom would appear in a dramatic, earthly way. The clearest example of this misunderstanding comes after Jesus' resurrection when His disciples asked, "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6). They still expected a political kingdom, but Jesus' reply made it clear: the reign of God was spiritual, not political or military.

Misunderstandings of the Kingdom

Throughout history, there have been several interpretations of the kingdom of God, many of which misunderstand its true meaning.

1. The Non-Eschatological View

This view, sometimes referred to as the "old liberal school," teaches that the kingdom of God is a personal, moral reign within the soul. According to this perspective, if individuals morally reform, they will experience God's reign. The kingdom of God, in this view, is seen as something present, not in a cataclysmic future but in the personal transformation of individuals. This interpretation often relies on Luke 17:21, where Jesus says, "*The kingdom of God is in your midst.*" This understanding sees Jesus primarily as a moral teacher and fails to account for the eschatological (end-times) nature of His teachings.

2. The Irreverent School

Another interpretation, known as the "consistent eschatological school," argues that Jesus believed the kingdom would come soon in a dramatic, world-altering event. They cite Matthew 16:28, where Jesus says some people will see the kingdom of God before they die. This school believes Jesus miscalculated the timing of the kingdom's arrival, viewing His death as a tragic failure. While this view acknowledges the eschatological nature of Jesus' mission, it does so with a critical perspective, arguing that He was wrong in His expectations.

3. The "Old Buddy" View

A third perspective holds that the kingdom of God is already a present reality, as evidenced in Matthew 12:28, where Jesus says, *"If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* This view emphasizes that God's reign is already here, though it may not be fully realized yet. While it acknowledges the kingdom's presence, it tends to downplay the future fulfillment of God's reign.

The Present and Future Kingdom

The correct view of the kingdom of God is that it is both present and future. The kingdom of God began with the arrival of Christ, His death, and His resurrection. It is now present in the lives of believers, where Christ reigns spiritually. However, the fullness of God's kingdom is still to come.

Imagine a timeline of world history. Before Christ, the kingdom of God was only faintly visible, like a broken or dotted line. The fall of mankind obscured God's reign, and the kingdom of this world took prominence. With Jesus' coming, death, and resurrection, the kingdom became more visible and powerful. Christians now live in a tension, existing in both kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. We are part of God's reign, but we still live in a fallen world.

At the return of Christ, the two kingdoms will be fully united, not by destroying the world but by purifying and renewing it. This union will restore God's original creation, making all things new.

Kingdom Now and Not Yet

The tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of God's kingdom is a central theme in the New Testament. While Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom had arrived, He also taught that it would fully come in the future. For example, in Luke 11:20, Jesus says, *“If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”* He is declaring that the reign of God has arrived in a new, powerful way through His ministry. This is the present reality of the kingdom.

However, the kingdom is still growing and transforming the world in subtle, hidden ways. The parables of the kingdom describe it as starting small, like a seed or a pinch of yeast, and growing slowly but surely. Though the kingdom has come, it is not yet fully realized.

As Christians, we live in the tension between the *already* and the *not yet* of God's kingdom. We are citizens of God's reign, but we still live in a world that is far from the fullness of that reign. The kingdom of God is present in our lives through the work of Christ, but we still await its ultimate fulfillment.

Understanding this paradox is key to our identity as followers of Christ. It shapes our mission, our hope, and our experience of God's transforming power in the world.

Kingdom Proclamation & Response

When we consider the life of Christ, we uncover a fascinating interplay of mission and conflict. Central to this exploration is the Gospel of Matthew, which presents a unified portrayal of Jesus' ministry—a ministry where word and work seamlessly intertwine. From Matthew 4:23 to 9:35, we see Jesus preaching in synagogues, proclaiming the kingdom of God, performing miraculous deeds, and healing the sick. These elements were not separate endeavors; they were interconnected aspects of His mission.

Early Hints of Opposition

As Jesus' ministry progressed, subtle signs of opposition began to surface. One example is the account of the paralytic being lowered through the roof (Matthew 9). While many marveled at the miracle, some accused Jesus of blasphemy. Similarly, in Matthew 9:34, after Jesus cast out a demon, critics suggested He was operating under the power of Satan. These moments foreshadow the intensifying resistance Jesus would face, culminating in the ultimate rejection of His mission by many.

This growing opposition marked a turning point. Jesus began to shift His focus from addressing the vast crowds to training a select group of disciples. These individuals would be equipped to carry on His work, ensuring the continuation of His mission.

Compassion for the Crowds

In Matthew 9:35-36, we see a poignant moment in Jesus' ministry. As He traveled through towns and villages, teaching, preaching, and healing, He looked upon the crowds with deep compassion. They were like sheep without a shepherd—harassed, helpless, and directionless. Jesus' heart broke for their plight, and He declared, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."

Jesus' perspective was striking. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, who viewed the masses with disdain, Jesus saw their immense value and potential. Recognizing the overwhelming need, He resolved to send His disciples to minister to them. However, these disciples were not yet seasoned or fully prepared for the task ahead. This raised an important question: How does one motivate people to take up such a challenging mission?

Motivating the Disciples

Jesus did not rely on fear or guilt to motivate His disciples. Instead, He presented the need and invited them to pray about it. By showing them the hurting and helpless crowds, He allowed their hearts to be moved by compassion. This approach fostered genuine commitment rather than superficial

compliance. Those who were truly motivated joined Him in the mission.

This principle is deeply relevant for Christian living and ministry today. There is often a tension between preparation and action. Some Christians, whom we might call “maximalists,” prioritize extensive teaching and training, sometimes to the detriment of actually serving others. On the other hand, “minimalists” advocate for immediate action, emphasizing the urgency of ministry despite limited preparation. Jesus modeled a balanced approach, equipping His disciples with foundational knowledge and then sending them out before they felt completely ready.

Teachings and Lessons form the Kingdom

Practical Lessons for Ministry

The tension between preparation and action is illustrated in a personal experience I had as a pastor. My church was located in a medium-income neighborhood with many unchurched and needy individuals. One summer, I suggested canceling evening services for July and August so we could focus on visiting our neighbors and engaging with the community. However, the idea was met with resistance. Many congregants felt that attending evening service was their primary act of worship and service to God. They struggled to see the value of stepping out of the church to serve others directly. This mindset reflects the “well-fed” Christian who consumes spiritual teaching without translating it into action.

Jesus’ example challenges us to strike a balance. He spent time teaching and equipping His disciples, but He also pushed them

to step out in faith and minister to others. His ministry serves as a reminder that growth comes not just from learning but also from doing.

The Call to Mission in Matthew 10

Matthew 10 provides valuable insights into Jesus' instructions for ministry. This chapter serves as a summary of Jesus' teachings on mission, compiled from various occasions. It begins with Jesus calling His twelve disciples and giving them authority to drive out evil spirits and heal diseases. Interestingly, Jesus' initial directive was specific: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6).

This restriction may seem puzzling. Why would Jesus, who later commands His followers to make disciples of all nations, initially limit their mission to Israel? Understanding the cultural and historical context sheds light on this directive. At that time, the disciples were still grasping the scope of God's redemptive plan. Their knowledge was limited, and their cultural biases against Gentiles and Samaritans were strong. By starting with the people they knew and understood, Jesus was preparing them for the broader mission that would come later.

Understanding the Harvest

The imagery of the harvest in Matthew 9:37-38 is often interpreted as a call to evangelism. However, a closer examination of biblical references to harvest reveals a dual meaning. In many passages, the harvest symbolizes judgment, as seen in Isaiah 27:12-13, Joel 3:1-13, and Revelation 14:15.

Jesus' use of the harvest metaphor may carry both connotations—a call to gather the lost and a reminder of the coming judgment.

This dual perspective emphasizes the urgency and seriousness of the mission. The disciples' work was not just about bringing people into the fold; it was also a preparation for the final harvest when God would judge the world. Understanding this broader context enriches our interpretation of Jesus' words and underscores the gravity of the mission.

The Mission of the Disciples: Word and Work

When Jesus sent out His disciples, He gave them a clear and compelling mission: follow His example in both word and deed. They were to preach the kingdom and back up their words with signs of God's power. "Do what you saw Me do; imitate Me," He instructed, offering practical advice on how to proceed. He told them, "Don't take any gold or silver or copper in your belts or bag for your journey or an extra tunic or sandals or a staff" (Matthew 10:9-10). This directive was radical—no provisions, no safety net. When the disciples asked, "How are we going to eat?" Jesus assured them that their needs would be met by the hospitality of others.

He said, "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at their house until you leave. Give it your greeting. If the house is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if not, your peace will return to you. And if no one welcomes you, shake the dust off your feet before you leave that home or town. It will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town" (Matthew 10:11-15).

Shaking the Dust Off: A Cultural Context

To grasp the meaning of "shaking the dust off your feet," consider a Jewish traveler's journey from Galilee to Judea. Between these regions lay Samaria, an area considered spiritually unclean by many Jews. To avoid defilement, some Jews would take the long way around Samaria, adding days to their journey. If they did pass through, they would shake the dust off their clothing upon crossing the border, symbolically removing any contamination.

Jesus applied this cultural practice to the disciples' mission: if a town rejected them and their message, they were to move on without carrying any lingering sense of rejection. The act symbolized a decisive break, reminding the disciples that they were not responsible for the response but for the message.

Proclaiming the Kingdom with Urgency

Jesus told the disciples to trust God and the people they encountered. "If you go to a town, you're proclaiming the kingdom," He said. "They should receive you; they should take care of you. And if they don't, treat them like a Samaritan—move on." This principle still holds relevance for Christian missions today.

Jesus also emphasized urgency in ministry. "If you're persecuted, flee to another place," He said (Matthew 10:22-23). Staying in one place too long, especially where the message was rejected, could be counterproductive. The disciples' task was to spread the Gospel, not to stubbornly linger where it bore no fruit. Jesus taught them to balance

boldness with prudence: don't compromise your message, but don't needlessly endanger your life either.

Sheep Among Wolves

Jesus warned His disciples about the dangers they would face. "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). The phrase "shrewd as snakes" advised them to navigate danger wisely, avoiding unnecessary trouble. At the same time, "innocent as doves" reminded them to remain pure and guileless, presenting their message with sincerity.

This balance between shrewdness and innocence is critical in ministry. There are times to be cautious, waiting for the right moment to act. At other times, boldness and transparency are necessary. Both qualities are essential for effective Christian living and ministry.

Following the Master's Example

"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and the servant like his master" (Matthew 10:24-25). Jesus set the standard for ministry. He ministered to the Jews, preached the kingdom, and performed miracles. He faced opposition and even death threats but remained steadfast.

Just as Jesus adjusted His geography when necessary to continue His mission, the disciples were called to do the same. Their goal was to emulate their Teacher—to be like Jesus in word, deed, and perseverance. This remains the goal for all in ministry today.

Giving Freely: The Spirit of Generosity

Jesus instructed the disciples to give freely as they had freely received. He never charged for His miracles, though He could have. Instead, He relied on God's provision and the generosity of others. This same spirit of generosity was to characterize the disciples' ministry. They were to trust God to supply their needs and focus on the mission, not material gain.

Facing Persecution with Courage

Jesus was honest about the cost of discipleship. He warned the disciples that they would be betrayed, hated, and persecuted (Matthew 10:17-23). Yet, He urged them not to fear. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). He reassured them of their worth: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

This fearless faith, rooted in God's sovereignty, is a hallmark of Christian living. Persecution may come, but God's care is constant.

Division and Loyalty to Christ

Jesus reminded the disciples that following Him would come at a cost. "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). Though He is the Prince of Peace, His message often causes

division, even within families. Loyalty to Christ must surpass all other allegiances.

In many parts of the world, believers face this reality daily. Even in societies where Christianity is prevalent, following Christ wholeheartedly can lead to misunderstanding and opposition, sometimes even from loved ones.

The Cost and Reward of Ministry

Jesus concluded with a sober yet inspiring reminder: ministry comes with a cost but also great rewards. “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:38-39). To share in Christ’s ministry is a privilege, but it requires sacrifice. Even small acts of kindness, like giving a cup of cold water in His name, will not go unnoticed by God (Matthew 10:42).

Learning by Doing

Christian ministry is best learned through practice. Hearing, studying, and doing create a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Christ. As one theologian put it, “Do and you will know.” The grandeur and difficulty of ministry are revealed through experience.

At the end of Matthew 10, Jesus sent the disciples out. By chapter 11, He continued teaching and preaching in the towns of Galilee. His pattern of ministry—preaching, healing, and enduring opposition—served as both a model and a challenge. Even John the Baptist struggled to understand Jesus’ approach, sending messengers to ask if He was truly the

Messiah. Jesus responded by pointing to His works as evidence and praised John as the greatest prophet.

Responding to the Message

Jesus lamented the generation's resistance to God's messengers. "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn'" (Matthew 11:16-17). Some criticized John the Baptist for being too austere, while others condemned Jesus for being too celebratory. Their unwillingness to respond revealed a deeper problem: the issue was not with the message but with the recipients.

Why Did Jesus Face So Much Opposition?

The ministry of Jesus was marked by intense conflict and resistance. From the very beginning, opposition followed Him. Matthew 12 provides insight into some of the reasons why Jesus faced such fierce hostility. As we examine His life, it becomes evident that the Gospel story begins and ends with conflict.

At His birth, Herod sought to kill Him. During His early ministry, Satan tried to tempt Him, and the people in His hometown of Nazareth attempted to throw Him off a cliff after His first sermon. Throughout all four Gospels, we see ongoing tension between Jesus and the religious leaders, culminating in the ultimate confrontation at the cross. But why did Jesus provoke such strong opposition? Let's explore the reasons behind this conflict.

Jesus Upset Powerful People

One major reason for the conflict was that Jesus upset people in positions of power—both spiritual and political. He disrupted Satan's domain through spiritual warfare and unsettled the religious and political establishment. Herod, the Pharisees, and others were distressed by His teachings and actions.

The Pharisees, in particular, viewed Jesus as a fellow rabbi but were shocked and offended by His behavior. He defied their expectations and broke their standards. At times, they acted like disappointed family members, and at other times, they treated Him as a traitor to their faith. Their frustration boiled down to several key issues:

1. **Desecration of the Sabbath:** The Pharisees accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath by healing and allowing His disciples to pick grain.
2. **Claiming Authority:** When Jesus declared Himself the "Lord of the Sabbath," they understood this as a claim to divinity.
3. **Exposing Hypocrisy:** Jesus openly revealed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, both in words and actions.
4. **Jealousy of Leadership:** Jesus' higher standards displaced the Pharisees from their role as spiritual leaders.
5. **Public Humiliation:** Jesus often outwitted them in debates about the Law, leaving them embarrassed and angry.

Jesus Defied Cultural and Religious Norms

The Pharisees' anger was rooted in Jesus' disregard for their traditions and societal norms. He interacted with groups of people that the Pharisees deemed unworthy:

- **Women and Children:** Rabbis of the time were discouraged from speaking with women, even their own wives, as this was seen as a distraction from studying the Law. Children were often viewed as unimportant. Yet Jesus welcomed and valued both.
- **Sinners and Outcasts:** Jesus ate with tax collectors, sinners, and other "undesirables." This was seen as a sign of acceptance and intimacy, which the Pharisees believed should be avoided at all costs.

The Mishnah, a collection of Jewish teachings from that era, emphasized avoiding sinners and maintaining strict boundaries. Yet Jesus ignored these customs entirely, prioritizing mercy and connection over rigid legalism.

Jesus Challenged Their Interpretation of the Law

Another major source of conflict was Jesus' attitude toward the Law. While He affirmed the Ten Commandments, He often criticized the Pharisees' additional rules and oral traditions. These traditions, believed to have been passed down from Moses, included countless regulations meant to "build a fence around the Law" to prevent people from breaking God's commandments.

For example, the Pharisees had extensive rules about the Sabbath, such as prohibiting walking more than a certain

distance or performing any form of labor. Jesus, however, saw these extra rules as burdensome and unnecessary. He prioritized human need over ritual, famously saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

The Pharisees' teachings on divorce provide another example. They focused on legalistic details about how to issue a divorce, with no emphasis on reconciliation or forgiveness. Jesus, in contrast, upheld the sanctity of marriage and ignored their lengthy regulations.

Jesus Ignored Their Oral Traditions

Perhaps most offensive to the Pharisees was Jesus' rejection of their oral traditions. These unwritten laws, considered by the Pharisees to be divinely inspired, included elaborate guidelines for everyday life. For instance, the Pharisees taught that sharing a meal with someone who hadn't properly tithed was sinful. This made it nearly impossible to associate with anyone outside their strict circle. Jesus not only ignored these restrictions but actively welcomed those the Pharisees excluded.

His disregard for their oral law symbolized a broader rejection of their authority and interpretation of righteousness. By doing so, Jesus exposed their traditions as man-made and elevated God's commandments above human rules.

Jesus Asserted His Authority

Time and again, Jesus asserted His authority in ways that infuriated the Pharisees. One striking example is found in Matthew 12, when Jesus and His disciples were accused of breaking the Sabbath by picking and eating grain. In response,

Jesus reminded them of David eating consecrated bread when he was in need and pointed out that priests worked on the Sabbath to perform sacrifices. He concluded by declaring, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

This statement was a direct claim to divine authority. Rather than engaging in a prolonged debate, Jesus made it clear that He, not the Pharisees, determined what was right.

Jesus Prioritized Mercy Over Ritual

Another source of conflict was Jesus' emphasis on mercy rather than ritualistic adherence to the Law. This is evident in Matthew 12:9-13, where Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. Knowing the Pharisees were watching, He asked, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!"

By healing the man, Jesus demonstrated that compassion outweighed legalism. This act further infuriated the Pharisees, who began plotting to kill Him.

Why Conflict Was Inevitable

The opposition Jesus faced was inevitable because He represented a fundamentally different vision of righteousness and obedience. While the Pharisees emphasized outward adherence to rules and traditions, Jesus focused on the heart, prioritizing love, mercy, and genuine relationship with God.

The Pharisees' reliance on oral tradition and their rigid interpretations of the Law created a false image of obedience that Jesus sought to overthrow. His ministry challenged their

authority, exposed their hypocrisy, and redefined what it meant to follow God.

In the end, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees serves as a reminder that true faith is not about legalism or tradition but about a transformed heart and a life centered on God's love and mercy.

Kingdom Life - Lessons from the Disciples' Journey

Faith in the Storm

After the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, Jesus withdrew to pray and sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee. This body of water, roughly 17 miles long and 8 miles wide at its widest, was familiar territory for seasoned fishermen like the disciples. However, in the fourth watch of the night, they were still struggling against the wind. As Jesus approached them, walking on the water, they were terrified, mistaking Him for a ghost. But Jesus reassured them, saying, "Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."

Peter's response was bold: "Lord, if it's You, let me come to You on the water." His initial faith allowed him to step out of the boat and walk on water, but doubt crept in, and he began to sink. Jesus's words to Peter, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" reflect the disciples' spiritual growth journey. They had faith to act but lacked endurance. This moment encapsulates their development: while Jewish leaders opposed Jesus and the crowds misunderstood Him, the disciples were beginning to grasp His identity and mission.

True Cleanliness: A Matter of the Heart

In Matthew 15:1-20, the Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples for not following the tradition of handwashing before eating. Jesus rebuked them, pointing out their misplaced priorities. “It’s not what’s on your hands that makes you clean or unclean; it’s what’s in your heart,” He declared. Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of adhering to human traditions while neglecting deeper matters of the heart.

This encounter starkly contrasted with the faith of the crowds who brought their sick to Jesus for healing and glorified God. Following this, Jesus performed another miraculous feeding—this time for 4,000 people. Despite witnessing the earlier feeding of the 5,000, the disciples still questioned how they could provide for the crowd. Their forgetfulness prompted John Calvin’s observation: “All who have once or twice experienced the power of God and distrust it for the future are convicted of unbelief.” Even so, Jesus acted with compassion and met the people’s needs.

Signs and Misunderstandings

In Matthew 16:1-4, the Pharisees and Sadducees demanded a sign from Jesus, despite the numerous miracles He had already performed. Jesus refused, saying, “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” This pointed to His death and resurrection, the ultimate sign of His identity and mission.

Later, as Jesus warned His disciples to “be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6), the disciples misunderstood, thinking He was upset about their

lack of bread. Jesus gently rebuked them: “You of little faith... don’t you remember the five loaves for the 5,000 or the seven loaves for the 4,000?” Gradually, they began to grasp that He was cautioning them against the corrupting influence of the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ teachings.

Peter’s Confession: A Rock of Revelation

In Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus brought His disciples to Caesarea Philippi and asked, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Their answers reflected popular opinions: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. Then Jesus turned the question to them: “But who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus praised Peter for this revelation, emphasizing that it was revealed by God. He declared, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.” While some interpret this as Peter himself being the foundation of the church, a closer look at Scripture reveals that the “rock” is the confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The church is built on this truth, with Christ Himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:11).

The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail

What did Jesus mean by saying, “The gates of hell will not overcome it”? Gates are defensive structures, not offensive weapons. This suggests that the church is on the offensive, advancing God’s kingdom, and the gates of hell cannot withstand its progress. The Gospel will grow like a seed,

producing a mighty harvest as it is preached to the ends of the earth.

A Suffering Savior and a Suffering Church

After Peter's confession, Jesus began to reveal the nature of His mission: "He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matthew 16:21). This did not align with Peter's expectations of a conquering Messiah. Peter rebuked Jesus, saying, "This shall never happen to You!" Jesus responded sternly, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Peter's misunderstanding highlights the tension between human expectations and divine purposes. While Peter correctly identified Jesus as the Christ, he had yet to grasp the nature of Christ's mission—a mission marked by suffering and sacrifice. This revelation extended to the nature of the church itself, which would also face suffering as it carried forward Christ's mission.

The Foundation of the Church

Jesus' words to Peter, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church," have often been debated. However, the broader witness of Scripture makes it clear that the foundation of the church is not Peter himself but his confession that Jesus is the Christ. The apostles and prophets laid the foundation by proclaiming this truth, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. The enduring strength of the church lies in its unwavering proclamation of Christ's identity and mission.

Peter's journey mirrors our own. Like him, we often confess truths we don't fully understand and must grow into. Just as Peter grew in his understanding of what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ, we too must grow in our understanding of who Christ is and what it means to follow Him. Jesus' patience with Peter's shortcomings offers hope for all of us. The Kingdom of God is advancing, and even the gates of hell cannot stop it. Let us, like Peter, continue to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and participate in the unstoppable mission of His church.

Kingdom Living

Community, Holiness, Forgiveness, and more

The Challenge of Holiness in Community

Why does the church often fall short of the clear commands in Matthew 18:15-20? One reason is the fear of partiality—the apprehension that discipline might target selective sins or individuals unfairly. Another reason is the sheer unfamiliarity of practicing biblical discipline; after neglecting it for so long, attempting it feels shocking.

How to Reconcile Differences in the Kingdom

If the church desires to take holiness seriously, it must do so from the very beginning. Holiness is not a one-time event but a constant journey. The process outlined in Matthew 18 shouldn't start only when a conflict arises. Instead, it should emerge from a culture of daily discipleship. Consider the root of the word “discipline”: it is tied to the word “disciple.” To be a disciple means to live under discipline, taking sin seriously every day. If we commit to holiness and mutual

accountability daily, church discipline becomes a natural extension of community life rather than an extraordinary or disruptive event.

The Goal: Winning Your Brother

The steps in Matthew 18 emphasize restoring relationships rather than punishing wrongs. The ultimate goal is always to win back your brother or sister in Christ. When the church prioritizes teaching, discipleship, and holiness, discipline flows organically from these practices. In short, cultivating a culture of holiness and forgiveness prevents discipline from becoming an isolated or intimidating experience.

Forgiveness as a Way of Life

Peter's question in Matthew 18:21 reveals the human struggle with forgiveness: "How many times shall I forgive my brother? Up to seven times?" His offer likely seemed generous, as Jewish tradition at the time suggested forgiving three times. Yet Jesus raises the bar to an unimaginable "seventy-seven times" (or seventy times seven, depending on translation). The implication is clear: true forgiveness cannot be measured or counted; it must become a way of life.

Forgiving someone even three times is challenging, let alone seventy-seven. To illustrate the necessity of forgiveness, Jesus tells a parable. A servant owes his master an astronomical debt—10,000 talents, equivalent to 600,000 years' wages. When he begs for mercy, the master forgives the entire debt. However, this same servant refuses to show mercy to a fellow servant who owes him a much smaller sum: 100 denarii, or about 100 days' wages. The master, upon hearing this, rebukes

the servant, saying, “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (Matthew 18:32-33). The parable ends with a stark warning: those who refuse to forgive others will face the consequences of their own unforgiveness.

The Weight of Forgiveness

This parable vividly contrasts our debt to God with others’ debts to us. The servant’s 10,000-talent debt represents the overwhelming weight of sin we owe to God—a debt impossible to repay. In comparison, the 100-denarii debt reflects the significant yet manageable offenses others commit against us. Jesus’ message is unmistakable: the forgiveness we extend to others should flow from the forgiveness we have already received from God.

Forgiving someone doesn’t mean pretending the offense was insignificant. It acknowledges the hurt but chooses mercy over vengeance. Our motivation to forgive stems from remembering how much we have been forgiven by God. When we grasp the magnitude of His mercy, forgiving others—even seventy-seven times—becomes possible.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

It’s important to distinguish between two kinds of forgiveness: internal forgiveness and relational reconciliation. Internal forgiveness involves letting go of hatred and bitterness in your heart, regardless of whether the other person repents. It’s something we owe to everyone as followers of Christ. Relational reconciliation, however, requires repentance and restoration of trust. For the sake of the church’s purity and

Christ's honor, unrepentant sin must still be addressed through appropriate channels, such as church leadership.

Faithfulness in Marriage - Jesus' Radical Standard

In Matthew 19, Jesus shifts the focus to marriage, addressing questions about divorce. The Pharisees ask, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" (Matthew 19:3). Their question reflects a debate of the time. Some rabbis taught that divorce was permissible only in cases of unchastity, while others allowed it for trivial reasons, such as a wife spoiling her husband's meal. The most lenient view permitted divorce for "any reason whatsoever."

Jesus responds by pointing to God's original design for marriage: "...the two will become one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:5-6). Rather than focusing on escape clauses, Jesus emphasizes the sanctity and permanence of marriage. Divorce was permitted by Moses only as a concession to human hard-heartedness, not as part of God's ideal plan.

When the disciples protest that such a high standard makes marriage too difficult, Jesus doesn't back down. Instead, He asserts that those who cannot handle the commitment should remain unmarried. This radical teaching shifts the question from "What's the least I can give?" to "Am I willing to take marriage seriously as God intended?"

The Rich Young Man: A Lesson on Priorities

Matthew 19 continues with the story of the rich young man, who asks Jesus, "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16). His question reveals a transactional

mindset: he wants to know what actions will earn him God's favor. When Jesus tells him to keep the commandments, the man claims he has done so perfectly. Instead of challenging his self-assessment, Jesus goes straight to the heart of the issue: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor...then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

The young man's wealth isn't the problem; his love for it is. *(God has no problem with believers being wealthy in fact His will as that you would prosper and be wealthy not only in riches but in every area of life. He just will not tolerate riches to become your God)* His unwillingness to part with his riches reveals that he values them more than God. Jesus' call to sell everything exposes the man's failure to keep the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). In contrast to the rich man's attachment to wealth, Jesus reminds His disciples that entering the kingdom of God requires complete surrender. While the task seems impossible, Jesus assures them, "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

The Cost of Kingdom Living

Matthew 18 and 19 challenge believers to live out the values of the kingdom with humility, forgiveness, and faithfulness. Whether in the context of community discipline, personal relationships, or marriage, Jesus calls His followers to pursue holiness and prioritize God above all else. This life of commitment and sacrifice may seem daunting, but it is only possible through God's grace and strength.

Ultimately, kingdom living is not about asking, "What's the least I can give?" Instead, it's about surrendering everything

to God and trusting Him to work through our weaknesses. In doing so, we reflect the grace and mercy that He has so freely given us.

Commitment to the Kingdom

The Central Theme: Serving the Kingdom of God

In Matthew 19, we see a compelling focus on service to the kingdom of God. This is expressed through love and commitment to one's spouse, care for children, and respect for others in the Christian community. This teaching is brought to life through two contrasting questions posed to Jesus.

The first question comes from the Pharisees, asking, "What is the minimum I can give? What is the least I must do for my spouse?" Jesus redirects this flawed inquiry by urging them to focus on God's design for marriage rather than their own minimal obligations. Shortly after, a rich young ruler poses the second question: "If I give the maximum to God, can I ensure recognition and reward for my service?" Jesus reveals that this too is a faulty question because the man had not truly given his all to God.

Then Peter speaks up, "We have given up everything to follow You. What then will there be for us?" Jesus responds with a promise: at the renewal of all things, the disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Furthermore, He assures that anyone who has sacrificed for His sake will receive a hundredfold in return and inherit eternal life. However, He also warns against serving God for selfish rewards, emphasizing that such an attitude risks straying from genuine devotion and first love for God.

Although salvation is secure for those who have truly given themselves to God, such self-centeredness could leave them among the last in the kingdom.

A Parable of Generosity and Justice

To illustrate this truth, Jesus shares the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). A landowner hires laborers throughout the day: some work twelve hours, others nine, six, three, and even just one hour. At the end of the day, he pays all of them a full day's wage.

Initially, those who worked the longest are thrilled, anticipating a bonus. However, as each group—including those who worked only one hour—receives the same wage, the full-day workers grow angry. They grumble, “These men who worked only one hour have been made equal to us who bore the burden of the work and the heat of the day.”

The landowner responds, “Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Did you not agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” Jesus concludes, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Understanding God's Justice and Grace

This parable challenges our notions of fairness. Many instinctively feel that full-day workers deserve more. However, Jesus reveals a deeper truth: there are two kinds of justice—retributive and distributive. Retributive justice ensures everyone gets what they deserve, while distributive

justice treats everyone equally. God always delivers retributive justice; He ensures no one gets less than they deserve. But His grace often goes beyond this, giving others more than they deserve.

Instead of grumbling over God's generosity to others, we should be grateful for His grace in our lives. If we focus on comparing ourselves to others, we risk losing sight of God's goodness and straying into self-righteousness. As disciples, our focus must remain on God's love and grace, not on works, merits, or rewards.

The Cost of Commitment

Following this parable, Jesus prepares His disciples for the ultimate price of commitment. In Matthew 20:17-19, He foretells His betrayal, condemnation, and crucifixion. Despite this sobering revelation, James and John's mother approaches Jesus with a bold request: "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

While it's easy to criticize this request, it reflects their belief in Jesus' promises. Jesus, however, gently corrects them, saying, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" The "cup" in Scripture often symbolizes God's wrath. While Jesus would drink this cup fully on the cross, James and John would later drink it in the form of persecution for their faith.

True Leadership in the Kingdom

When the other disciples hear of James and John's request, they become indignant. Perhaps they feel slighted or resent the

perceived favoritism. Jesus seizes the moment to teach about true leadership. He contrasts worldly authority, where rulers “lord it over” others, with kingdom leadership, where greatness is measured by service.

He declares, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” True greatness in God’s kingdom comes not from giving orders but from sacrificially serving others.

The Call to Follow Christ’s Example

Jesus’ life serves as both a pattern and a unique sacrifice. In the Beatitudes, we see traits that disciples are called to emulate: humility, mercy, purity, and peacemaking. In ministry, Jesus’ selflessness and generosity become the model for how we should serve others. Yet, there are aspects of Jesus’ life—such as His role as the atoning sacrifice for sin—that only He can fulfill.

As followers of Christ, we are called to reflect His character in our context. While we cannot atone for sin, we can serve others sacrificially and use our lives to glorify God. This balance—imitating Christ where we can and honoring Him as our Savior where we cannot—keeps us grounded in both humility and gratitude.

Conclusion

Serving the Kingdom with the Right Heart

The life and ministry of Jesus' provides us profound lessons for Christian living and ministry. His compassionate response to the crowds, His balanced approach to equipping and sending disciples, and His strategic focus on the mission's immediate needs all provide a model for us to follow. As we engage in ministry, we must avoid the extremes of endless preparation or premature action. Instead, we should seek to grow in knowledge and faith while stepping out in obedience to serve others. By doing so, we join in the kingdom proclamation and respond faithfully to the call of Christ. However, a commitment to the kingdom of God demands more than just outward acts of service; it requires a heart aligned with God's love and grace. Above all, we should aspire to be like Jesus—the ultimate example of faithfulness, generosity, and courage. As followers of Christ, we are reminded that the mission is not about comfort or convenience but about proclaiming the kingdom and reflecting the life of our Lord and Savior – Jesus!

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is uniquely detailed in the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5–7). However, there is a parallel account in the Gospel of Luke (6:17–49), often referred to as the Sermon on the Plain. While it is not identical, the two sermons share many teachings, though Luke's account is shorter and focuses on fewer topics. The Gospels of Mark and John do not contain direct accounts of the Sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain. However, many of the teachings found in the sermon appear elsewhere in their narratives:

- **Mark:** Emphasizes the kingdom of God and includes some individual teachings found in the sermon, such as discussions on divorce (Mark 10:2–12) and the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28–34).
- **John:** Focuses more on Jesus' identity and relationships rather than on extended ethical discourses. However, the themes of love and humility (e.g., John 13:34–35) echo the sermon's principles.

So, we will be sharing detailed teachings of Jesus' sermon on the Mount going through Matthew's gospel.

The Ethics of the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount is the ethical foundation of God's kingdom, offering a powerful blueprint for life under His reign. Presented early in Jesus' public ministry, it acts as a cornerstone of His teachings. According to Matthew, Jesus delivered this sermon after returning to Galilee, marking the

formal commencement of His mission following a quieter season of personal encounters and healing ministries.

Two key themes emerge in the Gospels that directly relate to the Sermon on the Mount. The first is Jesus' identity as the King of the Jews, the Son of David, Emmanuel, and the beloved Son of God. He embodies the proclamation of God's rule. The second is the recurring theme of conflict. From Herod's attempt to kill Him as an infant to the hostile reception of His teachings, Jesus' message consistently challenged the status quo and drew opposition.

Jesus' Ministry Among the Least Likely

Jesus began His ministry not among the religious elite but among the marginalized. His first audience in Galilee lived in a region steeped in Hellenistic influence—a mix of Greek and pagan culture. Known as “Galilee of the Gentiles,” it was a land marked by spiritual and physical poverty.

The people of Galilee were among the poorest in society, often struggling without basic resources or healthcare. When Jesus healed the sick, the paralyzed, and the demon-possessed, He was addressing their dire needs. Illness or disability almost always led to poverty unless one belonged to the small wealthy class. By healing and performing miracles, Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor and freedom for the captives.

His choice to minister to the downtrodden was both intentional and revolutionary. Crowds flocked to Him, drawn by His miraculous works. Yet these miracles served a dual purpose: they alleviated suffering while pointing to His divine

identity. Even Nicodemus admitted, “We know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

The Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount describes life in the kingdom of God. According to Matthew 5:1, Jesus delivered this teaching to His disciples on a mountainside. While the crowds may have overheard, the primary audience was His followers—those committed to Him or considering discipleship.

At first glance, the Sermon’s teachings appear simple. Phrases like “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” and “You are the salt of the earth” seem straightforward. However, the added clarity Jesus gives to Old Testament law is what makes them profoundly challenging. His commands are uncompromising. For instance, He doesn’t just say, “Don’t murder” but adds, “Don’t be angry.” He goes further still: “Be reconciled to your brother.” The Sermon culminates in the daunting command, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Wrestling with the Teachings

The challenge of the Sermon on the Mount lies in its high demands. Over the centuries, various interpretations have attempted to make sense of its radical teachings such as:

1. **Two-Tier Ethics:** During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church viewed the Sermon as “counsels of perfection” intended for monks and nuns who took vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Ordinary Christians were seen as held to a less rigorous standard.

2. **Private vs. Public Life:** Martin Luther argued that the Sermon applied to personal piety rather than public life. In private, Christians might turn the other cheek, but in public roles, such as magistrates, they might administer justice.
3. **Literal Application:** The Anabaptists adopted a literal interpretation, advocating for pacifism and withdrawal from worldly roles. They believed following the Sermon meant avoiding positions in government or the military if those roles conflicted with its teachings.
4. **Driving Despair and Faith:** Later Lutheran thinkers suggested the Sermon's purpose was to reveal human inadequacy, driving us to Christ for grace. By highlighting the impossibility of perfect obedience, it points to the need for redemption through Jesus' death and resurrection.
5. **Attainable Standard:** Some, like President Harry Truman, viewed the Sermon as a moral framework to strive toward. This interpretation emphasizes practical principles, such as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

A Message for Disciples

While these interpretations offer valuable insights, they miss the real purpose. The Sermon's primary audience is clear: it is for disciples – it is for Kingdom life. Matthew 5:1-2 emphasizes this by stating that Jesus addressed His followers directly. The Sermon assumes the listener has already entered the kingdom of God and acknowledges Christ as Lord.

The beatitudes illustrate this point. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” resonates deeply with those aware of their need for God’s grace. Similarly, “Blessed are those who mourn” speaks to mourning over sin and injustice—a perspective born of spiritual discernment.

Marks of a Disciple

The Sermon assumes certain characteristics of its audience. It is for those who:

- Recognize God as their King and Father, as evidenced by prayers beginning with “Our Father.”
- Practice spiritual disciplines like fasting, prayer, and giving to the poor. Jesus’ language is not “if you fast” but “when you fast.”
- Desire righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. This surpassing righteousness reflects a commitment to the reign of Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount: The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes, found in Matthew 5:3-12, form the opening of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, presenting a radical framework for understanding blessedness in God’s kingdom. This timeless passage begins as follows:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called
children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

But what do these statements really mean? Are they merely a list of virtues for Christians to emulate, or do they point to something deeper? Let’s explore the structure, significance, and transformative power of the Beatitudes.

What Does "Blessed" Really Mean?

The term "blessed" in the Beatitudes is rich in meaning. In Greek, the word *makarios* conveys more than just happiness—it refers to a deep, abiding joy that comes from being in right standing with God. This isn’t the fleeting joy of a good meal or a hearty laugh but a profound sense of well-being rooted in God’s peace. It’s the kind of joy that withstands trials, sorrow, and persecution. When Jesus declares “Blessed are...,” He is describing a spiritual state of contentment that transcends worldly circumstances.

The Beatitudes of Need Recognizing Our Dependence on God

1. Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

The starting point for entering God’s kingdom is realizing our spiritual poverty. In a world that celebrates self-reliance and

independence, Jesus flips the script. To be "poor in spirit" means acknowledging that we cannot rely on our own strength or righteousness to stand before God. It's the humility of a child who struggles to tie his shoelaces yet insists, "I can do it myself." Jesus teaches that true blessedness begins when we recognize that we can't "do it ourselves." We need God.

2. Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

When we recognize our spiritual poverty, the natural response is mourning—not just over personal sin but over the brokenness of the world. This mourning isn't hopeless despair; it's a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. As James 4:9-10 urges, "Grieve, mourn and wail... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." Mourning over sin is a sign of spiritual sensitivity and openness to God's transforming grace.

3. Blessed Are the Meek

Meekness is not weakness—it's strength under control. A meek person does not assert their own rights or demand their due but submits humbly to God. This humility flows naturally from recognizing one's spiritual poverty and mourning over sin. True meekness, however, is not about being shy or passive; it's about using strength for the benefit of others and the glory of God, rather than for selfish gain.

4. Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

The first three Beatitudes describe an awareness of need. This fourth Beatitude is the turning point—it reflects a deep desire for the solution. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to

long for God's will to be done in our lives and the world. In Jesus' day, hunger and thirst were urgent, life-or-death realities. Likewise, our desire for righteousness should be just as intense, compelling us to seek God with all our hearts.

The Beatitudes of Transformation

Living Out God's Kingdom

5. Blessed Are the Merciful

When we recognize our need for God's mercy, we become merciful toward others. Instead of judging those who struggle, we empathize, saying, "I've been there too." Mercy flows from a heart that understands grace—it's not about excusing sin but about extending compassion and help to those in need.

6. Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Purity of heart begins with mourning over sin. When we grieve over the things that separate us from God, we desire to be cleansed and made whole. A pure heart is undivided in its devotion to God, striving for holiness and integrity. This Beatitude reminds us that those who truly seek God will see Him—not just in eternity but even now, through a clear and undistracted focus on His presence.

7. Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Peacemakers are those who seek reconciliation, not personal gain. Conflict often arises when people assert their own way, but meekness paves the way for peace. True peacemakers act with integrity, seeking to resolve disputes for the good of others and the glory of God. Their efforts reflect the heart of Christ, the ultimate peacemaker.

The Cost of Living the Beatitudes

8. Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted

When we live out the Beatitudes, the world takes notice. Some will be drawn to the light of Christ in us, while others will resist and oppose it. Persecution, though painful, is a mark of faithful discipleship. It confirms that we are making an impact, standing as salt and light in a dark and decaying world (Matthew 5:13-16). Even in persecution, there is blessing, for it aligns us with the prophets and saints who have gone before us.

The Beatitudes: A Godward and Humanward Focus

The first four Beatitudes direct us toward God: we acknowledge our spiritual poverty, mourn our sin, submit to His authority, and hunger for His righteousness. The next four focus on our relationships with others: we show mercy, pursue purity, make peace, and endure persecution for righteousness' sake. Together, they paint a picture of the life transformed by God's grace.

A Hunger That Transforms

As Christians, we are called to hunger and thirst for righteousness. This hunger is not passive—it compels us to act, to seek God, and to reflect His character in the world. Yet, too often, we settle for lesser desires: comfort, success, or the approval of others. Jesus challenges us to desire something greater—a righteousness that only He can provide.

The Beatitudes remind us that this righteousness is both a gift and a calling. By His grace, Jesus satisfies our hunger,

transforms our character, and empowers us to be His witnesses. Ultimately, the Beatitudes point us to the kingdom of heaven, where all our longings will be fulfilled, and we will see God face to face.

Understanding Jesus' Perspective of the Law

Doing the Right Thing for the Right Reasons

The first principle to grasp about Jesus' teachings on the law is this: Jesus is concerned not only that we do the right thing, but that we do the right thing for the right reasons. He insists on coherence between our motives and our actions. This truth is vividly illustrated in His teaching on murder, but it's equally applicable to His teaching on adultery.

In Matthew 5:28, Jesus declares, "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (NIV). In Greek, the phrase reads, "...anyone who looks at a woman in order to lust after her..." This phrasing distinguishes between acknowledging someone's attractiveness and indulging in lustful thoughts. Noticing beauty is not sinful in itself, but choosing to look with the intent to indulge lust is. The intent—to gratify sinful desire—is what Jesus identifies as sin.

Jesus emphasizes the seriousness of this issue with striking language: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off..." (Matthew 5:29-30). Clearly, this is not to be understood literally—a one-eyed person can still sin. Rather, Jesus uses hyperbole to underscore the gravity of sinning in our hearts and minds. He wants us to understand that internal sins are not

trivial matters. Thus, the first principle is clear: our actions and motives must align, and we must do the right things for the right reasons.

Moving Beyond the Tolerable to the Ideal

The second principle Jesus teaches is to move beyond what is merely tolerable to what is ideal. This principle is evident in His teachings on divorce, oaths, retaliation, and loving one's enemies.

Divorce: Raising the Standard

In the Sermon on the Mount and in Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus addresses divorce. In the Greco-Roman world, divorce was rampant and often informal; many couples simply lived together without formalizing their union. In the Jewish context, men could divorce their wives for almost any reason, and some rabbis taught that trivial issues like a burnt meal or a wife's appearance were grounds for divorce.

Moses sought to curtail this practice by requiring substantial cause for divorce, as outlined in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. A certificate of divorce was mandatory, and once divorced, a woman's remarriage precluded her from returning to her first husband. These measures were designed to limit divorce and elevate the sanctity of marriage.

However, Jesus raises the standard even higher. He teaches that the only valid ground for divorce is unfaithfulness, as it fundamentally breaks the marriage bond. By narrowing the grounds for divorce, Jesus calls His followers to a higher ideal of marital fidelity.

Oaths: Living with Integrity

In the ancient world, oaths were used to guarantee truthfulness. An oath essentially meant, “If I am not telling the truth, may God judge me.” Even God Himself used oaths to affirm His promises (e.g., Genesis 22:16-18, Psalm 132:11).

Today, oaths are rare, but we frequently make promises. The need for promises, however, reveals a deeper issue: inconsistency in our honesty. Jesus teaches that our “yes” should mean “yes,” and our “no” should mean “no.” If we always spoke truthfully, there would be no need for oaths or promises. Jesus calls us to a life of integrity where our words and actions align perfectly.

Retaliation and Love: A Higher Way

Jesus also challenges the “eye for an eye” mentality and urges us to go beyond mere justice to radical love. Instead of retaliating against those who wrong us, He calls us to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and love our enemies. This higher standard reflects God’s love and grace and transforms relationships.

Interpreting Old Testament Laws

Many wonder whether Old Testament laws have become obsolete in light of Jesus’ teachings. The answer lies in understanding the purpose and context of these laws. Some Old Testament laws provided a significant step away from paganism toward God’s ideal, even if they didn’t fully reach it. For example, the cities of refuge addressed the issue of blood feuds, but forgiveness and reconciliation are closer to God’s ultimate ideal.

Other laws pointed directly to Christ, such as those governing temple rituals. Some laws addressed specific cultural practices, like not destroying fruit trees during war. Every Old Testament law embodies a vital truth, but as cultures change and God's revelation progresses, the application of these truths may evolve.

Evaluating Specific Laws

When determining how to treat a specific Old Testament law, we must carefully study its context and purpose. For example, the law about oaths in the Old Testament allowed for their use but regulated them to ensure sincerity. Jesus' teaching moves beyond regulation to the ideal of complete honesty, where oaths become unnecessary.

Similarly, while Old Testament divorce laws represented an improvement over pagan practices, Jesus' teaching on marriage calls for a deeper commitment to lifelong fidelity. These examples demonstrate how Jesus fulfills and elevates the law, guiding us closer to God's ideal.

Living the Higher Standard

Jesus' teachings challenge us to rise above mere rule-keeping and embrace a life of integrity, love, and faithfulness. By aligning our motives with our actions, moving beyond the tolerable to the ideal, and interpreting Scripture with wisdom and context, we can reflect God's character in our lives. Jesus' call to live by these principles is not just a higher standard; it is a transformative way of life that draws us closer to Him and

to one another. Jesus came to fulfill the law and show us a better way.

A Call to Authentic Righteousness

Introduction: Righteousness from the Heart

Matthew 6 is a continuation of the themes introduced in the preceding chapter. Chapter 5 opens with the Beatitudes, laying the foundation for Christian character. Jesus challenges His listeners in Matthew 5:20 with a bold statement: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." This declaration sets the stage for the rest of the discourse. In Chapter 6, Jesus shifts the focus from outward adherence to the law to the heart—our motives and intentions.

The Pharisees excelled at observing the letter of the law, but Jesus called for something greater: a righteousness that springs from within. As His listeners grappled with the question, "How can we surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees?" Jesus provided the answer by addressing the issues of motives and hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy and the Pharisees

While Matthew 6:1-18 does not explicitly mention the Pharisees, their approach to righteousness serves as an underlying theme. The Pharisees were known for their emphasis on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These practices were seen as pathways to righteousness, as evidenced by their reliance on texts like Tobit 12:8, which highlights the value of

prayer, fasting, and almsgiving when paired with righteousness. However, Jesus exposes the pitfalls of their approach by addressing their motives.

Jesus' critique of hypocrisy resonates deeply. As D. A. Carson aptly observes:

“We humans are a strange lot. We hear high moral injunctions and glimpse just a little of the genuine beauty of perfect holiness and then prostitute that vision by dreaming about the way others would hold us in high esteem if we were like that.”

How often do we find ourselves slipping into this same trap? It's easy to begin with genuine intentions only to veer into seeking recognition. Against this tendency, Jesus provides a clear warning: If your aim is to gain human praise, you will succeed, but that will be your only reward. Genuine righteousness, by contrast, seeks an audience of One.

Secret Acts of Righteousness

Three times in this chapter, Jesus warns against practicing righteousness to be seen by others. Whether it involves giving to the needy, praying, or fasting, the instruction is clear: keep it private. When you give, do so in secret; when you pray, retreat to an inner room; when you fast, avoid drawing attention to yourself.

This doesn't mean public acts of faith are inherently wrong. Rather, Jesus highlights the importance of motives. Are you seeking God's approval or man's? By emphasizing secrecy, Jesus teaches us to focus on pleasing God, who sees what is done in secret and rewards accordingly.

Lessons from the Lord's Prayer

Jesus' teaching on prayer provides a profound test of true righteousness. He begins with the instruction to pray in private, away from the eyes of others. The essence of prayer, He explains, is a personal conversation with God, not a public performance. While public prayers are not forbidden (as seen in Acts), they should not overshadow the importance of private, heartfelt communication with God.

Jesus also warns against manipulative prayer. Pagan practices often involved repetitive, formulaic prayers in the hope of gaining a deity's attention. Jesus counters this by emphasizing God's attentiveness: "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). Prayer, therefore, should reflect a high view of God's character—a Father who is loving, attentive, and sovereign.

The Lord's Prayer itself is a model of theocentric focus. The first three petitions—"Hallowed be Your name," "Your kingdom come," and "Your will be done"—center on God's glory and purposes. Even as we present our personal needs (daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from temptation), the overarching focus remains on aligning our lives with God's will.

Living as Bearers of God's Name

One way we honor God's name is by living in a manner that reflects His character. As Christians, we carry His name in everything we do. Whether in our words, actions, or even how we drive, we represent Christ to the world. Jesus' call to

hallow God's name extends beyond prayer to the very way we live our lives.

True Treasure: A Heart Set on God

Jesus transitions from discussing motives in righteousness to addressing where our ultimate loyalty lies. In Matthew 6:19-24, He contrasts earthly and heavenly treasures. Earthly treasures are vulnerable to decay and theft, while heavenly treasures are secure for eternity.

The key verse, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21), challenges us to examine what we value most. Are we fixated on material possessions, or is our ultimate trust in God? Jesus warns against the danger of divided loyalties: “No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

The False God of Mammon

The word “mammon”—used instead of the common term for money—conveys a deeper meaning. Derived from an Aramaic verb for trust, mammon represents anything in which we place our trust apart from God. It is a false god that promises security but ultimately leads to spiritual poverty. Jesus calls us to reject this idolatry and place our trust fully in Him.

The Contrast Between Earthly and Heavenly Treasures

Matthew 6:19-24 draws us into its profound teaching using poetic parallelism, a hallmark of biblical literature. Consider the contrasts:

- Do not lay up treasures on earth / Lay up treasures in heaven.
- On earth, moth and rust destroy / In heaven, treasures are secure.

Jesus presents two clear paths of life: storing treasures on earth versus storing treasures in heaven, living in light versus darkness, and serving God versus serving mammon. These choices are not merely suggestions; they are invitations to examine our priorities and realign our hearts with God's eternal purposes.

Commands That Reveal the Heart

The passage begins with direct commands: “Do not store up treasures on earth” and “Store up treasures in heaven.” While these may seem like simple imperatives, they carry a deeper challenge: to evaluate the focus of our hearts.

Jesus' teaching highlights that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. For believers, the message is clear: devotion to God must take precedence over worldly possessions. For unbelievers, the passage provokes deeper questions, such as, “Why not serve both?” or “Doesn't God want us to prosper?” These questions expose the tension between earthly desires and divine purpose, pushing us to consider what truly holds our allegiance.

Diagnosis and Preventative Wisdom

This teaching functions both as a diagnosis of misplaced priorities and as preventative advice. In Matthew 6:22-23, Jesus addresses the metaphor of the eye—the lamp of the

body. A healthy eye brings light to the soul, while an unhealthy eye brings darkness. This imagery reveals two layers of meaning:

1. **Diagnosis:** If your focus is consumed by materialism, it indicates spiritual darkness. Recognizing this condition is the first step toward seeking God's light.
2. **Prevention:** Guarding your focus on eternal values prevents a drift into spiritual darkness.

The “eye” in biblical terms often parallels the “heart.” A heart fixed on God's commands reflects a healthy, light-filled life. Jesus' teaching urges us to examine our desires and the impact they have on our spiritual well-being.

The Root of Anxiety: Unbelief

At the heart of misplaced priorities lies unbelief. Without trust in God as our Father, reliance on earthly treasures becomes a natural response. These treasures serve as a fragile safety net, subject to decay and theft.

However, Jesus calls us to deeper transformation. Changing our behavior is not merely about following rules but about reshaping the heart. Our actions shape our character over time:

- **Lying:** Repeated lies desensitize us to truth until deceit defines us.
- **Generosity:** Practicing generosity, though challenging at first, molds us into giving people.

Jesus points us beyond outward actions to the condition of our hearts. True change begins with faith in God’s love and provision.

The Evil Eye and Generosity

The imagery of the “evil eye” is vivid and powerful. In ancient idioms, an “evil eye” represented envy and greed—a craving that is never satisfied. This concept appears in Deuteronomy 15:9 and other biblical texts, emphasizing its enduring relevance.

In contrast, Jesus calls for a “single eye”—one that is pure, generous, and undivided in its focus. A single eye reflects a heart free of greed, embodying true generosity. Jesus challenges us to fix our eyes on eternal values, knowing that what we focus on will shape who we become.

The Choice Between Two Masters

Jesus concludes this section with a profound declaration: “You cannot serve both God and mammon.” This stark choice forces us to evaluate our loyalties. Are we driven by material gain or by love for God? Serving God requires more than outward acts of generosity; it demands inward trust and faith.

Jesus elaborates on this in the verses that follow, addressing worry:

- Life is more than food and clothing.
- God provides for birds and flowers; how much more will He care for you?

- Worry achieves nothing; it detracts from life rather than adding to it.

Faith in God's provision frees us from anxiety. Jesus calls His disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, trusting that all other needs will be provided. This is not merely a call to right behavior but to a life rooted in faith and dependence on God.

Our Response to the Sermon on the Mount

As we transition to Matthew 7, the focus shifts to how we respond to Jesus' teaching. After hearing these high standards, some may feel overwhelmed. Jesus addresses two common pitfalls:

1. Judging Others: Instead of using His words to critique others, we must apply them to ourselves. Are we examining our own hearts and priorities?
2. Relying on God: Jesus encourages us to seek God's help through prayer, acknowledging that we cannot achieve transformation on our own.

Finally, Jesus presents the ultimate decision: will we follow His words and bear fruit, or will we ignore them? The Sermon on the Mount is not just a moral guide but a call to radical discipleship, rooted in trust and love for God.

By shifting our focus from earthly treasures to heavenly ones, examining our hearts, and trusting in God's provision, we align ourselves with the life Jesus calls us to live. This is not merely about doing the right things but becoming the right

kind of person—a disciple whose heart is set on God and His eternal purposes.

Conclusion

The Sermon on the Mount is not a general moral code for all humanity but a radical call for those who follow Christ. It challenges believers to embrace a kingdom ethic that reflects God's character. While its demands may seem impossible, they drive us toward dependence on God's grace and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

The question is, "Is our life aligned with God's Kingdom? Have we moved beyond external displays of righteousness and embraced a heart fully devoted to God? Whether in acts of charity, prayer, fasting or how we view material possessions, Jesus calls us to examine our motives. Are we seeking human approval or God's? Are we storing up treasures on earth or in heaven? By aligning our lives with God's kingdom, we fulfill the call to surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees—not through outward perfection but through a heart transformed by His grace. The Sermon on the Mount reveals what it means to live as citizens of God's kingdom—not in our strength, but in His.

The Miracles of Christ:

Revealing the Kingdom of God

The miracles of Jesus Christ are among the most profound and awe-inspiring aspects of His ministry. Using the Gospel of Matthew as our primary source, particularly chapter 8, some of these miracles are shared in the other gospels and there are additional miracles shared in the other gospels not found in Matthew, but using Matthew we will explore the meaning, purpose, and significance of these miraculous works; and why did Jesus perform miracles? What did they signify, and how did and do they connect to His message of the Kingdom of God? Let us delve into these questions and uncover the deeper truths behind His actions.

Why Did Jesus Perform Miracles?

One of the first questions people ask about miracles is, “What do they mean?” Some suggest that Jesus performed miracles to prove His deity or to inspire faith. While these reasons hold some truth, they don’t fully capture the purpose of His miraculous works.

Even Moses and others (Peter & Paul) performed miracles, but they didn’t prove they were divine. The miracles performed by Jesus were done because of **love**. Jesus was “moved with compassion”. (Mk. 1:41, 6:34; Mt. 1:41. 6:34; Lk. 7:113) Also, His miracles demonstrated that he was an agent of God. God sovereignly works miracles through someone as He wills out of compassion and love. The same holds true today. God is still doing miracles and healing people. God has not changed. He is the same yesterday,

today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8). Let's look at how others argue or view Jesus' miracles.

Miracles and Faith

Others argue that miracles were performed to increase faith. While this is true in some cases, miracles often had the opposite effect, hardening the hearts of those who refused to believe. Additionally, miracles were not always a reward for faith. Many recipients of Jesus' miracles were not believers, such as the multitudes who were fed with loaves and fish yet later abandoned Him (John 6:66). Thus, miracles served purposes beyond merely inspiring faith or rewarding belief. However, the number one way people were healed through His ministry was by faith. People can receive healing many different ways, but when you study the individual cases where Jesus prayed for people to be healed it was – “your faith has made you whole”.

The Connection Between Words and Works

We often hear the saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” In Jesus' ministry, His actions—His miracles—spoke volumes. But what were they saying? To understand this, we must examine the Gospel of Matthew's structure.

The Inclusion in Matthew's Gospel

Matthew employs a literary device called an “inclusio” to frame Jesus' ministry. In Matthew 4:23 and 9:35, nearly identical verses summarize His activities: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” These verses bracket the Sermon

on the Mount (chapters 5-7) and the miracles of chapters 8-9, presenting a cohesive picture of Jesus' mission.

Proclaiming and Demonstrating the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount reveals the righteousness of God's Kingdom, while the miracles in chapters 8-9 demonstrate its power. Together, they show that the Kingdom is both proclaimed and enacted. Jesus' words and works are inseparable, forming a unified testimony of God's presence and authority.

The Authority of Jesus' Words and Works

Jesus' miracles validated the authority of His teachings. Unlike other rabbis, He did not rely on the authority of past scholars or traditions. Instead, He boldly declared, "You have heard it said... but I say to you" (Matthew 5:21-22). This audacious authority astonished His listeners, as Matthew 7:28-29 records: "The crowds were amazed at His teaching because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."

Miracles as Proof of Authority

In Matthew 8 and 9, Jesus demonstrates the power of His word through a series of miracles:

- He heals a leper with a simple command: "Be clean" (Matthew 8:3).
- He heals the centurion's servant from a distance, affirming the power of His word (Matthew 8:8-13).

- He drives out demons with a word, showcasing His authority over spiritual forces (Matthew 8:16).

These miracles are unlike the elaborate rituals of other exorcists, such as those described by the historian Josephus. Jesus' word alone is sufficient, revealing His unparalleled authority and the immediacy of God's Kingdom. Again, while the miracles of Jesus validate who He said He was and that He had power and authority the reason He ministered to those in need was out of His great love – He was moved with compassion.

A Closer Look at Two Miracles

1. Healing the Leper (Matthew 8:1-4)

As Jesus descended from the mountain after the Sermon on the Mount, a man with leprosy approached Him, knelt, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." This act of kneeling conveyed both reverence and a recognition of Jesus' power. Leprosy, an incurable and socially isolating disease, rendered the man untouchable. Yet Jesus did the unthinkable: He reached out and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be clean."

This story is significant because it answers the question most people have about God and healing. Will God heal me? Most people believe God is able to heal, but will He heal? Jesus answers the question once and for all. He said I AM WILLING! That settles it for eternity and for anyone. God is not a respecter of persons, what He will do for one He will do for all.

This touch was profoundly significant. For the leper, it was likely the first human contact he had experienced in years. Jesus' touch not only healed his body but also restored him socially, allowing him to rejoin his community. This miracle underscores Jesus' compassion and the holistic nature of His healing—addressing both physical and social needs.

2. Healing the Centurion's Servant (Matthew 8:5-13)

In Capernaum, a Roman centurion approached Jesus, pleading for the healing of his servant. Remarkably, the centurion's faith stood out. He believed that Jesus' word alone was enough to heal, saying, "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed." Jesus marveled at his faith, declaring, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such **great faith**."

This miracle highlights the universal scope of Jesus' ministry. The centurion, a Gentile, recognized Jesus' authority in a way that even many Jews did not. It also emphasizes the power of Jesus' word to transcend physical presence and geographic boundaries. It also emphasizes the importance of persons faith. Jesus recognized this man had "GREAT FAITH".

The Word That Manifests the Kingdom

Throughout His ministry, Jesus used His word to teach, heal, and deliver. His words were not mere expressions of thought; they were the very essence of His person and authority. When Jesus spoke, His word carried the power of the Kingdom of God, manifesting His sovereignty over both the physical and spiritual realms.

The Distinctiveness of Jesus' Word

Unlike human teachers, Jesus' words were inseparable from His identity. He did not change His mind or retract His teachings. His word was a perfect reflection of His character and will. This unity between His words and His person set Him apart from all others and demonstrated His divine authority.

Miracles of Jesus: Continued

Matthew 8:18-22 highlights how Jesus' teaching, accompanied by His miraculous deeds, demands a response. In this passage, individuals approach Jesus, intrigued or moved by what they have seen.

First, a teacher of the law tells Jesus, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Readers might be suspicious of this man because he is a scribe, a group often opposed to Jesus. Additionally, the scribe seems to believe he can choose discipleship on his own terms. Yet, in Jesus' time, disciples were chosen by their teacher, not the other way around. By addressing Jesus as "teacher" (or "rabbi"), the scribe acknowledges His authority but doesn't fully grasp the cost of discipleship. Jesus responds, saying, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." This response subtly warns the scribe that following Jesus is not about comfort or security. Matthew leaves the story unresolved, and we are not told whether the scribe ultimately followed Jesus.

Next, another man, already identified as a disciple, addresses Jesus as "Lord," a term of deeper reverence. He requests,

“First let me go and bury my father.” On the surface, this seems reasonable, even honorable. However, in the cultural context, it’s unlikely that his father had already passed away. Burial in ancient Israel occurred within 24 hours due to the lack of refrigeration, meaning that if his father had died, the man would have been attending to funeral arrangements, not conversing with Jesus. Instead, the man likely meant that he wished to delay following Jesus until his elderly father passed away. Jesus responds bluntly, “Let the dead bury their own dead. You follow Me.” His command is absolute, using the Greek present imperative to signify ongoing obedience: “Follow Me now and continually.” The spiritually dead can handle earthly obligations, but the call to follow Christ takes precedence over even the most important social duties.

Matthew leaves both stories open-ended, perhaps intentionally. By doing so, he forces readers to reflect on their own response to Jesus. Will they fully surrender, prioritizing Him above all else? Jesus' words remain a challenge to subordinate even the good and noble duties of life to the ultimate call of loyalty to Him.

Miracles of Lordship: Calming the Storm

In Matthew 8:23-27, Jesus performs a miracle that underscores His authority over nature. While on a boat with His disciples, a violent storm arises, threatening to capsize them. The disciples, terrified, wake Jesus, crying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith, then speaks to the wind and waves, commanding them to be still. Instantly, the storm ceases. This miracle demonstrates that Jesus is not merely a great teacher or

healer—He is Lord over creation itself. Skeptics may attempt to explain away Jesus’ healings as psychological effects, but no suggestion or touch can calm a storm. This act reveals His divine power and sets Him apart.

Power Over Demons: Healing the Demoniac

In Luke 8:28-34, we encounter a dramatic confrontation between Jesus and a demon-possessed man. This man is consumed by evil spirits, living among tombs—unclean places that symbolize his complete alienation from society. He is naked, deranged, and uncontrollable, with superhuman strength that even chains cannot restrain. He is so lost in his torment that he has no identity beyond the name “Legion,” reflecting the multitude of demons within him.

When the demons recognize Jesus as the “Son of the Most High God,” they beg Him not to send them into the abyss, the place of eternal torment described in Revelation. Instead, they request to enter a nearby herd of pigs. Jesus permits this, and the pigs, overwhelmed by the demonic presence, rush into a lake and drown. This irony underscores the futility and destruction of evil.

The central focus of the story, however, is the transformation of the demoniac. Once consumed by darkness, he is now clothed, seated at Jesus’ feet, and in his right mind. This physical and spiritual restoration demonstrates Jesus’ power to save and heal completely.

Surprisingly, the townspeople, rather than rejoicing, ask Jesus to leave. They recognize His power but fear it, unsure of what His presence might mean for them. The formerly possessed

man, now eager to follow Jesus, begs to become His disciple. Yet Jesus gives him a different mission: “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” In this way, the man becomes one of the first missionaries, sharing the good news of Jesus’ authority and compassion.

Lessons From the Miracles

Jesus’ miracles not only display His authority over nature, illness, sin, and demonic forces but also point to His ultimate mission: to bring healing, restoration, and redemption to those who come under His reign. Each miracle invites us to respond—whether by following Him wholeheartedly, like the demoniac, or by hesitating, like the scribe and the disciple who wished to bury his father.

The question remains for us today: How will we respond to Jesus’ call? Will we let go of earthly priorities and embrace the cost of discipleship, trusting in His power and lordship? His miracles remind us that He is worthy of our loyalty, no matter the cost.

Teaching the Miracles of Jesus:

Insights and Reflections

The miracles of Jesus hold profound significance in His ministry, offering glimpses of divine power and purpose. But how should we understand and teach them? In this chapter we will explore key aspects of Jesus' miracles, addressing common misconceptions, theological truths, and practical lessons for believers today.

Healing in the Atonement: What Does It Mean?

One common question arises when discussing Jesus' ministry of miracles: Does His atonement provide for physical healing for all of those who will receive it? The answer lies in the scripture not in how some try to explain it away or how some make it only an issue of someone having enough faith. So, what does Scripture say?

What is God's Will?

It is either God's will to heal or it is not! God is not double-minded, He is not one way one day and one way another. The Bible is crystal clear regarding His will to heal – IT IS HIS WILL TO HEAL! It is who He is – “I AM the God that heals you”. (Exodus 15:26) He is the God “who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103:3) I am always amazed that those who struggle with God's healing have no problem with God forgiving sins.

The reason most people struggle with God's healing is because they interpret scripture through the lens of experience and not faith. They see so many people sick and most have a

friend or relative who in their eyes were great people of faith and died of sickness and disease and assume then it must not be God's will to heal. You can NEVER understand or interpret the Word of God by your experiences or anyone else's experience.

We walk by faith and not sight. Do you believe it is God's will for all to be saved? You should because that is what the Word of God teaches. However, millions of people don't get saved. Does that change God's will? No! I'm not saying it is always easy to believe and understand, but at some point you need to get to where you say, **"God no matter the circumstances, or what others say, or what I can't understand in the natural, I choose to believe You and Your Word, to trust you."**

Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."

There is so much more I could share, but this is not the place to deal in totality with the issue of God's provision for healing through the atonement. Isaiah 53:4-5 lays it out very clearly;

*"Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And **by His stripes we ARE healed.**"*

This is the prophet Isaiah several hundred years before the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus prophesying about the atoning work of Jesus at Calvary. As Isaiah said looking forward to the cross – “you ARE healed”. The apostle Peter said the same thing in 1 Peter 2:24, “*By whose stripes of Jesus you WERE healed.*” Peter is looking back to the cross and now says – “you WERE healed”. Yes it is God’s will to heal!

The True Blessings of the Atonement

The truth is **every** blessing available to believers flows from the atonement. This includes both spiritual and physical benefits. However, not everyone will see the manifestation of all God has for them in this life not because it’s not God’s will, it is because the devil is a thief that comes to steal, kill and destroy and we live in a fallen world. The idea that lack of faith is the sole reason for unanswered prayers overlooks the broader truths of Scripture and the human condition.

The Dual Nature of Christ: Humanity and Divinity in Harmony

One of the most challenging aspects of Jesus’ life is understanding the interplay between His humanity and divinity. For example, Jesus could read people’s minds (Luke 5:22), but was this through divine omniscience or an extraordinary human ability? While it is tempting to attribute such acts solely to His deity, we must remember that Jesus was also fully human.

Jesus’ unparalleled ability to listen, discern, and empathize sets Him apart. Unlike us, He was not preoccupied with self-image or distractions. This allowed Him to observe and

understand people in ways no one else could. Thus, it is often impossible—and unnecessary—to separate His humanity from His divinity. Together, they reflect the unified person of Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

The Humanity of Jesus: Genuine and Relatable

The Bible emphasizes that Jesus' humanity was authentic. He experienced emotions like astonishment, distress, and even exhaustion (Mark 4:38, John 11:33). In Matthew 24:36, He acknowledges a limitation in knowledge, saying, "No one knows the hour, not even the Son of Man." These moments reveal that Jesus willingly laid aside certain divine prerogatives to live a truly human life.

This genuine humanity makes His miracles even more remarkable. While Jesus relied on the power of the Holy Spirit, His human experiences connect Him to our struggles, making His teachings and actions deeply relatable.

A Closer Look: The Healing of the Paralytic (Luke 5:17-26)

To understand how to study and teach the miracles of Jesus, let us examine the healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:17-26. This passage offers profound insights into the context, characters, and theological significance of Jesus' actions.

Setting the Scene

The story unfolds during a time when Jesus was calling His disciples and performing miracles. On this particular day, He was teaching in a crowded house, and the power of the Lord was present for healing. Among the audience were Pharisees,

scribes, His disciples, and a curious crowd. Most importantly, God Himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was present, orchestrating the events.

The Determination of Friends

The action begins with a group of men bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Unable to enter the house due to the crowd, they devise a bold plan: they climb to the roof, remove part of it, and lower their friend down to Jesus. Imagine the scene—dust flying, sunlight streaming through the hole, and heads peeking down as the paralyzed man is lowered on a stretcher. Their determination highlights an important biblical theme: faith often involves overcoming obstacles.

Forgiveness Before Healing: A Surprising Twist

What happens next is unexpected. Instead of immediately healing the man, Jesus declares, “Your sins are forgiven.” This must have puzzled the man and his friends, who were likely hoping for physical healing. The Pharisees, however, took offense, accusing Jesus of blasphemy. After all, only God can forgive sins. By forgiving the man, Jesus was implicitly claiming divine authority.

Proving Divine Authority

To address their doubts, Jesus asks, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?” Forgiving sins, though invisible, is far more significant. To prove His authority, Jesus commands the man to rise, take his mat, and go home. The man’s immediate healing serves as visible evidence of Jesus’ power to forgive sins, leaving the crowd in awe.

Theological Reflections: Sin, Suffering, and Faith

This miracle highlights the connection between sin and suffering, a concept often misunderstood. While sin can lead to suffering, not all suffering is a direct result of personal sin. For instance, illnesses like liver damage from excessive drinking are consequences of specific actions, but not all ailments have such clear causes.

Jesus' miracles demonstrate that He has authority over both sin and its effects. His actions remind us that physical healing, while significant, points to a deeper spiritual reality: the restoration of our relationship with God.

The Unique Nature of Jesus' Miracles

It is crucial to recognize that Jesus' miracles, on their own, do not conclusively prove His divinity. After all, many people in biblical history have performed miracles. What sets Jesus apart is not simply the miracles themselves but the way He performed them and the words He spoke when doing so. Unlike Moses, Elijah, or even the apostles, Jesus often pointed directly to Himself. For example, He declared, "I forgive you. Now rise." This is something no prophet or apostle ever did. They always directed attention to God's power and authority, emphasizing that they were merely His instruments. Jesus, however, said things like, "I am willing. Be clean. I will heal you." In doing so, He positioned Himself as the source of the miracle, revealing His divine authority.

This distinction becomes even more evident when comparing Jesus' approach to miracles with that of others. Moses, Peter, Paul, and Elijah all stressed that they acted through the power

of God. Jesus, on the other hand, claimed the authority Himself saying, “I am the way” and pointing people to Himself. This unique aspect of His miracles underscores His divine identity.

Miracles and Faith: A Complex Relationship

Miracles often evoke questions about their connection to faith. Do miracles require faith, or do they create faith? The answer is not straightforward. Jesus healed large crowds, including unbelievers, demonstrating that one does not have to be a believer to benefit from a miracle. Miracles are gifts from God, blessings for both the just and the unjust, reflecting His great mercy.

At times, Jesus used miracles to encourage or reward faith. For instance, He asked, “Do you believe that I have the power to heal you?” and then said, “As you have believed, let it be done for you.” Sometimes, miracles stimulated faith; other times, they deepened it. And occasionally, Jesus chose not to perform miracles for those entrenched in unbelief, as seen during His trial or when the Pharisees demanded a sign. Miracles point to Christ’s comprehensive redemption as Savior, but they do not compel faith. Instead, they serve as signs, inviting us to trust in Him and His redemptive mission.

A Glimpse of Eternity

Miracles also offer a preview of what eternity will be like. They provide a glimpse of redeemed humanity, a time when sickness, tears, and suffering will no longer exist. Each miracle is an act of restoration—not complete restoration, but a foretaste of the universal healing to come. For example,

when Jesus healed the leper, it was not just physical healing but also social healing, restoring the man to his community. As followers of Christ, we are called to emulate this aspect of His ministry. In fact, Jesus said, “*he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do,*” (John 14:12) We are to minister God’s love and hope through preaching, teaching, healing through the Word of God watching God confirm that Word with signs, wonders, and miracles. We are not the ones who heals, saves, or performs miracles – Jesus is. We have the opportunity and privilege of being used by God to bring hope and healing to a hurting and broken world. Study the life of Christ through the gospels should inspire us and encourage us.

We Are to Imitate Christ – be like Jesus – how?

Imitating Christ is both a privilege and a challenge. Not everything Jesus did is meant to be replicated by His followers. John Murray, in his book *Principles of Conduct*, wrote, “To aspire to be like God in one sense is the essence of virtue. To aspire to be like Him in another is iniquity.” Understanding this distinction is essential for faithful Christian living.

When studying the Gospels, we must be attentive to what they reveal, even if it challenges us. For instance, the differences between Gospel accounts can sometimes unsettle readers. Did Jesus encounter one demoniac or two? Did the centurion himself ask for his servant’s healing, or did Jewish emissaries approach Jesus on his behalf? Such variations do not undermine the reliability of Scripture but invite us to dig deeper into its context and meaning.

Understanding the Differences in the Gospels

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke share many similarities, leading some scholars to propose that they draw from common sources, such as Mark others argue that Matthew and Luke altered Mark's account to make it more palatable or theologically precise. However, this perspective can undermine the trustworthiness of the Gospels, suggesting that their authors arbitrarily modified the narrative.

A better explanation acknowledges that the Gospel writers had access to a wealth of material. Luke explicitly states that he investigated everything carefully (Luke 1:3). John writes that his Gospel was selective, aiming to inspire belief in Christ (John 20:30-31). The similarities among the Synoptic Gospels are natural because they tell the same story: the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their differences reflect the unique perspectives and audiences of the authors. For example, Matthew wrote primarily for Jewish Christians, Luke for Gentiles, and Mark for Roman believers. These variations enrich our understanding, offering a multifaceted view of Christ's life and mission.

Lessons from Jesus Calming the Storm

The story of Jesus calming the storm illustrates the variations among the Gospels. In Matthew, the disciples cry out, "Lord, save us! We're perishing!" In Mark, they say, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" And in Luke, they plead, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" These differences highlight the disciples' fear and desperation, but they also reveal subtle nuances. Mark portrays the disciples as accusatory, while

Luke's account implies a greater recognition of Jesus' authority.

Similarly, the sequence of events differs. In Matthew, Jesus addresses the disciples' concerns before calming the storm, emphasizing a teaching moment. In Mark and Luke, He calms the storm first, focusing on His authority over nature. These variations reflect the Gospel writers' unique emphases while maintaining the core message: Jesus is Lord over all creation.

The Unified Message of the Gospels

Despite their differences, the Gospels present a unified story of Christ's power and provision. They were written in a context where oral storytelling was common, and eyewitnesses were still alive. The Gospel writers selected and arranged their material to address the specific needs of their audiences while staying true to the historical events. This process resulted in a rich tapestry of perspectives that deepen our understanding of Jesus' life and mission.

The calming of the storm, like all Gospel accounts, ultimately points to Jesus' divinity and His call for faith. In Matthew, He rebukes the disciples for their "little faith," teaching that there is no need to fear when He is present. In Luke, He asks, "Where is your faith?" inviting self-reflection. Mark, though hardest on the disciples, offers hope by implying that their faith will grow. Each account teaches us to trust in Jesus' power and provision, even in life's storms.

Conclusion

Jesus' miracles are far more than displays of power; they demonstrate the love and compassion He has for people and

provide evidence of His identity as the Son of God. They reveal His authority, invite faith, and provide a foretaste of the restoration to come. The differences in the Gospel accounts enrich our understanding, reminding us that the story of Christ is both universal and deeply personal.

As we study these accounts, may we grow in our faith, trusting in the One who calms the storms, heals the broken, and brings redemption to all who believe.

The Power of Parables

Parables are timeless teaching tools that convey profound truths through simple, relatable stories. Their genius lies in their ability to challenge listeners to reflect deeply and uncover meaning for themselves. Let's dive into the purpose of parables, their messages, and the invaluable lessons they offer. To begin with, let me share this story to help set the stage.

A Story of Two Monks – an example

Once upon a time, in a monastery nestled high in the mountains, two monks lived a life of quiet devotion. The monastery sustained itself by weaving and selling baskets. One day, the monks prepared a large batch of baskets and set off to sell them at the marketplace in the nearest town. Upon arrival, they agreed to split up—one heading north, the other south—with plans to reunite at the piazza fountain by nightfall.

The first monk sold all his baskets quickly and returned to the fountain as agreed. But his companion did not return that evening. The next day passed, and still, there was no sign of him. Finally, on the third day, the second monk arrived. Disheveled, dirty, and visibly ashamed, he approached his friend with downcast eyes and confessed, “Brother, I cannot return to the monastery. I have sinned. I gave in to temptation, broke my vows, spent the money, and committed fornication.”

The first monk listened carefully and replied, “Come, my brother. We will return to the monastery together and confess that we have sinned. Together, we will repent and deliver half

the money. They need not know who spent the rest.” And so, united in grace and humility, the two returned to the monastery as one.

This story of the two monks brims with profound truths and challenges us to reflect on our own lives. Consider these lessons:

1. **The Ripple Effect of Sin:** Sin is rarely confined to the individual. Its consequences often ripple through communities, impacting others in unexpected ways.
2. **Corporate Responsibility:** The first monk’s response highlights a sense of shared accountability. Perhaps if he had stayed with his brother, the temptation could have been avoided.
3. **Human Weakness:** The story reminds us that no one is immune to sin. Given the right circumstances, any of us could falter.
4. **Compassion Over Judgment:** Instead of condemning his brother, the first monk chose to extend compassion, forgiveness, and a path to restoration.

Parables like this are intentionally open-ended. For some, these interpretations resonate deeply; for others, they may provoke new questions. Perhaps the most crucial question to ask is: *Which monk am I?* Such is the nature of parables and how they can teach us different lessons.

Why Did Jesus Use Parables?

Parables were central to Jesus’ teaching. Their timing in His ministry is significant. As opposition to His message grew,

parables became a way to both protect His truths and provoke deeper reflection among His listeners.

Engaging the Heart

Parables convey truths in a way that disarms and engages. Imagine if Jesus had bluntly declared, “The potential for all sin lies within you.” Many listeners might have walked away offended. Instead, through a story, He invited them to consider this truth for themselves.

Responding to Opposition

By the time Jesus began speaking in parables, hostility from religious leaders was mounting. Direct statements about His mission and the kingdom could have been weaponized against Him. Parables, however, protected His message while delivering profound truths.

Teaching Through Stories

A striking example is found in Matthew 13. On the same day Jesus was accused of casting out demons by Satan’s power and was challenged to prove His identity, He spoke in parables. These stories addressed the pressing question: *How can the Messiah, performing miracles by God’s power, face such opposition?*

Some of Jesus’ parables are easy to understand in fact Jesus clearly explains the meaning of several of them others He leaves to the reader/hearer to figure out. Let us take a look at some of the better-known parables of Jesus.

The Parable of the Sower

One of Jesus' most well-known parables is the Parable of the Sower or of the Soil (Matthew 13:1-9). In this story, a farmer scatters seed on four types of ground:

1. **The Path:** Birds quickly eat the seed.
2. **Rocky Ground:** The seed sprouts but withers under the sun due to shallow soil.
3. **Thorns:** The seed grows but is choked by competing plants.
4. **Good Soil:** The seed flourishes, yielding an abundant harvest of 30, 60, or even 100 times what was sown.

Ancient Farming Practices

In ancient times, farmers scattered seeds before tilling the soil. The “path” refers to well-trodden footpaths crossing fields, where seed inevitably landed. What astonished Jesus' listeners wasn't the scattering but the yield. In a world where a 10-fold harvest was exceptional, a return of 30, 60, or 100 times was miraculous.

Responses to the Word

Jesus later explained the parable to His disciples. The seed represents the Word of God, and the soil the condition of a person heart which produces different harvests:

- **The Path:** Those who hear but do not understand; the enemy quickly snatches the Word away.

- **Rocky Ground:** Represents shallow, temporary faith that falters under trials.
- **Thorns:** Depicts those whose faith is choked by worldly worries and deceitful wealth.
- **Good Soil:** Symbolizes true believers who produce abundant spiritual fruit.

The question remains: *What kind of soil are you?*

The Purpose and Power of Parables

Jesus used parables to both reveal and conceal truths, depending on the listener's heart. As He explained in Matthew 13:10-12, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them." Parables gave deeper understanding to those who sought truth while veiling it from the hardhearted.

Giving and Taking

Parables are vivid and memorable, often disarming listeners and prompting deep thought. They invite personal application while withholding clarity from those unwilling to hear. In this way, parables serve as both an invitation and a judgment.

The Kingdom's Quiet Arrival

The Parable of the Sower also illustrates the nature of God's kingdom. It doesn't arrive with fanfare or force but like a seed—small, quiet, and often unnoticed. Though its beginnings are humble, its ultimate harvest will be extraordinary.

Understanding Parables: Stories That Surprise and Teach

Parables often include an element of surprise, forcing listeners to pause and ask, “What does this mean?” For example, in the Parable of the Sower, the surprising yield points to the miraculous nature of God’s work. This strangeness engages the imagination and invites deeper reflection.

Context Shapes Meaning

The meaning of a parable often depends on its context. For example, the Parable of the Sower reassured Jesus’ disciples that despite opposition and setbacks, the kingdom would grow and bear fruit in ways they couldn’t yet comprehend.

Parables of Luke 11-12: Prayer and Possessions

Let’s continue our teaching on the parables of Jesus by moving to the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 11, Jesus shares a powerful parable that reveals the true nature of God. Many of us mistakenly view God as distant, indifferent, or even harsh. To challenge these misconceptions, Jesus introduces a hypothetical situation. The original Greek begins with the phrase, “Who of you has a friend?”—a unique and intentional choice. This isn’t just a “suppose” scenario as some translations suggest; Jesus is prompting us to reflect on an idea that seems absurd.

Jesus often uses this rhetorical device to confront illogical thinking. For example, in Luke 12:25, He asks, “Who of you

by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" The answer is obvious: no one. Similarly, in Luke 17:7, He asks, "Who of you would invite a dirty, smelly laborer to sit down at your table without first letting him clean up?" The implied answer is again no one. These questions are designed to provoke deeper reflection on God's nature.

In the parable from Luke 11, Jesus asks us to picture a friend who is unwilling to help, even in the face of a pressing need. Yet, even such a person would eventually respond out of social obligation, to avoid embarrassment. Jesus contrasts this hypothetical with the truth of God's nature:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13)

Here, Jesus shows that God is not a reluctant giver but a loving Father eager to bless us, even with the greatest gift of all—the Holy Spirit. The message is reinforced through the literary device of *inclusio*, where key phrases open and close the passage. Jesus begins with "When you pray, say, 'Father,'" and ends by affirming that our Father gives good gifts. This structure points to the core truth: God is our loving Father, and we can trust Him fully with our prayers.

The Root of Prayer

The theology of prayer in Luke 11 emphasizes God's goodness and love. Jesus encourages persistence, but the heart of prayer isn't about using specific methods to manipulate God. It's about trusting in His character. Jesus assures us that God answers prayers not because of our persistence, but because of His inherent goodness.

The Greek word “anaideian,” often translated as “boldness” or “persistence,” refers more to a sense of shamelessness or desperation to avoid embarrassment. In the context of the parable, it's not the petitioner who should be ashamed, but the friend who refuses to help. Hospitality in the ancient world was a communal responsibility, and a refusal to help a guest would have brought shame to the entire village. Jesus uses this cultural context to highlight that even flawed human relationships, based on social pressure, can motivate people to meet needs. How much more will a perfect and loving God respond to our prayers?

Trusting God's Wisdom

Persistent prayer isn't about wearing God down. Jesus warns against “babbling with vain repetition” (Matt. 6:7). When God says no, it's not because He's uninterested, but because His wisdom sees the bigger picture. What may seem like a simple or logical request could be harmful in ways we can't foresee. Trusting God means believing that His refusal is often His protection, and His “no” is a path to something better.

Money and Possessions: Parables from Luke 12

When it comes to wealth, Jesus speaks often—especially in Luke 12. It's a subject that resonates deeply because we all, at some point, imagine what we would do if we were rich. While harmless daydreaming can be fun, it can also reveal deeper desires for wealth and misplaced priorities.

A Warning Against Covetousness

In Luke 12:13, a man interrupts Jesus, asking, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." While the man's specific situation is unclear, disputes over inheritance were common at the time. Jesus refuses to get involved in the matter, instead offering a caution:

"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Jesus repeats the warning to emphasize its importance. Covetousness is a sneaky temptation—whether it's desiring a bigger house, a nicer car, or more money for vacations, the pull of possessions can consume us. To illustrate this, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool.

The Rich Fool

A wealthy man has a bountiful harvest and decides to build bigger barns to store his crops. He congratulates himself, thinking, "I have everything I need for many years. I'll take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry." But then God speaks:

"You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

The man's mistake lies in his self-centered thinking. Of the 51 Greek words in this passage, many are personal pronouns like "I," "me," and "my." His wealth has led him to believe he is in control, only to find that life is fleeting, and what he possesses is not his to keep. The message is clear: material wealth cannot satisfy the soul's deepest needs.

Being Rich Toward God

Jesus teaches that true wealth is being "rich toward God." He gives us several reasons to keep money and possessions in perspective:

1. Life is about more than food and clothing (v. 23).
2. If God cares for the ravens, He'll certainly care for us (v. 24).
3. Worrying about material things can't add a single hour to our lives (v. 25).
4. God provides even for the wildflowers, which last only a day—how much more will He care for us? (v. 27-28).
5. We are not pagans, who chase after worldly things (v. 30).
6. Our heavenly Father knows what we need (v. 31).

Instead of striving for earthly wealth, Jesus calls us to seek His kingdom first. By trusting God with our needs and using our resources to serve others, we store up treasures in heaven—where they cannot be destroyed.

God is Not Against Riches and Wealth

The Word of God gives us many warnings about the potential dangers of wealth and riches like in this parable and we need to take heed of them. However, too often people then assume God is against money. God is not against riches and wealth in fact He is for it. Deuteronomy 8:18 tells us, “It is He who gives us the power to get wealth”. Psalm 35:27 says, “he takes pleasure in the prosperity of His people”. If God was against wealth He would not give us the power to get it. If prosperity was bad, He wouldn’t be glad for us to prosper. The issue is priority. Prosperity has a purpose, money has a mission it is to help establish His covenant. Again, the issue is God first? Who is your God?

More Insights into Jesus' Teachings

Associating with Outcasts

In Luke 14, Jesus challenges social norms by teaching the value of associating with all kinds of people, especially outcasts. Jesus is also concerned about prejudice and deals with the issue in other contexts in His life and ministry. He ends this chapter with the poignant statement, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:35). Notably, Luke provides no record of the audience’s reaction—no agreement, praise, or objection. This silence suggests they failed to grasp His message, a concept related to the interpretive technique called “uptake.” Uptake occurs when a listener responds in a way that shows they understand or engage with the message. The Pharisees’ response in Luke 15 reveals their lack of uptake.

Jesus Welcomes Sinners

As Luke 15 begins, we see Jesus welcoming tax collectors and sinners, allowing them to gather around Him. The Pharisees, however, mutter disapprovingly, criticizing Him for associating with such people. Ironically, Jesus had just emphasized the importance of engaging with outcasts. In response to their criticism, He delivers three parables that vividly illustrate His purpose.

The Lost Sheep: Seeking the Stray

First, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep. He asks, “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine and search for the lost one?” (Luke 15:4). The answer is clear: a good shepherd would seek the lost sheep. Jesus further emphasizes the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, surpassing the joy over ninety-nine righteous people who don’t need to repent. This parable underscores Jesus’ mission to seek and save the lost.

The Lost Coin: Valuing the Missing

To reinforce His point, Jesus shares another parable. He describes a woman who loses one of her ten silver coins and diligently searches until she finds it. When she does, she rejoices with her friends, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I lost” (Luke 15:9). This story parallels the first, illustrating that Jesus seeks out lost sinners because they are valuable to Him. Once again, He highlights the heavenly celebration over every sinner who repents.

The Prodigal Son: A Tale of Two Brothers

Jesus concludes with the parable of the prodigal son, or more accurately, the parable of the lost sons. The younger son, tired of life at home, demands his inheritance, essentially wishing his father dead. The father obliges, dividing his livelihood—his very life savings—between his sons. The younger son squanders his wealth on reckless living and ends up destitute, longing to eat even the food of pigs. Finally, he comes to his senses, recognizing both his physical and spiritual poverty. He resolves to return to his father, confessing his sin against heaven and his father, and asking to be treated as a hired servant.

The Father's Extravagant Welcome

When the father sees his son from afar, he runs to him—an undignified act for a man of his status. This act of running, tucking up his robes, and embracing his son signifies extravagant love and forgiveness. The father restores his son's status by clothing him in the best robe, placing a ring on his finger, and putting sandals on his feet. He orders a celebration, saying, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24).

The Elder Brother's Resentment

The story takes a turn as the elder brother learns of the celebration and becomes angry. Despite his duty to lead and participate in the festivities, he refuses to join. Confronted by his father, he bitterly complains about the unfairness of the situation. He accuses his father of favoring the younger son, exaggerating claims about the prodigal's sins, and disowning

his brother by referring to him as “this son of yours.” The elder brother’s language reveals his self-righteousness and resentment, as he describes his years of service as “slaving” for his father.

The Father’s Gentle Plea

In contrast, the father responds with gentleness and compassion. Addressing him as “My son”—or more literally, “My child”—the father reminds him of their shared relationship and reassures him that everything he has belongs to him. Yet, he explains the necessity of celebrating, saying, “Your brother was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:32). The father’s words underscore the importance of reconciliation and joy over the return of the lost.

Unfinished Business: The Pharisees’ Choice

The parable ends without revealing the elder brother’s response. This open-ended conclusion invites the audience to reflect and decide how they would respond. The Pharisees, represented by the elder brother, must confront their own self-righteousness and decide whether to join the celebration or remain outside in bitterness.

Identifying with the Characters

Whenever we hear a story, we naturally identify with certain characters. In this parable, the Pharisees are the elder brother, though they may resist this identification. The younger brother represents the sinners Jesus welcomes, and the father symbolizes God’s extravagant love and grace. Jesus crafts the story to help the Pharisees see themselves in the elder brother,

urging them to renounce their self-righteousness and join the celebration of God's mercy.

The Challenge for Us

This parable challenges us to examine our own hearts. Are we like the younger brother, in need of repentance and restoration? Or are we like the elder brother, harboring resentment and self-righteousness? Most importantly, will we join the celebration of God's grace, embracing His call to seek and welcome the lost? The choice is ours, just as it was for the Pharisees.

Jesus and the Fig Tree

When Jesus cursed the fig tree, it was a moment that puzzled the disciples and continues to intrigue readers today. In Matthew 21:20, the disciples ask, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" On the surface, this seems like a reasonable question. However, a more insightful question might have been, "Why did You make the fig tree die?" Instead, the disciples seemed preoccupied with the mechanics of the event, likely wondering, "Can we do that too?"

Jesus' response shifts their focus. He explains, "If you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but you can also say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:21-22). This answer not only satisfies their curiosity but also redirects them to a deeper truth about faith and prayer.

Faith That Moves Mountains

The phrase “Prayer can move mountains” is well-known in Christian circles, but Jesus’ specific wording deserves attention. He said, “this mountain,” not “mountains” in general. This distinction matters. Jesus likely had a particular mountain in mind, and understanding the context can deepen our grasp of His teaching.

Jerusalem is built on a hill called Mount Zion. From certain vantage points, the temple on this hill would dominate the view, especially for someone approaching from Bethany, where Jesus often stayed. Given the setting, it’s reasonable to infer that when Jesus spoke of “this mountain,” He referred to the temple mount.

The Symbolism of the Temple Mountain

Jesus had just cleansed the temple, demonstrating His authority over it. The temple, situated on a steep slope, was both a physical and spiritual landmark. By referring to “this mountain,” Jesus may have been addressing more than the geographic feature; He was symbolically judging the spiritual corruption associated with the temple.

Jesus used the phrase “this mountain” in two other instances in the Gospels. In Matthew 17:20, He referred to the mountain of His transfiguration. In John 4, speaking to the Samaritan woman, He mentioned Mount Gerizim. In both cases, “this mountain” referred to a specific location. Thus, in Matthew 21, it’s plausible that Jesus was pointing to the temple mountain, emphasizing that its judgment and restoration required faith.

Mountains as Symbols of Rebellion

Throughout Scripture, mountains often symbolize human pride and rebellion against God. Ancient cities were frequently built on mountains, serving as fortresses and symbols of self-reliance. Prophets like Jeremiah and John in Revelation used mountains metaphorically to represent defiance against God. For example, Jeremiah 51:25 calls Babylon a “destroying mountain,” despite its location on flat terrain. Similarly, Revelation 17:9 describes Rome as a city built on seven hills, emphasizing its arrogance and opposition to God.

Jesus’ teaching goes beyond the physical. He instructs His disciples that the way to move such “mountains”—whether the mountain of Israel’s sin or the oppressive power of Rome—is through faith and prayer. Victory comes not through violence or political maneuvering but through spiritual means.

Hunger for Righteousness

The fig tree incident carries another layer of meaning. Jesus’ hunger for figs could symbolize God’s hunger for righteousness among His people. The barren fig tree becomes a poignant image of spiritual barrenness. By cursing the tree, Jesus delivers a visual parable about the consequences of unfruitfulness.

Did They Understand?

One question remains: Did the people, especially the religious leaders, understand the deeper meaning behind Jesus’ words? Some might have picked up the allusion to Jeremiah 7 and the

broader scriptural context, while others likely missed it. However, Jesus' disciples would have pondered His words, and Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recorded them for future generations to study and understand.

The Authority of Jesus: Debates in the Temple

After the fig tree episode, Jesus enters the temple courts, where He faces a series of debates designed to challenge His authority. The first question comes in Matthew 21:23: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Jesus counters with a question of His own: "John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven or of human origin?" This puts His opponents in a dilemma. If they acknowledge John's authority as divine, they must explain why they didn't believe him. If they deny it, they risk losing credibility with the people, who regarded John as a prophet. Trapped, they answer, "We don't know," and Jesus, in turn, refuses to answer their original question.

Paying Taxes to Caesar

In another attempt to trap Him, the Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus whether it is right to pay taxes to Caesar. This is a politically loaded question. A simple "yes" could alienate the Jewish masses, while a "no" could lead to charges of sedition.

Jesus' response is masterful. He asks for a coin and points out Caesar's image on it. "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's," He says. This answer affirms the legitimacy of paying taxes while making it clear that ultimate

allegiance belongs to God. It's a lesson in navigating complex situations with wisdom and integrity.

Parables That Challenge

Following the debates, Jesus tells parables to illustrate His points further. In the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32), He highlights the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who profess obedience to God but fail to act accordingly. In the parable of the tenants (Matthew 21:33-46), He foretells His own rejection and death at the hands of these leaders, emphasizing their accountability to God.

The Sword of the Spirit

Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrates that His weapon is not a sword but words—truth spoken with authority. He uses parables, debates, and symbols to convict hearts, call people to repentance, and reveal God's kingdom. His approach is both confrontational and compassionate, aimed at bringing as many as possible to salvation.

Conclusion

The cursing of the fig tree, the teaching about moving mountains, and the debates in the temple all point to the transformative power of faith and prayer. Jesus challenges His disciples to see beyond the physical and grasp the spiritual realities at play. The mountain of human pride and rebellion can only be overcome through spiritual means. As followers of Christ, we are called to wield the mighty instruments of faith and prayer, trusting in God's power to bring about His purposes.

Teaching Parables

The Challenge of Familiarity *Maintain the Impact of the Parables*

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of Jesus' most beloved teachings. However, its very familiarity creates a challenge: How do we recapture its original impact? When we hear this story today, our response might be a casual, "Oh, that again." We already know the plot—a man is beaten and robbed, religious figures pass him by, and the Samaritan helps him. The title itself, "Good Samaritan," spoils the ending and dulls the shock value. For first-century Jews, however, this story was anything but predictable. To them, a Samaritan was the last person they would expect to be the hero.

To fully grasp the parable's meaning, we must unlearn our preconceived notions and rediscover the cultural and historical context that made it so provocative. This requires us to think carefully about how we communicate the parables in a way that reawakens their power.

The Lawyer's Question: "Who Is My Neighbor?"

The parable begins with a dialogue between Jesus and a lawyer, as recorded in Luke 10:25-29. The lawyer poses a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with a counter-question, asking what is written in the law. The lawyer answers correctly: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus affirms this answer, adding, "Do this, and you will live."

At this point, the lawyer seeks to justify himself, asking, “Who is my neighbor?” Why does he ask this? One possibility is embarrassment; he may have realized he had asked a question he already knew the answer to. Another, more plausible explanation is that he was seeking to narrow the scope of the command. Loving one’s neighbor is a monumental task, so the lawyer may have been looking for a loophole. By defining “neighbor” in a limited way, perhaps he could meet the requirement and still feel righteous.

The Road to Jericho: Setting the Scene

Jesus answers the lawyer’s question with a story. The setting is the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, a notoriously dangerous route. Jerusalem sits about 2,000 feet above sea level, while Jericho is approximately 1,400 feet below sea level. The road descends through desolate, barren terrain—an ideal spot for robbers.

In the parable, a traveler is attacked, stripped of his clothes, beaten, and left half-dead. He becomes an “everyman,” devoid of identifying features like clothing, language, or accent. When others encounter him, they have no way of knowing who he is or whether they owe him assistance.

The Priest and the Levite: Products of Their Culture

First, a priest passes by. Often, this character is portrayed as cruel and heartless, but the reality is more nuanced. Priests were forbidden by the law to touch a corpse, and the man on the roadside might have appeared dead. Touching him would have rendered the priest ceremonially unclean, requiring a lengthy and costly purification process. Additionally, cultural

norms of the time, as reflected in the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus, suggested helping only the devout. The priest's decision, while troubling, was predictable given his cultural and religious context.

Next comes a Levite. While Levites did not have the same strict prohibitions as priests, they often adopted similar practices. Like the priest, the Levite passes by the injured man.

The Samaritan: An Unexpected Hero

Finally, a Samaritan appears. To the Jewish audience, this would have been shocking. Samaritans were viewed as heretics and enemies. Rabbis of the time even discouraged Jews from accepting help from Samaritans, as their offerings were considered unclean.

Despite this, the Samaritan becomes the hero. He tends to the injured man's wounds, transports him to safety, and pays for his care. His actions embody sacrificial love, breaking cultural and religious barriers. The Samaritan's behavior is the antithesis of what Jesus' audience would have expected, driving home the point of the parable.

Modern Parallels: The Relevance of the Parables

How can we make this parable resonate with modern audiences? One approach is to reimagine it in contemporary terms. Imagine a man driving on an icy Midwestern road, crashing into a ditch, and being thrown unconscious from his car. A pastor drives by but doesn't stop, preoccupied with an important church meeting. A missionary also passes, too busy to help. Then, a homosexual man—someone stigmatized by

many Christians—stops, provides aid, and ensures the injured man receives care.

This retelling might unsettle some listeners, which is precisely the point. Parables are meant to challenge our assumptions and provoke self-reflection. However, no modern analogy can perfectly capture the cultural dynamics of the original story. The Samaritan's low standing in Jewish society was far more extreme than any contemporary parallel.

Beyond Morality: Seeing Christ in the Parables

It's tempting to reduce the parable of the Good Samaritan to a moral lesson: "Be a good neighbor." While this is part of the message, it's not the whole story. Jesus' parables often reveal deeper truths about His mission and identity.

In Luke 24:44-47, Jesus explains that all Scripture points to Him. The parables are no exception. They illustrate the kingdom of God, the nature of discipleship, and the character of Christ. The Good Samaritan not only models love for others but also reflects Jesus Himself—the one who shows mercy to those who are broken and helpless.

Engaging with the Parables

To teach the parables effectively, we must bring them to life. Dissecting cultural nuances is valuable, but it should never overshadow the story's emotional and spiritual impact. Parables are like jokes; they lose their power if overexplained. Instead, they should be told in a way that draws listeners in and invites them to see themselves in the story.

Jesus used parables to confront, challenge, and inspire His audience. As preachers and teachers, we must strive to do the same. By recovering the shock value, emphasizing the presence of Christ, and engaging our listeners, we can ensure that these timeless stories continue to transform lives.

The Danger of Hypocrisy

At the conclusion of the previous discussion, I highlighted that hypocrisy often begins with self-deception. Over time, a person caught in hypocrisy can sincerely believe they are not a hypocrite at all. The Pharisees, tragically, embodied this second type. Jesus' warnings no longer convicted them; instead, His words fueled their anger. Yet Jesus, in His mercy, continued to warn them.

To illustrate this point, consider the following parable: Once upon a time, a woman woke up with a severe headache on the right side of her head. After enduring the pain for several days, she sought medical attention. Her doctor ran numerous tests and, consulting with a specialist, confirmed the presence of a brain tumor. However, being a tender and kind-hearted man, the doctor withheld the grim diagnosis, reassuring her instead that the pain would subside in six months. While technically true—she would indeed feel no pain in six months as she would have passed away—this was tenderness without true kindness. It failed to address the root of the problem.

Similarly, warning people about sin is an act of true kindness. Merely saying, “God loves you,” while withholding the reality of judgment, fails to get to the heart of the matter. Jesus' love compelled Him to tell the truth, no matter how difficult it was to hear. As counselors and ministers, we must avoid foolish

kindness that addresses only surface issues and fails to confront the deeper problems.

End Time Teachings of Jesus:

Matthew 24-25

Jesus' Final Discourse

In Matthew 24-25, we encounter Jesus' fifth and final major discourse, where He speaks about the fall of Jerusalem and the last things. This teaching is not limited to the eternal future but also addresses the near future that His disciples would face.

Prophecy or Post-Event Writing?

A key question arises: Is this passage truly prophetic? Critics often claim that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, suggesting that the prophecies were retroactively fabricated. However, a close examination of Matthew 24 reveals that its details were not derived from contemporary accounts of Jerusalem's fall but instead from Old Testament prophecies.

For example, Josephus, a Jewish historian, emphasizes the internal strife among the Jews during the siege. The temple, he writes, was filled with human blood due to infighting before the Romans ever breached the city walls. Yet Jesus does not mention these events. Instead, His descriptions draw on Old Testament language about divine judgment. For instance, the imagery of camps, siege ramps, and the city's destruction (Isaiah 19, Ezekiel 4 and 28, Amos 9) aligns with Old Testament lamentations. These references underscore that Jesus' words were not tailored post-event to fit the historical record.

The Flight of Christians

Another compelling point is Jesus' warning in Matthew 24:15-16: "When you see the abomination of desolation...flee to the mountains of Judea." Historically, Christians fled to the city of Pella, not the Judean mountains. If the Gospels had been written after the event, they likely would have reflected this detail. Instead, the text remains true to Jesus' original prophecy, further supporting its authenticity.

Dating the Gospels

The dating of the Gospels is another area of debate. Critics often propose dates long after the events they describe, suggesting that the accounts are unreliable. However, early church leaders around A.D. 150-200 affirmed that Matthew's Gospel was written first. Evidence within the New Testament also supports an early date. For instance, 2 Corinthians 8:18, written in the late 50s, may reference the Gospel of Luke. If Luke was written early, then Matthew—written before Luke—likely dates to the 40s or 50s. John Wenham's *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke* provides a thorough exploration of this topic.

The Disciples' Questions

In verse 3 Matthew records these three questions –

- 1) When will these things (i.e., the temple destruction) happen?
- 2) What will be the sign of your coming?
- 3) What will be the signs of the end of the age?

Luke in his gospel adds some additional detail to the first question. He includes not only when will the destruction of the temple happen, but what will be the signs that the destruction is going to happen – we will call this question 1A.

As we go through the rest of Matthew chapter 24 Jesus answers these 3 questions, but there are two things about Jesus' answers that we need to take note of;

1. Jesus doesn't answer the questions in the same order they are asked and
2. He also adds another question – What are NOT the signs?

What are Not the Signs of the End of this Age?

This is the first question Jesus answers beginning in **verse 4**. There are two specific things He makes clear are not to be mistaken as signs of the end and we should not be alarmed by them. He wants to make sure people aren't deceived and don't get confused when they see certain things happen because the real signs are easily confused with ordinary, everyday events.

- 1) Jesus' first warning is that no one should be misled into believing that Jesus had already returned. In other words, don't be misled if you hear others saying Jesus has already come. People speculating and saying that Jesus has come are *always* going to be wrong, and so we can *always* ignore them. When Jesus does come back, He will bring us with Him, so we can't miss it.
- 2) Next, Jesus says don't be worried about wars or rumors of wars. Rumors that wars are happening between Iran and Israel or Russia and Israel or anywhere else are meaningless and should be ignored. We will see why this is important when Jesus tells what the real signs will be that mark the end of this age.

The amazing thing is, we have seen through the years many fall for these counterfeits, and there will be more to come. Isn't it interesting that we rarely if ever see people claiming to be Muhammed or Confucius or Buddha. Why? Because Satan knows who the real God is, so he doesn't bother counterfeiting the others because they are meaningless.

What are the Signs of the End of this Age?

Next Jesus begins to answer question #3 in **verse 7**, “***What are the signs of the end of the age?***” Jesus shares what the signs will be that lead up to and announce that the end of the current age is getting close that is the “***Age of the Gentiles***”. This current age started in 605 BC and continues until it ends when the Kingdom age begins which will be at some appointed time in the future. This is one of the most important keys about the end times. Only when you properly understand what the Age of the Gentiles is, know what the time frame of the age is, and what the purpose of the age is can you accurately put the signs of the end time in proper perspective.

In **verse 8** Jesus adds another important piece of information. He compares the signs that lead to the end of this age with that of what a mother experiences leading to the delivery of a child – “birth pangs”. There are 4 things about birth pangs we should take note of as a mother moves toward the moment of deliverer -

- They are painful.
- They begin mildly.
- They intensify over time.
- They increase in frequency – they get closer together.

Keeping these in mind as we study the signs that Jesus gives us will be huge for us to properly put the signs in proper perspective.

3 Signs of the End of this Age

With that in mind Jesus shares the signs that will signal and announce the end of this age is very near. He gives these three signs in **verse 7 which are:**

1. World Wars (not ordinary wars that always happen – it will be much bigger wars i.e., WW1, WW2...)
2. Famines – it will be the frequency and intensity that are key
3. Earthquakes – again it will be the increase and magnitude.

What are Signs of the Destruction of the Temple?

At the beginning of this chapter Jesus predicted the destruction of Herod's temple. Matthew skips recording the answer to this question and instead jumps to explaining His second coming. (question 2), however Luke in his gospel includes Jesus answer to question #1 and 1A.

Matthew moves forward in time by recording Jesus' answer to question #2 on the signs of Jesus' second coming, while Luke moves back in time to cover Jesus' answer to question #1 and the destruction of the temple in the first century

Luke's Summary of Jesus' Answer to Question 1

The Destruction of the temple in 70AD

Luke 21:12 starts with, “*But before all these things*”. This helps us see clearly that Jesus was talking about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Jesus explains to his disciples that before the destruction of the temple, the church would see persecution, especially church leaders. They would be dragged into synagogues and before governors of Rome, which we see recorded in the book of Acts.

The persecution of the church in the first century was an early sign of the coming destruction of the temple, and in Luke 21:20 it says that the city of Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies. This would be the key sign for the believers of the first century to know that the destruction of the temple was drawing near. That sign occurred in AD 66, when the Roman general Cestus Gallus was sent from Rome to put down a Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem.

The Roman siege eventually resulted in the Roman army penetrating the city walls in AD 70 and destroying the temple. Josephus was a Jewish military commander captured by the Romans who later chronicled the Roman Jewish wars, and during the fall of Jerusalem he witnessed the destruction and wrote about it.

Josephus said that 1.1 million Jews were killed in the city and tells of how the Temple was burned to the ground and the city was utterly laid waste. Titus celebrated the great military victory by commissioning an arch which is still visible in Rome today. It shows the Romans' carrying away the implements of the Temple.

Jesus told His disciples they would know that the temple was about to be destroyed in the first century when armies begin

surrounding the city of Jerusalem. This would be the key sign for the believers of the first century to know that the end of the temple was drawing near. (verse 20) He told them to flee the city and don't return. Those who obeyed His word escaped the carnage but those who didn't understand or believe Jesus' words died in the attack. They were among the 1 million Jews who died

History proves and shows us that all these signs leading to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD came to pass just as Jesus predicted. Now let's go back to Matthew for the answer to question 2

Verses 9-31

What are the signs of His coming into the Kingdom?

The answer to this question is by far the longest of all the questions. The first thing for us to notice is how extreme tribulation and persecution will once again be the backdrop of these prophetic events, just as believers were persecuted in the 1st century before the temple's destruction so it will happen again before Jesus returns. Jesus says believers will be persecuted, martyred and hated by everyone on earth because of their association with Jesus.

Jesus now goes on to describe the specific signs that will precede His return and the start of the Kingdom reign. In **verse 10** Jesus says many believers will fall away, betraying one another and even hating one another.

Many have wrongly translated or interpret this as "apostasy" and have tried to apply it to the church. First, the better translation of the Greek word used here, *skandalizo*, is to

stumble or to take offense. Jesus is not talking about Christians turning away from their faith in Jesus but rather Christians stumbling (i.e., sinning) in the face of intense persecution. Again, like all signs this has always happened throughout history, but during this time right before the return of Christ the number of believers stumbling will be at an all-time high. Jesus says even to the point of betraying other Christians to save their own skin and to the point of hating other Christians.

Second, Jesus is talking about the time right before His return. The Church will have been removed. However, there will be thousands of believers who get saved during the Tribulation. These are the Christians who Jesus is speaking of that will “stumble – take offense”. *(The apostle Paul however, in his letters does warn the church that in the last days of the church age there will be many who think they are saved who are attending church, but they are not of the “faith” – 1Tim. 4:1 Two different situations don’t confuse them.)*

Next in **verse 11** Jesus says there will be false prophets misleading many on the earth, and lawlessness will increase everywhere and the love of many will grow cold. People will become more ruthless and crueler than ever before. All these are signs of the return of Jesus.

As the end of the age grows closer, the birth pangs will increase such that false prophets will be everywhere and lawlessness will become the new norm as society crumbles under the weight of hatred, pride, and depravity.

The Abomination of Desolation

Verses 15-27 are some of the most significant verses in this chapter. Jesus describes a very important and specific sign – it is **“the abomination of desolation”**. We read about this in Daniel. He tells us this event happens in the middle of a “week” which is the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation. (Dan. 9:27) He says a man (the antichrist) will make a covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will break that covenant stopping the sacrifices and grain offerings in the temple. There will be an idol setup in the temple – an abomination that desecrates the temple.

Jesus says when the desecration of the temple happens, this will be a major sign to those on earth. Jesus says it will be a turning point that triggers a “great tribulation” such as has never been seen on earth before or after. There will be even greater upheaval, the greatest wrath and destruction that God could possibly pour out on earth will be poured out in this final 3.5 years of the Tribulation. Remember those who were saved during the Church age will have been removed and will be with Christ in paradise.

On top of that, Satan becomes especially active in persecuting believers on earth during this time. In fact, Jesus says in verse 22 if God had not set a time limit, all of mankind would be destroyed. This is why the Tribulation is only seven years, and Jesus says the great tribulation will be limited to the final 3.5 years of that time.

Remember, Jesus spoke these words 2,000 years ago to a handful of men sitting on a hillside in Israel. He warned them about events that would occur in the future. Jesus gave them

these signs fully confident that in a future day, His followers would have these words available and they would be read.

I think it is amazing how Jesus clearly believed that what He spoke on that day on that hillside would be remembered, recorded, preserved and shared. Jesus even quoted from the Book of Daniel which was written several hundred years before and knew that all Scripture like that of Daniel would also be preserved and shared over thousands of years. The point I am making is how powerful and reliable the Word of God is. It stands the test of time. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His Word never pass away.

Let's move on to the rest of Jesus' (fourth) answer, to the (second) question on signs of His Second Coming. Remember these signs take place entirely within the seven years of Tribulation on earth.

Jesus has given the signs that happen in the earliest period of Tribulation like lawlessness and love growing cold. He then shared the events at the midpoint of Tribulation mainly the abomination in the temple. Now Jesus moves to the very end of the seven years, to the very last days when Jesus' return is only hours away.

In **verse 29** Jesus says that the sun will stop shining which means the moon also goes dark. The stars will no longer be visible either. This will be a climactic moment when all light sources cease, and the world will be plunged into utter and complete darkness.

The world stage will be set for the ultimate entry and final sign of Jesus return that will be witnessed by all on earth. Out

of this intense darkness, Jesus will appear as a bright sign in the sky, and the angles will be with Him and the Church will follow. Like all the signs in this discourse Jesus is describing the way He will appear from an earthly perspective.

Jesus makes an important distinction in **verse 30** by labeling the nations, that is the unbelieving Gentiles as the “**tribes of the earth**”. This is in contrast to the “**tribes of Israel**”. Israel will be celebrating their Lord’s return as they see Jesus coming in power and glory. The tribes of the earth will not be celebrating they will be mourning because the Lord’s return brings their judgment.

Jesus' return has different consequences for different groups of people. To Jews, the Lord brings faith and redemption, along with the believing Gentiles, He will establish the promised Kingdom, but to the unbelieving Gentiles on earth, the Lord brings judgment.

In **verse 31** Jesus says He will send angels to gather the elect, that is all the Jews wherever they may be left in that day, and assemble them in Jerusalem as a final sign for those waiting for His return. This will be necessary because the Old Testament promises that all Jews will be assembled in the Promised Land for the Kingdom and the Old Testament promises Israel that at the moment of this gathering for the Kingdom, a great trumpet will be blown.

Is. 27:12-13 – “In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.”

Many missed His first coming and in the years since most have missed or ignored the good news of the Gospel. Father God does not intend for anyone to miss His Son's second coming into His Kingdom. It will not be possible to ignore the signs of Jesus' Second Coming or to deny the event.

In verse 34 Jesus makes a very key statement. He says, “*this generation will not pass away until “all these things” take place*”. This has been a source of considerable confusion and misinterpretation in the Church. Many people predicted Jesus would return in 1988 – 40 years from 1948 the years of a generation. Obviously, He didn't.

Listen, Jesus wasn't talking about a single human generation. He said “this generation” not “a generation. He was referring back to the fig tree. Jesus was speaking of the entire nation as a new generation of Israel, not merely one chronological generation.

*So, Jesus said “this” generation, meaning
“this nation of Israel,” won't pass away until all
these things come to pass.*

The leading sign that lets us know the end of the age is coming - is when Israel returns to the promise land, ... and that day has already come. You can be sure everything else Jesus said is coming.

The Last Day

From Matthew 24:36 onward, Jesus shifts focus to His return and the end of the age. He emphasizes the unpredictability of that day: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36). Jesus compares this to the days of Noah, when people carried on with life unaware of the coming flood.

The phrase “that day” serves as a clear reference to the final day of judgment, understood universally in Jesus’ time. This day will come unexpectedly, just as the rain did in Noah’s time, catching many off guard.

A Foreshadowing of Judgment

While the fall of Jerusalem was not the ultimate day of judgment, it served as a foreshadowing. For Israel, it was a cataclysmic event, a dress rehearsal for the final judgment. Jesus’ prophecies about this destruction remind us that His words are trustworthy, both for events that have already come to pass and for those still to come.

Matthew 25-27 - The Significance of the Resurrection

Before diving into the final teachings and trials of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 25-27, it’s important to acknowledge the foundation upon which all of Christianity stands: the resurrection. Without it, our faith would be futile, and this study would be meaningless. While we won’t address the resurrection in full detail here, we must keep in mind that it gives ultimate meaning to the events leading up to it. Jesus’ death, as painful and unjust as it was, sets the stage for the victory of eternal life.

Why Jesus Had to Die

Jesus provides profound explanations for why His death was necessary in these chapters. He teaches that His sacrifice grants eternal life and prepares believers for the day of judgment. This chapter is filled with prophetic insights, many of which were partially fulfilled by A.D. 70 with the fall of

Jerusalem. However, Jesus' words also point to the ultimate "last day," a time of final judgment for all.

Jesus emphasizes that no one knows the exact timing of His return, urging His followers to focus on preparation rather than prediction. Early we shared what parables are and why and how Jesus used them. We discussed in detail several of the parables. Now in these chapters, we see Jesus' use parables to illustrate the importance of readiness, faithfulness, endurance, and stewardship. These lessons remain as relevant today as they were when first spoken.

Parables of Preparation

1. **The Thief in the Night** (Matthew 24:44): Jesus compares His return to a thief's unexpected arrival. The message is clear—stay ready at all times.
2. **The Wise Servant** (Matthew 24:45-51): Faithfulness in our daily tasks is essential. The servant who diligently fulfills his responsibilities will be rewarded, while the one who squanders his opportunity will face severe consequences.
3. **The Ten Virgins** (Matthew 25:1-13): This parable highlights the need for endurance. The bridegroom's delay teaches us to remain prepared, even if His return takes longer than expected.
4. **The Talents** (Matthew 25:14-30): Here, Jesus underscores the importance of using what God has entrusted to us. The servants who invest their talents receive identical commendations, proving that God

values faithfulness over quantity. Conversely, the servant who hides his talent faces harsh judgment.

Lessons from the Parable of the Talents

The parable of the talents offers a vivid picture of stewardship. Each servant receives an extraordinary sum—equivalent to twenty, forty, and one hundred years' wages. Even the least amount entrusted is significant, demonstrating that God's gifts are abundant.

The master's identical commendation of the faithful servants emphasizes that success is not about doing great things but about doing what we are called to do. As an analogy, think of God as a divine car designer. He's pleased when each vehicle performs as designed, whether it's a compact car or a luxury sports car. The trouble arises when we fail to use our gifts entirely, as seen in the servant who buried his talent. His inaction led to condemnation and loss.

The Separation of Sheep and Goats

This is a judgment carried out by Jesus at the end of the Tribulation. It is described by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-33 ***“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.***

At the end of the tribulation after the battle of Armageddon Jesus uses His angels to gather all nations before Him. The word for nation in Greek is *ethnos*, which is the word

commonly used for Gentiles, so the Lord is gathering all the Gentiles that are still alive.

He gathers them in order to judge them and determine which ones will be allowed to enter into the Millennial Kingdom. The judgment will be on the basis of faith, not on the basis of works. He will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep are believers who by faith accepted Jesus. The goats are unbelievers who have not lived by faith in Jesus.

These sheep's faith will be evident by their fruit. The fruit that demonstrates their faith will be the care they give, the protection they provide, and helping with the needs of the unbelieving Jews during the time of Tribulation. To the sheep, the believers, Jesus says enter my Kingdom.

In contrast the goats lack the fruit of the Spirit, since they didn't have faith. These Gentiles (the goats) instantly die and enter into eternal punishment. Later they will enter the Lake of Fire.

So, the believing Gentiles are going to live and be welcomed into the Kingdom while the unbelieving Gentiles die immediately and enter Hell to await the Second Resurrection

The sheep enter into the kingdom as mortal, natural human beings, who will be capable of marriage and producing children. Their offspring will be sinful unbelievers just like children born into the world today. There will be billions of people born into the kingdom from these sheep.

Eternity Beyond Judgment

After judgment comes eternity, a topic that stirs both curiosity and hope. The Bible reveals glimpses of what heaven will be like. Contrary to popular misconceptions, heaven will involve work—not the toilsome kind we experience now, but fulfilling, joyful labor. We will also create and achieve, as the kings of the nations bring their glory into the heavenly city.

The most important truth about heaven, however, is captured in Paul's words: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). While we can't fully comprehend what awaits, we know it will exceed our wildest imaginations.

A Word on Hell

Just as heaven is a place of unimaginable joy, hell is a place of profound loss. Biblical imagery—fire, outer darkness—conveys its horrors, though the exact nature is secondary to the overarching truth: it is a realm devoid of God's presence and blessing.

A Child's Perspective

I'm reminded of a story heard about a four-year-old boy who asked his mother, "Will there be pears in heaven?" His mother's wise response captures the essence of heavenly hope: "If you need pears to be happy in heaven, there will be pears." The point is not the specifics but the assurance that heaven will fulfill our deepest longings in ways we can't yet comprehend.

Conclusion

We were not able to cover all of the details surrounding the end times and all that Jesus shared. We covered several of Jesus' key teachings to help get a better understanding of the life of Jesus and His mission. The teachings of Matthew 24 reveal Jesus' profound concern for His disciples' understanding of both imminent and eternal events. His warnings about Jerusalem's fall demonstrate His prophetic insight, while His teachings on the last day call us to vigilance and faith. As we study these passages, we are reminded of the reliability of Jesus' words and the necessity of preparing our hearts for His return. Let us heed His call, live faithfully, and eagerly anticipate the day when all will be made new.

Also, we should be motivated to share the gospel. The church today has perhaps the single greatest witness opportunity of any in all of history. This is the time for the Church to fulfill its mission. We need to be about our Father's business, building the ark and loading it up with as many passengers as we can. When I say building the ark, I mean preaching the gospel and being a witness in these dark times. In the following chapters, we will be looking at the end of Jesus' life. His final week, death, and resurrection, but first we are going to look at what the Gospels teach us about the Deity of Christ.

The Deity of Christ

The Deity of Christ in the Gospels

The identity of Jesus Christ has been a topic of theological discussion and debate for centuries. In the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—Jesus makes a variety of claims, both direct and indirect, that point to His divine nature. These claims often go unnoticed, yet they are crucial in understanding Jesus' self-awareness and His relationship to God.

The Gospels record several key moments that underscore Jesus' divine nature, even if He doesn't explicitly state, "I am God", though there are times when Jesus clearly says He is God. For now, let's explore some of these other significant moments.

1. Jesus Claims the Right to Judge Humanity

Jesus frequently makes statements that indicate He will judge humanity, a prerogative that only God can claim. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, He warns that on the last day, many will call Him "Lord," but He will reject them, saying, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). In Matthew 13, He speaks of the "Son of Man" sending His angels to remove the wicked from His kingdom. Additionally, in Matthew 16:27, Jesus states that He will reward each person according to their deeds. These claims suggest that only God can judge human hearts and deeds on the final day.

2. Jesus Claims the Power to Forgive Sins

In several instances, Jesus demonstrates His authority to forgive sins, an act that is reserved for God alone. When a paralytic is lowered through the roof, Jesus tells him his sins are forgiven (Matthew 9:2). In Luke 7, Jesus forgives the sins of a woman who anoints His feet. These actions imply that Jesus not only has the power to heal but also to absolve sins—something only God has the right to do.

3. Jesus Bestows Eternal Life

Jesus also claims the ability to grant eternal life, another function that belongs to God alone. In His conversation with the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-21), Jesus teaches that eternal life comes through following Him. He also speaks of the Beatitudes, declaring who will inherit the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:3-12). By claiming to determine eternal destiny, Jesus implicitly asserts His divinity.

4. Jesus' Presence Represents God's Presence

In a confrontation with the Pharisees over the Sabbath, Jesus claims that "something greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6). The temple was seen as the dwelling place of God, but Jesus suggests that His presence among them surpasses even the sacred temple. In other words, Jesus is identifying Himself as the manifestation of God's presence on earth. Furthermore, His promise to be present wherever two or three are gathered in His name (Matthew 18:20) indicates His omnipresence, a characteristic that belongs only to God.

5. Jesus' Claim to Be the Exclusive Path to Salvation

In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus claims that those who acknowledge Him before men will be acknowledged by Him

before the Father. He also asserts that those who fail to love Him more than their family or even their own life are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37-39). These statements imply that Jesus is the key to eternal life, and that one's response to Him determines their eternal fate. This reinforces His divine authority and claim to be the only way to salvation.

6. Jesus Equates Himself with God

Perhaps one of the most profound ways Jesus asserts His deity is by equating actions toward Himself with actions toward God. To know Jesus is to know God; to see Jesus is to see God (John 14:9). In Matthew 25:40, Jesus declares, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." This identification with God is further demonstrated in His teachings and miracles, where He acts not just as a representative of God, but as God Himself.

Implicit Claims to Deity in the Gospels

At the conclusion of Matthew 20, Jesus makes several indirect claims that suggest He is more than just a great teacher or prophet. He assumes that His life serves as a model for others. Only God has the authority to demand that all people be conformed to His image, thus making a subtle claim to deity. Furthermore, Jesus refers to Himself as the *Son of Man*, stating that He came to give His life as a ransom for many. This suggests that He is not only greater than great but that His life is of divine value, capable of redeeming humanity.

Jesus Himself testifies of His deity. In John 8:58 He said, "Before Abraham was, I am". I Am a reference to the Great I Am. (Ex. 3:14) He said, "I am the Light of the World". (John

8:12) God is the light. After Jesus is arrested, He is questioned by the high priest and in Matthew 26:63-64 we read this, “*Again the high priest said to Jesus, “You are now under oath. I command you by the power of the living God to tell us the truth.* Tell us, are you the Messiah, the Son of God?” *Jesus answered, “Yes, that’s right.” (ERV)*

These claims are critical when discussing Jesus' nature with non-believers. Many people view Jesus as a wise man or a moral teacher, even a prophet but the key question is not whether He was a good person—it’s whether He is God. Understanding this distinction is vital in conversations with skeptics. While the world may acknowledge Jesus as a teacher, the debate often hinges on His divinity.

The Historical Jesus vs. the Christ of Faith

Many critics argue that Jesus never consciously recognized His own divinity. They maintain that the church's affirmation of Jesus as God developed later, long after His death and resurrection. These critics claim that Jesus did not think of Himself as divine, and that the doctrines of the early church, such as His full divinity and humanity, were later theological inventions.

This view, while widely held in some academic circles, poses a significant challenge for those who accept the historical accounts of Jesus’ life. Critics may argue that the Gospels contain human and divine elements, but they often dismiss the deity of Christ as a post-Easter invention. They suggest that the "divine" aspects of Jesus were attributed to Him by His followers after His resurrection, not by Jesus Himself during His lifetime.

However, this view fails to account for the numerous indirect claims to deity scattered throughout the Gospels. If Jesus never considered Himself God, why would He perform actions and make statements that only God has the authority to do? These actions are not easily dismissed as later theological constructs; they are woven into the very fabric of the Gospels.

Conclusion

The Gospels are filled with indirect and implicit claims to Jesus' deity. From His authority to judge, forgive sins, and grant eternal life, to His presence as the embodiment of God among humanity, Jesus demonstrates that He is more than just a moral teacher or wise prophet. He is, in fact, God Himself. For those who seek to understand the true nature of Christ, these claims are essential. They reveal not only Jesus' divine nature but also His central role in God's plan for salvation.

Dismissing these claims does a disservice to both the Gospels and to the identity of Christ. Jesus is either a Liar – Lunatic - or Lord. As believers, it is crucial to recognize and affirm the full deity of Jesus as presented in the Synoptic Gospels, for this understanding lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

Jesus' Final Week

The final week of Jesus' life before the cross is a powerful blend of triumph and tragedy. It is a period where we see Him embrace the role of royalty while simultaneously redefining what true kingship means. The events leading up to the cross—the cursing of the fig tree, the cleansing of the temple, and the triumphal entry—all carry a tone of immense conflict and divine purpose. Let us delve into the key moments of this monumental week.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Serves Others

In Matthew 20:17, Jesus predicts for the third time that He is going to Jerusalem to be betrayed, flogged, crucified, and raised to life. Yet, His disciples fail to grasp the gravity of His words. Instead, they ask for positions of authority in His coming kingdom. Jesus responds by emphasizing His mission: He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

On the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters two blind men who cry out to Him, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us." Despite the crowd's attempts to silence them, they persist. Jesus asks them a simple question, "What do you want?" When they reply, "We want to receive our sight," He heals them. This miraculous act once again affirms His identity as the Messiah and the Almighty One.

The Triumphal Entry: A King's Humble Arrival

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem via Bethphage and the Mount of Olives, Matthew 21 recounts His triumphal entry. The

crowds shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!” Yet, a perplexing question arises: how could the same crowds that hailed Him as a king later cry, “Crucify Him”?

The answer lies in the composition of the crowds. Those shouting “Hosanna” were likely Galilean Jews familiar with Jesus’ ministry. They had followed Him and witnessed His miracles. In contrast, the crowd demanding His crucifixion consisted of Jews from all over the Roman Empire—people unfamiliar with Jesus and easily influenced by the religious authorities.

Jesus’ triumphal entry also differs significantly from the triumphal entries of earthly rulers. Unlike victorious generals who entered cities with pomp, power, and military might, Jesus rides in on a borrowed donkey. This humble animal symbolizes peace, not war. By doing so, Jesus fulfills the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9: “Your king comes to you, humble and riding on a donkey.”

The symbolism of the donkey cannot be overstated. In modern terms, it’s akin to identifying someone by their car. A luxury car might signify wealth, while a modest, rusted vehicle might indicate humility. Jesus’ choice of a donkey underscores His peaceful mission and humility. He comes not as a conqueror but as a servant-king.

The Meaning Behind “Hosanna”

The crowds’ cries of “Hosanna to the Son of David” carry deep implications. While “Hosanna” means “praise God,” it was often used in a nationalistic context, much like saying,

“God save the Queen.” The people praising Jesus likely saw Him as a political savior, someone who would deliver them from Roman oppression, much like David delivered Israel from its enemies.

However, their understanding of the Messiah was flawed. They anticipated a military leader who would bring social and political victory. Jesus’ mission, however, was spiritual. He came to bring peace with God—a peace that would transform all other aspects of life.

Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem

In Luke 19:41-44, as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, He weeps over the city, lamenting its failure to recognize the path to peace. He prophesies its destruction, saying, “The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls.”

The peace Jesus offers is spiritual—a reconciliation with God that leads to social and economic harmony. Yet, the people’s desire for a military Messiah blinds them to this truth. Their rejection of Jesus sets the stage for Jerusalem’s eventual destruction by Roman armies.

The phrase “it is hidden from your eyes” reflects the complex interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The people’s spiritual blindness was self-inflicted, yet God also allowed it to fulfill His greater purpose—the sacrificial death of Christ.

Cleansing the Temple: A Priestly Act

Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus heads straight to the temple and drives out those buying and selling. This act is more than a protest; it's a declaration of His authority over God's house. By quoting Isaiah 56:7, "My house will be called a house of prayer," and Jeremiah 7:11, "but you are making it a den of robbers," Jesus highlights the corruption and misplaced priorities of the temple leaders.

The temple commerce, while convenient for travelers, had overrun the court of the Gentiles, making genuine worship nearly impossible. By cleansing the temple, Jesus restores its intended purpose: a place for prayer and worship for all nations.

Afterward, the blind and lame come to Him in the temple, and He heals them. For a brief moment, the temple fulfills its true purpose as a place of divine teaching, healing, and worship.

Confronting the Religious Authorities

Jesus' actions in the temple provoke the ire of the Jewish leaders. They demand to know by what authority He acts. Instead of seeking the spiritual significance of His actions, they focus on protecting their own power and influence.

This confrontation marks a turning point. Jesus' ministry had previously drawn opposition primarily from the Pharisees and scribes, whose power lay in their spiritual influence over the masses. Now, He challenges the Sadducees and Herodians, who wield political and judicial authority. This shift escalates the conflict, as these leaders have the power to orchestrate His death.

The Final Days: A King and a Sacrifice

Throughout His final week, Jesus embodies both kingship and priesthood. He enters Jerusalem as a king of peace, not war, and takes responsibility for the spiritual integrity of God's house. Every action, every word points to His ultimate mission: to lay down His life as a ransom for many.

As the week progresses, the conflict intensifies. The religious authorities conspire against Him, and the crowds' misunderstanding of His mission deepens. Yet, through it all, Jesus remains steadfast, fully aware that His sacrificial death is the key to humanity's redemption.

In the final week of His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrates what it means to be a servant-king, a humble Messiah, and the ultimate sacrifice. His triumphal entry, His cleansing of the temple, and His weeping over Jerusalem reveal His heart for a lost and broken world. Even in the face of rejection and impending death, He offers peace to all who will receive it.

In just a moment we will continue with the crucifixion of Jesus and finally the greatest event in all of history – the Resurrection, but first let's discuss a very important question – Is Jesus God?

The Death of Jesus on the Cross

Two Gardens: Eden and Gethsemane

The grand narrative of redemption begins and ends in two gardens: Eden and Gethsemane. In Eden, the first Adam failed the test of obedience, plunging humanity into sin and creating the need for salvation. In Gethsemane, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, triumphed in obedience, securing redemption for all who believe. Where Eden brought the curse, Gethsemane paved the way for redemption.

In Gethsemane, Jesus faced an overwhelming trial. He prayed in Matthew 26:39, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Why would Jesus, who had often spoken of His impending death, express such anguish? The answer lies in the unparalleled nature of His mission.

The Cup of Wrath

Jesus’ dread in the garden went far beyond fear of physical pain or death. The “cup” He spoke of symbolized the wrath of God against sin, as described in Jeremiah 25 and Isaiah 51. His mission was to drink this cup fully, bearing the weight of humanity’s sin and enduring God’s wrath in our place.

Paul captures this in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.” Jesus bore the cumulative guilt, shame, and punishment for all sin. This also meant experiencing separation from the Father—a spiritual agony far greater than the physical suffering of the cross.

Broken But Unbroken

At the Last Supper, Jesus said His body would be broken for humanity. While no bones were literally fractured, fulfilling the prophecy in Psalm 34:20, His body was battered and torn. The horrors of crucifixion—dislocated joints, torn tissue, and the slow suffocation—left His body devastated. Thus, His words about being broken find fulfillment in the suffering He endured.

The Arrest: Divine Sovereignty in Human Actions

The events leading to Jesus' crucifixion were a combination of human schemes and divine sovereignty. After Jesus raised Lazarus, the Jewish leaders feared His growing influence. Caiaphas, the high priest, declared in John 11:50, "It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." Unwittingly, he prophesied the redemptive purpose of Jesus' death.

Judas' betrayal initiated the arrest. In Gethsemane, he led temple guards to Jesus. Yet even in this moment of apparent defeat, Jesus displayed divine authority. When the soldiers sought "Jesus of Nazareth," He responded, "I am He" (John 18:6). At His words, the soldiers fell to the ground, a powerful reminder of His sovereignty. Jesus willingly surrendered to fulfill the Father's plan.

Trials of Injustice

The trials of Jesus reveal human corruption and divine purpose. The Jewish leaders sought to condemn Him under both Jewish and Roman law. At a nighttime trial, they struggled to find consistent testimony against Him. Finally,

Jesus' affirmation of His identity as the Messiah sealed their verdict of blasphemy.

When Jesus was brought to Pilate, the Roman governor, the Jewish leaders framed Him as a political threat to Rome. Pilate, finding no fault in Him, attempted to release Him but ultimately gave in to the crowd's demands. Pilate's decision, driven by fear of unrest, underscores the tragedy of valuing political expediency over justice.

The Cross: Love and Sovereignty Intersect

The crucifixion of Jesus was the ultimate expression of divine love and justice. John Stott, in *The Cross of Christ*, highlights the repeated use of the Greek word "paradidomi" ("hand over") in the Gospels. Judas handed Jesus over out of greed. The priests handed Him over out of envy. Pilate handed Him over out of fear. But above all, God handed Him over out of love, ensuring the fulfillment of His redemptive plan.

As Jesus hung on the cross, He bore the sin of the world and endured the full weight of God's wrath. His cry, "It is finished" (John 19:30), signaled the completion of His mission. The work of salvation was accomplished. The cross stands as a beacon of hope, inviting all to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in Christ.

Judas' Betrayal: Was He Saved?

Judas' betrayal of Jesus has left many through the years a challenging question: **"Is Judas saved?"** Matthew 27 refers to Judas as a "son of perdition," but in the same chapter, he makes statements and takes actions that might resemble repentance.

Judas declares in verse 4, “**I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood.**” He then throws the blood money into the temple and hangs himself. On the surface, these actions might seem like remorse, but the nature of his repentance is critical to understanding his fate.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10, contrasts **godly sorrow** with **worldly sorrow**. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and salvation, while worldly sorrow results in death. If Judas’ confession, “I have sinned,” had been a sign of true repentance, he would not have ended his life in suicide—a grave sin and a curse. While it’s important to note that suicide does not necessarily disqualify someone from salvation, Judas’ case is different.

Judas’ actions align with a deeper rejection of Christ. He sold the Savior for thirty pieces of silver, allowed Satan to enter him, and fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 69, which foretold that Jesus would be betrayed by one of His own. Acts 1 further supports this conclusion, painting Judas not as a man saved but as one lost to worldly grief. His despair was over the consequences of his sin, not over his betrayal of the Son of God. One day we will know for sure the fate of Judas. The lesson for us is

The Trial of Jesus: Law and Hypocrisy

The trial of Jesus is one of the most pivotal moments in the Gospels, full of irony and hypocrisy. Initially, the high priests relied on **false witnesses** to accuse Jesus. Matthew explicitly tells us these witnesses were false, though they may not have realized it themselves.

The Sanhedrin, oddly enough, wanted to preserve the appearance of legality. They didn't simply accept any two testimonies and proceed with false charges. They sought witnesses whose accounts aligned, attempting to stage a "valid" trial. When their plan failed, they abandoned the charade and began questioning Jesus directly. Their actions reveal a strange contradiction: a deep concern for the letter of the law while simultaneously plotting to condemn an innocent man.

The Crucifixion: Beyond the Physical Suffering

As we turn to the crucifixion, it's crucial to avoid trivializing this event. The Gospels do not dwell extensively on the **physical agony** of Jesus, though it is acknowledged. Instead, they focus on the **words spoken around the cross**—words filled with meaning and eternal significance.

Today, the cross is often sanitized or reduced to a symbol. It's used as jewelry, a design for churches, or even a metaphor for personal struggles ("my cross to bear"). Yet, the reality of the cross is far from "pretty."

The cross signified **shame** and was reserved for the lowest of the low—slaves and criminals. For God's covenant people, it symbolized a curse, as stated in Deuteronomy and reiterated in Galatians. Beyond its physical horror, the cross represented the climax of humanity's rebellion against God. The Jews, by rejecting and crucifying their Messiah, committed the ultimate act of disobedience.

Pilate, in washing his hands, declared himself innocent of Jesus' blood. The Jews chillingly responded, "**Let His blood**

be on us and on our children.” What they meant as condemnation would later become their only hope—for Christ’s blood would indeed cover those who believe.

The Words of the Cross: A King’s Victory

The Gospels emphasize the **words spoken during Jesus’ trial and crucifixion** over the details of His suffering. Even in mockery, profound truths were spoken. The soldiers clothed Him in a scarlet robe, placed a crown of thorns on His head, and sarcastically declared, **“Hail, King of the Jews.”** Yet their mockery carried an unintended truth—Jesus reigns, even from the cross.

The sign above His head read: **“This is Jesus, King of the Jews.”** And it was true. On the cross, Jesus did what a king does—He defended His people. By taking on sin and defeating death, He protected us from our greatest adversary.

Jesus’ Cry of Forsakenness

Among Jesus’ seven statements from the cross, none is more haunting than Matthew 27:46: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** Known as the **cry of dereliction**, this moment reveals the depth of Jesus’ suffering.

What’s striking is Jesus’ choice of words. Throughout His ministry, He consistently referred to God as His **Father**—except here. Why? This cry marks a pivotal change in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

By quoting Psalm 22, Jesus invites us to interpret His death through the lens of this prophetic psalm. Psalm 22 vividly describes the suffering of the Messiah, from being pierced in

His hands and feet to the mockery of the crowd and the dividing of His garments. Yet, this cry is not merely a quotation—it's a genuine expression of abandonment.

Why was Jesus forsaken? **Because He who knew no sin became sin for us** (2 Corinthians 5:21). In that moment, He bore the full weight of humanity's sin and experienced the separation from God that sin causes. This was the ultimate fulfillment of the "great exchange": Jesus took our sin and gave us His righteousness.

"It Is Finished": The Triumph of the Cross

Jesus' final words, **"It is finished,"** carry profound meaning. The Greek word *tetelestai* can mean "paid in full" or "discharged in full." Both interpretations are true. Jesus had fully paid the debt of sin and completed the mission the Father had given Him.

Following this declaration, Jesus cried, **"Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit."** This marks a significant shift—His work was done, and He could once again address God as His Father. Jesus' life wasn't taken from Him; He willingly gave it up.

The Aftermath: Signs of a New Covenant

The events following Jesus' death are nothing short of extraordinary. The temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom, signifying that the barrier between God and humanity was removed. The way to the Holy of Holies—the presence of God—was now open to all.

An earthquake shook the ground, and tombs were opened, with saints coming to life after Jesus' resurrection. These events symbolize the transformative power of Jesus' death: He brings life where there was death, and hope where there was despair.

The Thief on the Cross: A Promise of Paradise

One of the most poignant moments of the crucifixion is Jesus' interaction with the thief beside Him. When the thief said, **“Remember me when You come into Your kingdom,”** Jesus responded, **“Today you will be with Me in paradise”** (Luke 23:43).

A Moment of Reflection

Take a moment to think about this: Does your theology align with that of the thief hanging on a cross next to Jesus? Picture the scene. This man, condemned and hopeless, is moments away from eternity—and it looks like his destination is anything but promising. His life has been marked by sin, rebellion, and failure. From every perspective, his situation appears utterly hopeless.

But then, something miraculous happens. This thief, who moments earlier had been cursing Jesus alongside his companion, experiences a dramatic shift. One day, I hope to meet him and ask, “How did it happen? How did it all shake out for you?” Because think about it: he never attended a Bible study. He never got baptized. He didn't know the first thing about church membership or theology. And yet—against all odds—he made it! He made it! But how?

An Angelic Encounter

I can only imagine what that scene might have looked like when he arrived in heaven. Picture an angel standing at the gates, a look of bewilderment on his face as he sees this man approach.

“What are you doing here?” the angel might have asked.

“I... I don’t know,” the thief stammers.

“What do you mean, you don’t know?” the angel presses.

“I mean, I really don’t know,” the man replies, scratching his head.

The angel, now clearly puzzled, says, “Hold on. Let me get my supervisor.” Moments later, the supervisor angel arrives, clipboard in hand, ready to ask some clarifying questions.

“All right,” the supervisor says. “Let’s get down to business. Are you clear on the doctrine of justification by faith?”

The thief stares blankly. “Never heard of it in my life.”

“Okay... well, let’s try this. Can you explain the doctrine of Scripture?”

Again, the thief looks lost. “No idea what you’re talking about.”

Finally, in sheer frustration, the angel asks, “Then on what basis are you here?”

And the thief’s answer is as simple as it is profound: “The man on the middle cross said I could come.”

The Power of the Cross

That's it. That's the entire basis for his entrance into paradise. The thief's salvation wasn't earned through good works, religious rituals, or theological knowledge. It was secured by the man on the middle cross—Jesus Christ. The cross is what makes it possible for any of us to come. It's not about what we've done; it's about what He has done.

Jesus paid the ultimate price for our sins on the cross. The One who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). The thief's story is a vivid reminder of the power and simplicity of the gospel. Salvation is not about our efforts; it's about grace. It's about the man on the middle cross who says, "You can come."

How Powerful Is the Cross?

The cross is more than just a symbol; it's the centerpiece of human history and the ultimate expression of God's love. It's the place where justice and mercy meet, where sin is defeated, and where hope is born. For the thief, it meant a last-minute rescue from eternal separation from God. For us, it means the same. No matter where we've been or what we've done, the cross stands as a beacon of hope, declaring that the door to heaven is open to all who believe.

The thief's story invites us to examine our own theology. Are we relying on our own efforts to earn God's favor, or are we trusting fully in the finished work of Christ? Because at the end of the day, the only answer that matters is this: "The man on the middle cross said I can come."

This exchange reveals the heart of the Gospel. Salvation is not earned by works but given through faith in Christ. Even in His final moments, Jesus extended grace to a repentant sinner, offering the assurance of eternal life.

Conclusion: The Mystery and Majesty of the Cross

The crucifixion of Jesus is a profound mystery—a moment where divine justice and mercy intersect. On the cross, Jesus bore the weight of our sin, endured separation from the Father, and accomplished the work of redemption.

The words Jesus spoke from the cross provide insight into His mission, His obedience, and His love. They remind us that the cross, though a symbol of shame and suffering, is ultimately a symbol of victory.

Through the cross, Jesus triumphed over sin and death, opening the way for us to have a relationship with God. Let us never take for granted the depth of His sacrifice or the power of His resurrection.

The Resurrection

It's Meaning

The resurrection of Jesus Christ stands as one of the most profound and essential truths of the Christian faith. Without it, the drama of redemption remains incomplete. While it may seem obvious, many believers sometimes overlook its significance. For years I focused almost entirely on the fact that Jesus died for my sins. It wasn't until in Bible College sitting in a class about who we are in Christ did the reality of His resurrection truly impact me. I had heard that Jesus rose for my justification and for my life, but the truth had never fully sunk in. He didn't just die for my sins; He rose to give me life. When He rose, I rose in Him. I rose to an abundant life, a life with authority, and purpose. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in me and through me.

The Victory of the Resurrection

The resurrection is the climax of the drama of redemption. Without it, death would have the final word. Jesus' victory over sin and death was not fully realized until He rose again. The crucifixion led to death, but the resurrection proclaimed His triumph. Jesus didn't merely die—He conquered death. This is the good news of the resurrection: it reveals the fullness of Christ's person and work.

After His death, Jesus' body was laid in a tomb. First-century tombs typically held about three bodies, but Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus in a new tomb, ensuring it was empty before Jesus' burial. He was truly dead, and He truly rose again. Importantly, Jesus was not merely resuscitated; He was

resurrected. A resuscitation would mean His body came back to life in its previous state, but Jesus' resurrected body was transformed. The Gospels describe how He could eat and be touched, yet He could also pass through walls. His physical body was different, glorified, and eternal.

The Resurrection as a First-fruit

Jesus' resurrection is not an isolated event—it is the first fruit of what is to come. In a garden, the first tomato or apple signals the harvest to follow. Similarly, Jesus' resurrection points to the future resurrection of believers. His transformed body gives us a glimpse of what our resurrection bodies will be like. This is not just a theological detail; it is central to the Christian faith. If Christianity is about redemption and not merely ethics, the physical resurrection of Christ cannot be compromised.

The Historical Accuracy of the Resurrection

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is reported and told of in all four of the Gospels. It is found in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20. They provide eyewitness reports of the resurrection. Many of these witnesses were martyred. All they had to do to stay alive was recant their testimony. Pretty powerful testimony and proof of the resurrection of Jesus.

However, many have sought to refute the resurrection over the centuries. The three most common objections—the Swoon Theory, the theft of Jesus' body, and the claim of hallucinations—fail to hold up under scrutiny.

The Swoon Theory

The Swoon Theory posits that Jesus didn't actually die but instead lapsed into a coma after His crucifixion. According to this theory, the cool air of the tomb revived Him. However, this explanation collapses under its own improbability. First, Roman executioners were experts at their craft; they ensured their victims were dead. Historical records, including Roman sources, affirm that Jesus was executed. Additionally, the physical trauma Jesus endured—two beatings, crucifixion, and a spear thrust to His side—makes survival impossible.

Josephus, a first-century historian, recounts an incident where three of his friends were crucified but removed from their crosses after only a short time. Despite receiving the best medical care, two of the three still died. The notion that Jesus survived crucifixion, unwrapped Himself from His grave clothes, moved a 500-pound stone, overpowered Roman guards, and appeared gloriously to His disciples stretches credulity far beyond belief.

The Theft of the Body

Another objection claims that Jesus' disciples stole His body. This theory also fails under examination. Roman guards faced the death penalty if they failed in their duties, making bribery or overpowering them highly unlikely. Moreover, the disciples were not in a state to plan such a heist. They were devastated and fearful. When they first heard the women's report of the resurrection, they didn't believe it. If they struggled to believe the news, why would they fabricate it?

The transformation of the disciples from cowards to courageous proclaimers of the Gospel must also be considered. Something extraordinary changed them. People do not willingly die for a lie that brings them no personal gain. Yet the disciples faced persecution and martyrdom, holding firmly to their testimony of the risen Christ.

The Hallucination Theory

A third objection suggests that the disciples hallucinated Jesus' appearances. While individuals may experience hallucinations, mass hallucinations involving hundreds of people at once are unheard of. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote, inviting verification of his claim. If the resurrection were a hallucination, the Roman authorities could have easily disproven it by producing Jesus' body.

Modern Skepticism and Reliability of the Gospels

In modern times, critics often dismiss the resurrection by attacking the reliability of the Gospels. Scholars like John Dominic Crossan argue that the Gospels are fundamentally unreliable. Crossan even suggests that Jesus' body was likely left unburied and devoured by animals. Such theories reflect an anti-supernatural bias rather than sound historical reasoning.

However, the Gospels' accounts of the resurrection are historically credible. They include details that a fabricated story would likely omit, such as the initial disbelief of the disciples and the prominent role of women as the first

witnesses—a detail unlikely to be invented in a first-century patriarchal society. The preponderance of evidence proving the resurrection is overwhelming.

The Meaning of the Resurrection

Beyond defending the historicity of the resurrection, we must grasp its meaning. The resurrection confirms that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Throughout His ministry, Jesus made profound claims about His identity. He called Himself the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Son of David. He forgave sins, claimed the authority to judge the world, and explicitly and implicitly declared Himself to be God. Without the resurrection, these claims would be empty. The resurrection validates them all.

Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King

The resurrection also affirms Jesus' roles as prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet, He foretold His death and resurrection, and these events unfolded exactly as He said. As a priest, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Unlike the Old Testament priests who offered sacrifices repeatedly, Jesus' sacrifice was once for all. His resurrection proves that the penalty for sin has been fully paid and that His sacrifice was accepted by God.

Finally, the resurrection establishes Jesus as King. Though His kingship was often hidden during His earthly ministry, it became evident at the crucifixion and even more so in the resurrection. By rising from the dead, Jesus defeated Satan, sin, and death. He secured eternal life for His people and continues to reign as the King of Kings.

The Call to Respond

The resurrection of Jesus is not merely a historical event to be acknowledged; it demands a response. It proves that Jesus is who He says He is and that His work of redemption is complete. To believe in the resurrection is to recognize Jesus as Savior and Lord and to live in the reality of His victory over sin and death.

Ultimately, the resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It is the proof of Christ's deity, the validation of His sacrifice, and the guarantee of eternal life for all who believe. Through the resurrection, we have hope, purpose, and the promise of a future with Him. Let us live in the light of this glorious truth.

CLOSING

As we reach the conclusion of this journey through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, let us take a moment to reflect on the profound truths we have explored. From the unique perspectives of the Gospel writers to the transformative power of Jesus' teachings and the earth-shattering significance of His death and resurrection, this journey has revealed the incomparable beauty of the Savior's life.

We learned how each Gospel writer had a distinct purpose and perspective, and together they painted a multifaceted portrait of Jesus:

1. **Matthew** emphasized Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Writing primarily for a Jewish audience, Matthew's Gospel highlights Jesus' lineage, teachings, and His role as the King of Israel.
2. **Mark** presented Jesus as the suffering servant, focusing on His actions and miracles. Mark's fast-paced narrative portrays the humanity and divine authority of Christ, appealing to a Roman audience.
3. **Luke** portrayed Jesus as the Savior of all humanity. Writing as a historian and physician, Luke meticulously detailed Jesus' compassion for the marginalized, emphasizing His ministry to the poor, women, and Gentiles.
4. **John** unveiled Jesus as the eternal Son of God. With a theological depth unparalleled in the other Gospels,

John focuses on the divinity of Christ and His role as the Light of the World and the Bread of Life.

Each Gospel contributes a unique thread to the tapestry of Jesus' life, giving us a comprehensive understanding of His mission and message.

The life of Jesus is a testament to God's power and compassion. His miracles were not only acts of divine intervention but also demonstrations of His love for humanity. Whether healing the sick, calming storms, feeding multitudes, or raising the dead, each miracle revealed His authority over creation and His heart for people in need.

Beyond His miracles, Jesus' ministry was marked by a relentless pursuit of truth and love. He challenged religious hypocrisy, uplifted the downtrodden, and redefined what it means to live a righteous life. His life was a living sermon, a model of humility, servanthood, and unwavering obedience to the Father.

Jesus' teachings continue to resonate across generations. In His parables, He used everyday stories to reveal profound spiritual truths, inviting listeners to embrace the Kingdom of God. From the Good Samaritan's compassion to the Prodigal Son's redemption, these stories challenge us to live with love, forgiveness, and faith.

The Sermon on the Mount is a cornerstone of Jesus' teaching, offering a blueprint for kingdom living. With its call to be salt and light, to love our enemies, and to seek first the Kingdom of God, this sermon invites us to embrace a life marked by radical faith and obedience.

Jesus also spoke about the end times, providing His disciples with insights into the signs of His return and the culmination of history. His teachings on vigilance, faithfulness, and readiness remind us of the urgency of living for His glory.

The last week of Jesus' life is the climax of the Gospels and the cornerstone of our faith. From His triumphant entry into Jerusalem to His intimate moments in the Upper Room, Jesus demonstrated His unwavering love and commitment to fulfill the Father's will.

His crucifixion was the ultimate act of sacrifice. On the cross, He bore the weight of humanity's sin, offering redemption to all who believe. The darkness of that day was eclipsed by the glorious light of the resurrection. His victory over sin and death secured eternal life for all who place their trust in Him.

It is my prayer that you have a great understanding and appreciation for Jesus - the Son of God who came to earth as a man to give His life for us so we can have eternal life with Him. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ demand a response. To know Him is to be transformed by Him. If you have not yet surrendered your life to Christ, now is the time. He invites you to experience the fullness of His love and the joy of eternal life.

If you have never received Christ as your Lord and Savior take this opportunity to make that decision and pray the prayer on the next page with an open heart, and begin your journey as a follower of Jesus Christ. For those who already believe, let this study inspire you to deepen your faith and share His love with the world. Jesus is not just a figure of history; He is the

living Savior who reigns today and invites us into a relationship with Him.

Let us go forth, living lives that reflect the love, grace, and truth of Jesus Christ, and may our journey through the Gospels continue to inspire and transform us for His glory.

Prayer of Salvation

Dear Heavenly Father,

I come to You in the Name of Jesus.

Your Word says, “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37) I know You won’t cast me out. You take me in, and I thank You for that.

You said in Your Word, “Whoever calls on the name of Jesus the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13) I am calling on Your Name, and I know You have saved me.

You also said, “If we confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Rom. 10:9-10) I believe in my heart Jesus is the Son of God. I believe He was raised from the dead for my justification. I confess Him as Lord.

Because Your Word says that, “with the heart one believes unto righteousness” – and I do believe with my heart – I have now become the righteousness of God in Christ (2Cor. 5:21). I am now saved!

Thank Your Lord!

Signed

Date

About the Author

Bruce Edwards is a pastor, teacher, and author with over 40 years of leadership experience in business and ministry. He has been married to his wife Trudy for over 50 years. They have two children and 6 grandchildren.

He has a master's degree in business management and a degree in the pastoral ministry. He served over 28 years at Victory Christian Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma as Senior Associate Pastor. He has written over 30 books and helps pastors grow their churches.

As a pastor, he has a passion for helping people experience the abundant life provided through Jesus and is committed to teaching and communicating the principles of God's Word with clarity,



THE LIFE and TEACHINGS OF CHRIST

- sermon on mount
- miracles of Jesus
- parables of Jesus
- teachings of Jesus
- crucifixion
- resurrection



**The Gospels of
Matthew - Mark - Luke - John**