

Why Four Gospels?

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
MATTHEW...MARK...LUKE...JOHN




Thru the Bible
Radio Network

P. O. Box 7100
Pasadena, California 91109

Why Four Gospels?

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



“If the Holy Spirit had wanted one Gospel, He would have given us one Gospel. But He gave us four in order that they might meet the needs of mankind.”

Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture references are from the
New Scofield Reference Bible.

Printed in the United States of America
1986, Revised 2006

Why Four Gospels?

In the Fullness of Time

The question has been asked from the very beginning, “Why four Gospels? Why not five? Why not three?” Well, the wag has given an answer: “Three is not adequate, and five is superfluous, so we have four.” But there must be a better reason than that.

Some scholars have attempted to resolve the problem by making a harmony of the Gospels. When I was in seminary, I studied the harmony in both English and Greek. They attempt (and these are sincere men) to come up with one account. It is amazing how outstanding men will trim the corners in an attempt to reconcile any disparity they think they’ve found in the Gospel records. Reading many of these harmonies is like trying to fit a size 4 shoe on a lady with a size 7 foot – it’s just difficult to do! You’ve probably heard the story about the lady who went into the shoe store. The clerk, in a gracious way, asked, “What size do you wear?” She said, “Well, I can get on a 4, but 5 is my size, and since 6 feels so good, I always buy a size 7.” Let me tell you, that’s the way they harmonize the Gospels. We do not need a harmony today. We need a disharmony.

There is a vast difference and wide divergence among the Gospel records. Each was written for a particular purpose to meet the need of a separate segment of the world population. We need to recognize this and let the Gospels conform to this very natural pattern. If the Holy Spirit had wanted one Gospel, He would have given us one Gospel. But He gave us four in order that they might meet the needs of mankind.

When Christ came, there were four major divisions in the human family. These divisions were not strictly racial or national, although they basically followed that pattern. Rather, they were cultural

divisions based on thought patterns. There are four separate ways of looking at life; likewise, there are four levels of civilization. I believe that to this day you can put all of mankind (as you could in Christ's day) under one of these major divisions. Each presents certain specific human needs, each has certain expectations, and there is a Gospel to meet the need of each segment. And I hope we shall see that each performed a tremendous mission, and that God used these divisions of the human family to get over to man His message, which is for *all* mankind.

The Religious Man

The first division, and I'm sure it is the one that would come to your mind first, would be the nation Israel, representing the religious man. As we shall see, God segregated and separated these people from the rest of mankind in order to do a work in the nation, and then He scattered them throughout the world. My friend, He did that for a very definite purpose. They represented a God-given religion. Actually, God has never given but one religion. That was Judaism, the Mosaic system. Somebody may ask, "But what about Christianity?" Christianity, in my book, is not a religion – it's a Person. You either have Christ or you don't have Him; you either trust Him or you don't trust Him. It's not a religion; it's a Person. But God *did* give a religion, the Mosaic system, and He gave it to the nation Israel.

In Christ's day, religion had gone to seed; it was as dead as a dodo bird. It was reduced to a ritual and a law. It was a legalistic system – and that was all.

I am afraid there are those today, even in fundamental circles, who try to make Christianity just that. They follow a little rule and a little regulation, learn a little vocabulary – all of which makes them Christian, so they say. May I say to you that Christianity is

a Person, and that Person is Christ. It is not a religion at all. It does not even conform to the meaning of the word “religion.”

In Christ’s day, religion had become so dead that though in the beginning of His earthly ministry He said, “Make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise” (John 2:16), He concluded His ministry by saying, “Your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:38), and He walked out. He turned His back on religion.

Let me remind you that religion had not satisfied the heart of man. One dark night, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus with a question. (The religious man always thinks he has the answers until a few questions are asked and he comes into contact with Jesus Christ.) That night Nicodemus asked, “How can a man be born [again]?” (John 3:4). Yet Nicodemus represented religion at its best.

On another occasion, a scribe (Scripture calls him a lawyer) came to Jesus. The scribes, by the way, knew the Old Testament. They played a little game in the temple when business was light in which they would take a thorn, push it into an Old Testament scroll (the Old Testament was not, of course, in book form at that time), and guess where it had stopped. They wouldn’t try to guess just the chapter, or the verse, or the word, but the *letter* where the thorn stopped! They knew the Old Testament. So the scribe who came to Christ knew the Old Testament or he wouldn’t have been a scribe. Yet he came with this question: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25). He knew he did not have it. And Nicodemus knew he was not born again. Even Zacchaeus, the publican who was an Israelite outcast, climbed up in a sycamore tree because he wanted to see Christ. He wanted something that religion could never give him. And after our Lord had visited with him in his house, He came out and said, “This day is salvation come to this house” (Luke 19:9).

When religion rejected our Lord (religion has always been against Jesus Christ – the greatest enemy of the person of Jesus Christ in this country right now is liberalism), He turned to individuals. He said to them, as He says to you and me today:

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Matthew 11:28, 29)

He denounced religion. We always hear about the “gentle Jesus,” how gracious He was. It is true that He was gentle, and He still is today. When a sinner came to Him, He was always gracious. But, my friend, He hated religion when it was phony. The harshest words in the Bible came from His lips, and He uttered them, not against Rome, not against harlots, not against the bootleggers, but against religion. Let me lift out just one verse as an example:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither permit them that are entering to go in. (Matthew 23:13)

My! Religion will shut men out from God. So our Lord came to meet the need of the religious man.

The Strong Man

The second division is the Roman Empire, representing the strong man. I have always admired the Romans. I can't help but admire them. For one millennium they ruled the world! And, my friend, they brought law and justice to the world. Our laws are partially based on theirs. I have a quotation I'd like to share with you from Dr. Gregory concerning the Romans:

The Romans, on the contrary, gave the world law in its dynamic, governmental, and temporal aspects. With him it was not a precept waiting for man to fall in with it, but the expression of a present force, the organized and martial might of Rome, demanding submission and remorselessly crushing men and nations into its iron moulds. It said to men: "Rome is all-powerful and does not choose to wait; therefore yield on the instant or die."¹

The world got tired of that. Mark wrote to meet the need of the strong man. Mark is the Gospel of miracles; it is the Gospel of action. The word that occurs more than any other word is the little conjunction "and." A teacher I had in rhetoric would have failed me if I'd turned in a paper that had as many "ands" in it as does Mark's Gospel. But Mark didn't fail. He wrote what the Romans wanted to hear – "Jesus did this...and He did that...and He did the other thing." The Roman wanted to know that. He believed that law, as was represented by him, got action throughout the world – and it did. It was death for anybody that resisted. No one could flee away because Rome had a secret service that reached out everywhere – over three continents and the islands of the sea round about. The Gospel of Mark was written to meet the need of that man. It was the Gospel of miracles. And it is in this Gospel that our Lord said, "The Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister" – to do something – "and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). One day a little Jew, crippled, ill, and heart-sick, stumbled down the Apian Way into Rome. He had already written, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power [not *exousian*, delegated power, but *dunamis*, dynamite power] of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). Do you want

¹ D. S. Gregory, *Key to the Gospels or Why Four Gospels?* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1876), 159.

to know if it was dynamite or not? Read Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He says that the gospel Paul brought in was one of the factors that shook Rome to its foundations. It couldn't stand up against it. My friend, the Gospel of Mark is a brief Gospel, and it is the Gospel written for the man of action.

The Thinking Man

Then there is the third Gospel, the Gospel of Luke. It was written for the Greek, the thinking man. For one hundred years, termed the Golden Paraclean Age, four centuries before Christ came, Greece erected upon the horizon of history a culture that has dazzled the world from that day to this. One of the tenets of Greek culture was their search for the perfect man. Look at their art, look at their statuary – they were seeking the perfect man, physically. Read their literature – they were looking for the perfect man, mentally. And as you look at their gods, you realize they were nothing more than projections of humanity. They did not find what they sought. They never found the perfect man.

Dr. Luke – a medical doctor, himself a Greek, the one Gentile who wrote in the Scriptures, and a brilliant man – wrote for the Greek. He wrote with the thinking man in mind, and he presented to him the perfect man. Greek philosophy had not produced him, but Dr. Luke said in effect, “I poured Him into the test tube in my clinic, and I put the acids of Greek philosophy down upon Him, I placed the stethoscope upon His heart. He is perfect.”

Our Lord came to save – save the thinking man. After our Lord's resurrection when He met with His disciples, Luke said, “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Jesus was a great teacher. Aristotle was a great teacher, Socrates was a great teacher, Plato was a great teacher, but not like Jesus. Our Lord could open men's understanding to

comprehend spiritual truth, and He still does this today. You and I give out the Word of God, but understanding comes from Him. He is still the Great Teacher.

The Wretched Man

The last major division of the human family was the Oriental races. Out yonder is the mysterious East. An Englishman who went out there, spent years as a soldier, and wrote a great deal of poetry, said, “East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet.” Although it is strange to us, there is one thing we know about it: It is a place of squalor, misery, and poverty. While you and I try one reducing diet after another, thousands of people in the Orient die from starvation. But the strange thing is that right beside that poverty is untold wealth. There is a man out there who gets on one side of the scale, and they put diamonds and gold on the other side – that’s his income. Believe me, that’s a nice way to draw a salary! There is wealth untold and poverty unspeakable, yet both the rich man and the poor man are wretched. And out of that mysterious East, for some strange reason, there came wise men saying, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have...come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2). They had a need; they were looking for someone to meet that need. John wrote a Gospel for this particular mind:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:30, 31)

They don’t need poverty out there, and they don’t need wealth. Somehow neither has solved any problems. What they need is *life*. Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they

might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

These four groups, represented by the Hebrew, the Roman, the Greek, and the Oriental, were well separated in that day. However, the world today is a melting pot. Technological advancements have made it so that when a man puts his first step on the moon, the world sees it. Races today mingle and mix in thousands of places. I saw it in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in the West Indies, in the Hawaiian Islands, and I am seeing it in this country today. You and I live in a melting pot. That’s what our world has become.

Now all you have to do is to walk down the streets of a great, throbbing city and you will find all four groups:

The religious man is here. If all you have is religion, not Christ, you are lost. You know down in your heart that religion has never satisfied you.

There is the strong man. When I go out to lunch, the clerks from banks and young executives are there. You ought to listen to their conversations. You would think the president of the Federal Reserve Bank was speaking to the head of the New York Stock Exchange to hear some of those young fellows talk! They are sure of themselves. They are on their way up. They do not think they need a Savior. They are the strong men. You may be that strong man, and you are saying, “Preacher, you’re not talking to me. I have what I want. I have a bank account. I have a fine family. I don’t need Christ.” Yes, you do. You don’t rule the world; the Roman did, and he needed Christ.

Then there is the thinking man. You may be that man. You have a high IQ and are under the impression you are going to *think* your way through life. No, you’re not. The Greek for one hundred years put up a civilization that was intellectual. It came tumbling down. And the gospel went out in the Greek language.

Then there is the wretched man. He is in our midst today. Oh, he may have a few dollars in his pocket, but he is miserable. Several outstanding men have committed suicide recently. There are a lot of wretched people in this world – in all walks of life. Christ “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). I hope you see your need of Him today. If you do, I’m here to tell you that He can meet your need, whatever it is. And most of all, He can save your soul. God had you in mind when He gave mankind a written record. He prepared one of the four Gospels specifically for you.

Matthew: Written for the Religious Man

Years ago, the public was subjected to the news of one of the most brutal crimes of the twentieth century: the mass murders that the news media labeled the Sharon Tate case. It is one of the most shocking and sensational crimes in this age of crime. A group of young people, some teenagers, some barely out of their teens, even girls, participated. It was a cold-blooded, wholesale slaying from what looks like a passionless and senseless orgy of blood. This, I think, was the final product of a society that boasted of its new freedom and its new morality and its abandonment of the Judeo-Christian ethic, as they called it. This was nothing new, of course, because the pattern had been duplicated many times before. This is what happens when depraved human nature is free to do its thing. The antediluvians, way back near the beginning of mankind, engaged in great wickedness, evil, corruption, viciousness, vileness, and violence. Paul lists a catalog of things that would characterize a coming generation. Among them is this:

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good.

(2 Timothy 3:3)

It looks as though we've arrived, does it not? The most offensive and disgusting factor to me is that the leader of this group of young degenerates, Charles Manson, called himself Jesus Christ! This blasphemous assumption revealed that he was a religious leader operating a depraved and disgusting religion. And there are many like that abroad in our land today.

In another area of our culture, a writer and producer of films turned out a smashing hit. And a hard-boiled newspaper reporter in New York, after he had seen it, wrote, "It's vicious and vile, the most offensive picture I've ever seen." The producer of that picture said that one was tame compared to the next one he planned to produce, saying, "It will truly be vile and offensive, and it will also be blasphemous" – because he was going to portray Jesus Christ.

Two factors, I think, emerge right now in our contemporary culture. One is that the Lord Jesus Christ is still a controversial person. Nearly two thousand years ago He asked His disciples the question, "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" (Matthew 16:13). They answered that people thought He was John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Elijah, one of the prophets. But they all came short. The world outside didn't have the answer, and it doesn't have the answer today. Yet they're still talking about Him.

Our culture reveals a second factor: filth, depravity, corruption, degeneracy, and sex have become a religion again. And that's not new, because all the pagan religions of the past were based on sex. The female principle is in the deities of all pagan religions.

Religion has always been the greatest curse of mankind. If you doubt that, look at India today – it's got religion. So does Africa. And the very interesting thing is that the United States of America is filled with religion. But religion has been a curse to mankind, and it always deals with externalities – with rituals, liturgy, forms, rules, regulations, ceremonies, laws, ordinances, rites, orgies,

and incantations.

After all, God gave just one religion, and that is the Mosaic system. Christianity is a Person, and you either have that Person or you don't have Him. And to have Christ is salvation – that is not a religion. However, God did give a religion, the Mosaic system, and He gave it to the nation Israel. This nation represented religion in the day that Christ came to this earth and when Jerusalem was the religious center of the world.

As indicated in the introduction, there are four major divisions of the human family, and each Gospel is slanted in the direction of one of these segments. The Gospel of Matthew is written primarily to the nation Israel, and therefore to the religious man. You need a background of the Old Testament to understand Matthew. I have written a book entitled *Moving Through Matthew* because there is a movement in the Gospel of Matthew. It is like a swinging door that swings back into the Old Testament, gathering up more Old Testament prophecies than any other Gospel, and then it swings into the New Testament farther than any other one since only in the Gospel of Matthew is the church mentioned.

It was written by an ex-taxgatherer to meet the need of his countrymen. As a taxgatherer, Matthew had a great need, although he was a rich man. When Matthew wrote about himself, he had very little to say:

And as Jesus passed forth from there, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the tax office; and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. (Matthew 9:9)

But both Mark and Luke tell us that Matthew made our Lord a great feast in his house and invited in all his friends for dinner – apparently he was a wealthy man. Matthew tells us practically nothing about himself because he is presenting another.

Now the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in the Hebrew language. It is the only New Testament book that was written in Hebrew. How do we know this? Well, Papias, one of the early church fathers, and a bishop in Asia Minor who lived toward the end of the first century and into the second, turned to Christ under the preaching of Philip and Bartholomew. He was an associate of Polycarp, the martyr, and was contemporary with Justus of Jerusalem and Ignatius of Antioch. He is the one who tells us that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew:

Matthew wrote the Oracles (of the Lord) in the Hebrew tongue, and every one interpreted them as he was able.²

Eusebius, historian of the third century, wrote:

Matthew having in the first instance delivered his Gospel to his countrymen in their own language, afterward, when he was about to leave them and extend his apostolic mission elsewhere, filled up, or completed, his written Gospel for the use of those whom he was leaving behind, as a compensation for his absence.³

And it is interesting to see that Iranaeus and Origen confirmed this also. These were church fathers in whom we have great confidence. And then Jerome – who came along much later but lived in Pales-tine and is considered, I think, the most learned of the Latin fathers – made this statement:

Matthew the publican, called Levi, who composed a Gospel in the Hebrew tongue for the special use of those Jews who had believed in Christ, and no longer

² Ibid., 89.

³ Ibid., 91.

followed the shadow of the Law, after the revelation
of the substance of the Gospel.⁴

These are indeed remarkable statements, and they underscore the fact that Hebrew is the only language the Jew would have accepted. You will recall that when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, the mob was ready to stone him to death, but he was rescued. Then he stood on the stairs while the mob still milled about, ready to take him, and began to speak to them in the Hebrew tongue. This quieted them down just as the Lord had quieted the waves on the Sea of Galilee, and they listened to him. And, after all, that's the language of religion. You remember what the Lord Jesus said to the woman at the well, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). And Dr. Kurtz, the great German historian, has written, "Judaism prepared salvation for mankind, and heathenism prepared mankind for salvation." Also Dr. Gregory writes, "The world religion has been delivered to them." Isn't it amazing that though the other religions of the world are slanted to a particular group of people, the gospel given to a small group in that day is a message for all mankind? That's something that ought to cause the critic to think twice.

God had prepared these people over the long haul. Two thousand years before Christ came, there was a man living down in Ur of the Chaldees in idolatry, for the whole world had gone into idolatry. And God called this man Abram, and said in effect, "Leave this, and come to a land which I'll show you." And God made certain covenants with that man. He promised him a land, a nation, and that he would be a blessing to the nations of the world – because after the Flood and the Tower of Babel God had to bid good-bye to the human family. (See Genesis 12:1-3.) But He said to them, in essence, "I'll be back, because I'm going to prepare salvation for

⁴ Ibid., 92.

the world.” And so He prepared the descendants of Abraham, drew them aside from the stream of humanity, segregated them, put them in a place where He could school and train them, and then scattered them throughout the world for a purpose. There is *purpose* in what our God does.

Three dispersions are predicted in the Bible. It also predicts that the people would be regathered three times. Up to today, all three dispersions have taken place, but only two regatherings. I disagree with those who say that the present nation of Israel is the third regathering. You haven't read the Old Testament if you come to that conclusion, my beloved, because those prophecies concerning that third regathering have not been fulfilled.

The first dispersion took place at the time of Jacob and his family. Seventy people went down to Egypt with Jacob. When they came out, they numbered probably a million and a half. Jacob went down to Egypt at God's direction, and there in the brickyards God forged in the fires of slavery these people into a nation. Then He took them out into the wilderness and there He gave them the Mosaic system, a religion. He kept them in that wilderness forty years to train them and give them the experience of the forty years with the Law. Then, at the end of it, Moses wrote Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is not a repetition of the Law, but it is the interpretation of the Law with forty years' experience. And God gave to them for the ancient world a doctrinal statement that most theologians say is the greatest in the Old Testament: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Or let me translate it a little differently: “Jehovah our *Elohim* (*Elohim* is plural), our triune God, is one Jehovah.” God was saying through the Hebrew people to a world of polytheists, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). And these people bore that witness.

They had an influence. Have you ever wondered about the Greeks and their tremendous civilization? When Homer was writing about the gods upon Mount Olympus and the wars at Troy, David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, was singing praises to God. It is recognized today that they so influenced the Greeks that many intelligent Greeks repudiated the gods on Mount Olympus and became monotheistic. Both Socrates and Plato wrote that way.

Out yonder in the Far East there arose, after the Babylonian captivity, Zoroastrianism (modern Parsiism). Out of the ancient world they testified to the Oneness of God. Where did they get it? They got it from Israel. "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah, our triune God, is one Jehovah."

Then Israel went into Babylonian captivity because they turned to idolatry in spite of what God had said. For seventy years they were down yonder in the land of Babylon. Then, by the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, Israel returned to their own land. During this period, Jesus was born. Our Lord said after His rejection, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). "When?" His disciples asked. He said, "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies" (Luke 21:20). And in AD 70, Titus the Roman came and surrounded that city. He breached the wall, and his hordes marched in. Never has there been a slaughter that compares to that. As a result, these people were scattered throughout the world, and they took the synagogue with them to every corner of the empire. That synagogue became the springboard by which Paul and the other apostles preached the gospel in the cities of the Roman Empire. Invariably they were thrown out of the synagogues, so they took the gospel to the Gentiles.

Pharaoh, in Egypt at the time of his greatest crisis, had as prime minister Joseph – and it's a good thing he did. Also, Daniel was

prime minister to the rulers of two of the great world empires – Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Apparently he influenced them to such an extent that they came to a knowledge of God. Later, a Persian ruler had a Jewish consort by the name of Esther, and a prime minister by the name of Mordecai. Also, a Persian king had a secretary of state by the name of Nehemiah. This was during another critical period in the history of the world when the power passed from the East to the West.

In the day that Christ came, this God-given religion had deteriorated into a liturgy of laws and empty rituals where they would tithe even a little row of anise and cummin (plants used for food seasoning). The scribes and Pharisees, the religious rulers, had reduced God's laws to nothing in the world but form. Our Lord said to them that they concerned themselves with the letter of the Law and missed the spirit of it altogether.

Fundamentalism may be doing that also. It is one thing to say you believe the Bible is the Word of God, it's another thing to know it and let it speak to your heart. You see, fundamentalism can reduce it to a little form and ceremony. Some think if they carry a Bible, learn a certain vocabulary, and act very pious on Sunday, they have it made. But that's the thing for which our Lord condemned the Pharisees and scribes. The people in our Lord's day, for the most part, were ignorant of the Scriptures. They only knew what the scribes and Pharisees gave them – they had no Bible of their own. The orthodox Jew of that day (and they were the majority) would not accept anything that did not conform to the Law and the Prophets. It had to follow the letter of the Law.

Matthew wrote to show that Jesus was the Messiah and that He fulfilled the letter of the Law and the Prophets in His coming to

this earth. He said that He was going to initiate a kingdom on earth, but it must conform to the *intent* of the Old Testament that there must be not just an outward form, but an inward change. And I do wish that the amillennialists under whom I studied in seminary would understand what our Lord really meant when He said, “The kingdom of God is within” (Luke 17:21 KJV). Of course it’s within – you don’t rub it on the outside like lotion or rubbing alcohol. It’s something that has to begin in the heart. And Matthew makes it very clear that the kingdom is to be peopled with folk who’ve been changed from within. They must have a capacity for God, but Messiah must die to make that possible. That religious leader, Nicodemus, came to Jesus by night to talk about the kingdom. Our Lord said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). But He also told him that “the Son of man [must] be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14, 15). He must die to make the kingdom possible.

The Gospel of Matthew tells about the birth of Jesus. And it opens with these majestic words:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

That was never challenged. That’s who He is. The Jew would say, “Sure. If He’s the son of Abraham, if He’s the son of David, I’ll listen.” Matthew wrote for the Jew.

Next, the genealogy is given to explain why Joseph could not be the father. Actually, the value of the genealogy is not to show how Jesus could be born of a virgin, but how He could not be born any other way – because Matthew makes it very clear that Jechoniah is in that genealogy (see Matthew 1:11, 12). Those who knew the Old Testament were aware that there had been a curse pronounced

upon that line, and *no one* in that line could sit upon the throne of David (see Jeremiah 22:24-30). How can Joseph have a son to sit upon the throne of David? He can't. However, he can be the husband of Mary, who is also in the line of David through another route – David's son, Nathan. And, by being her husband, Joseph can give to Jesus the royal and legal rights to the throne of David. Israel needed to know that, and Matthew wrote this for that reason.

Matthew cites four Old Testament prophecies that make fulfillment look impossible. If you had lived in that day, you would have said, "How can Messiah be born in *Bethlehem*? Why are the mothers weeping in *Ramah*? Why does God call Him out of *Egypt*? And how can He call Him out of *Egypt* if He is born in *Bethlehem*? And, of all things, He's to be brought up in *Nazareth* to be called a Nazarene! How can it be?" Matthew gives all these prophecies with their fulfillment. He reminds them that Micah predicted He would be born in Bethlehem and records details of that event (see Matthew 2:1-6). He said that there was weeping in Ramah as Jeremiah had said there would be (see Matthew 2:17, 18). (Apparently old Herod drew a circle and said, "We'll kill every baby in the circle." Ramah was included, and there must have been a lot of babies there.) Also, Matthew records how God called Jesus out of Egypt as Hosea had predicted (see Matthew 2:15) and how He happened to be called a Nazarene as Isaiah had said He would be called (see Matthew 2:22, 23).

Daniel gave that marvelous prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, which gives the time that Messiah would be cut off (see Daniel 9:24-26). All Israel should have been sitting on the curbstone in Jerusalem waiting to receive Him as the Triumphal Entry came by.

The Old Testament had even predicted the star. Old Balaam said, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). And the wise men came out of the East where Balaam had been,

saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (Matthew 2:2)

It was Isaiah who made it very clear that Gentiles were going to be present: “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:10). Oh, how accurate Isaiah is! Why didn’t he say a root of David? He goes back to Jesse, David’s father, because by this time there were no longer kings in David’s line, but it was back in the peasant class as Jesse was. Isaiah also wrote:

And the nations [Gentiles] shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. (Isaiah 60:3)

The wise men were Gentiles, and they sought Him out when Jesus was born.

John the Baptist, Matthew says, came according to prophecy:

For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet, Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

(Matthew 3:3)

And out yonder in the wilderness there went out this message: “Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). And when our Lord began His ministry, He picked up that message (see Matthew 4:17).

Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount as does no other Gospel writer. Why? He gives it for a people under Law. May I say to you that it’s given for people who have a religion. Have you ever noticed that the liberal always goes to it? I’ve talked to any number of men and women who have said that the Sermon on the Mount was their religion. But I haven’t found anybody yet who’s keeping it. You’d better change your religion, friend, unless

you keep it. Our need is not religion; we need a Savior. And the Sermon on the Mount is religion, it is the ethic that Christ gave. Do not despise the Sermon on the Mount, just realize that you don't keep it and be honest about it. Our Lord also gave the dynamic Matthew records later. Matthew is not attempting to give you a chronological life of Christ. Rather, he clusters together a group of miracles our Lord performed to show you that the One who gave the ethic on top of the mountain had the power to execute it down below. He is the One Matthew is presenting.

Matthew shows that the Sermon on the Mount deals with the outside of man. Why? Because the people have already been dealt with on the inside. Man has to be changed from within. After three years of ministry, our Lord took these men who had been with Him for three years up to Caesarea Philippi where He questioned them: "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" (Matthew 16:13). They answered in effect, "There are all kinds of reports going around." (And they've been going around ever since.) Then He asked, "But who say *ye* that I am?" (Matthew 16:15, italics mine). (And that's the question He asks you today.) Simon Peter said what any Jew in that day must have said when he came to know Him: "Thou art the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The Lord Jesus answered,

Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, who is in heaven.
(Matthew 16:17)

And at that time He mentions the church for the first time. That is His immediate program now.

But wait a moment, He had something else to give them that was new. After Simon Peter gave that magnificent answer, it is recorded:

From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. (Matthew 16:21)

But Simon Peter wasn't ready for that one! And a lot of people today who have religion are not ready for it, either. Although Peter believed the Old Testament, he was not ready for this.

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee. (Matthew 16:22)

How wrong was Peter's reaction? It is so wrong that our Lord said, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23). That type of talk is satanic. And then, according to Dr. Luke, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. And Matthew, for the benefit of these people, repeats five times that on the way to Jerusalem He said that He was going there to suffer and die. Again and again He gave this forewarning to them. You see, at the very beginning of His ministry, He did not tell His disciples about His death. Now you see why – they weren't ready. They had a religion; they did not think they needed a Savior to die for them.

When our Lord came to Jerusalem for that last time, He denounced the religious rulers as no one has ever been denounced. Listen to Him: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Matthew 23:23). The word "hypocrite" was the word used over in Athens for an actor. It's somebody playing a part. *Krinomai* means to answer. *Hupo* means to answer back. An actor is one to whom somebody gives a line and a cue and he answers back. A hypocrite was an actor, somebody playing a part. And our Lord said to them, "You're just acting religion." A lot of people play church. It's fun. They love it. You can do many things in a church and not be saved; you can be just acting. Listen to Him:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith.

(Matthew 23:23)

They argued about little things. I hear questions like this: “Dr. McGee, do you think a Christian could smoke a cigarette?” My reaction is this: Why don’t you grow up? What about faith and mercy and judgment in your life? You don’t smoke, but what about your life? Is Christ real to you today or are you merely playing a part? Listen to Him:

Ye blind guides, who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. (Matthew 23:24)

That’s a good one! If I had been there, I would have laughed at that comparison.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. (Matthew 23:25)

That sums it all up: What’s outside is religion; what is inside – that’s Christianity. When you get the inside clean, the outside will take care of itself.

Then, dropping back a couple of chapters, let me lift out something else that I consider important.

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? (Matthew 21:42)

They have rejected Him, but He will become the head of the corner. He will yet rule on this earth. He is still the Savior of the world.

Now you and I are going to have to deal with Jesus Christ some day. Every person will. Saved or lost, we will stand before Him.

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you [the nation Israel], and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it. (Matthew 21:43)

And I think that He is getting ready to take it away from us also.

And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. (Matthew 21:44)

There is the Great White Throne, on which sits the One who must judge you if you reject Him.

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they regarded him as a prophet. (Matthew 21:45, 46)

Then our Lord gave a commission, “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19). And I think that when those disciples heard Him say these words that day on the Mount of Olives, they remembered Isaiah’s prediction of Him: “I will also give thee for a light to the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Amen. (Matthew 28:19, 20)

That gospel that they were to carry to the ends of the earth is a gospel that can reach inside and transform individuals who will trust Jesus Christ.

Our contemporary culture has rejected Him in more ways than one. Have you noticed that the most popular songs have to do with “I love *me*”? We’re moving now into an era where no longer will there be love songs about the girl or the boy, but “I love myself.” This generation really has become interested in itself. “I’ve got to do *my* thing. I’ve got to have *my* freedom. My opinion is important, you must hear from *me*.” God says that we need to take our rightful place as sinners. We have a great need. We’re not really as wonderful as we think we are. We can rub it on the outside, but it’s vanishing cream – it won’t help. We need a Savior.

Matthew wrote to a religious people. They had religion, but they didn’t have Christ.

Mark: Written for the Strong Man

When the founding fathers came to our shores, they did not come on an invasion. They did not come to make war. They did not want to fight the Indians, but tried to make peace with them. They did not come to exploit others. They did not come to rape the land of its wealth. They truly came in peace. It has been stated poetically in a very beautiful way:

Not as the conqueror comes,
 They, the true-hearted, came;
Not with the roll of the stirring drums,
 And the trumpet that sings of fame;
What sought they thus afar?
 Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of seas, the spoils of war? –
 They sought a faith’s pure shrine!
Aye, call it holy ground,
 The soil where first they trode.
They have left unstain’d what

there they found –
Freedom to worship God.⁵

That was their mission.

However, looking back in history to the time when Mark wrote his Gospel, we find that the strong man had a different mission, for the strong man was the Roman Empire. For almost a millennium, the Romans brought peace to the world. They brought a peace that was obtained by a philosophy different from that of the men who founded our nation. Their methods were contrary to ours and contrary to the Word of God. The legions of Rome marched over the then known world. Rome was part of the image that Daniel interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 2:40). It was typified by iron, and Rome was as hard as iron. The Romans were men of will and strength. They undertook the Herculean task of ruling the world, and they did it for one thousand years. They believed in human power expressed in law and order, and they would subordinate the individual to the state in their attempt to attain a universal state. They built highways over the territories they conquered to give them ready access so they might indeed rule the world. They promised to those they conquered law, order, and protection. And the iron heel of Rome was put down on mankind.

They represented the idea of active human power in the ancient world. They embodied that idea in the state or empire, as the repository of law and justice. They came in process of time to deify the state as the grandest concrete manifestation of power. With the consciousness of being born to rule the world, they pushed the idea of national power to universal empire.⁶

⁵ Felicia Dorothea Hemans, "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England."

⁶ Gregory, *Key to the Gospels*, 157.

Caesar Augustus, who passed the tax bill that moved Mary and Joseph down to Bethlehem, was actually a great-nephew of Julius Caesar. His name was Caius Octavius, and he took the name of Caesar because it was a name that would stand against the world. But he wanted a title, and the Senate suggested many titles to him. He declined to be called king or dictator, because neither title signified enough. He took the title of Augustus because it carried not only the connotation of politics but that of religion. That is what Rome presented to the world. Gibbon, who probably made the greatest study of the Roman Empire, said:

The empire of the Romans filled the world, and when the empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies. To resist was fatal and it was impossible to fly.⁷

Although Rome brought peace to the world, it was a frightful peace.

Dr. Robert Culver wrote one of the most brilliant books on Daniel I've ever read. Listen to what he has to say:

Two millennia ago, Rome gave the world the ecumenical unity which the League of Nations and the United Nations organizations have sought to revive in our time. The modern attempts are not original at all (as many of our contemporaries suppose), but are revivals of the ancient Roman ideal which never since the time of Augustus Caesar has been wholly lost.⁸

This gives us a picture of the tremendous empire that was ruling the world when the Lord Jesus Christ was born.

⁷ Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1954), 114.

⁸ *Ibid.*

In this connection, Dr. Gregory further states concerning the Roman:

He was to try whether human power, taking the form of law, regulated by political principles of which a regard for law and justice was most conspicuous, could perfect humanity by subordinating the individual to the state and making the state universal...Its Herculean tasks and its universal empire furnish the highest expression of the human soul as the repository of the energy for shaping the world to law and order.⁹

The Roman, as the man of power, was to attempt the solution of perfecting mankind and bringing a “millennium” here upon the earth. That, my friend, is the awesome picture that is presented of the great empire that ruled in the day when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Rome represented active human power in the ancient world. It led to dictatorship and finally to worship when that power was vested in one man.

At this time Paul says, “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4). Jesus Christ lived and died and arose from the grave in the Roman Empire. One day a little Jew by the name of Paul hobbled into the city of Rome with a message, which, Gibbon said, shook the empire to its foundations. Of this message, Paul had written:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

God sent a message to that segment of the world population of

⁹ Gregory, *Key to the Gospels*, 53.

that day, the Gospel of Mark. John Mark is the writer. Although I do not want to elaborate on him since he is not the one we're looking at, this young man was evidently schooled in Roman thought. He himself apparently was a man of action, though he certainly was a coward at the beginning (see Acts 13:13). But he made good. His Gospel is actually Simon Peter's account. Evidently John Mark got the facts from Simon Peter, who was likewise a man of action – he liked action better than he liked logic. And this is the man the Spirit of God chose to be the first one to go to a Roman soldier, a centurion, and preach the gospel.

Let's turn to that record now, as it's rather important. Simon Peter had been coached by the Spirit of God regarding going to a Gentile – which he'd never done before. Listen to him as he goes into this Roman home:

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all). (Acts 10:34-36)

But this is a new kind of peace. It's a kind of peace that you do not have to send an army to bring about, a kind of peace that comes inside a man and is not imposed by outside force. Another Roman centurion yonder in Philippi was startled when he found that all the doors of his prison were open, supposing the prisoners had escaped. He knew nothing of the kind of power that could hold men without prison bars. (See Acts 16:26, 27.) A centurion was a realist, he was a man of physical power, believing only in that. Now follow Peter as he continues his message to the Roman centurion:

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit,

and with power; who went about doing good... (Acts 10:38)

(That's interesting because that is what the Roman thought he was doing and believed in doing – going about and doing good.)

...and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. (Acts 10:38, 39)

This, you see, is the way Peter gave the gospel to a man of action, a Roman. He goes on:

Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly.
(Acts 10:40)

Peter was a man of action.

Most of the church fathers concur that Simon Peter is the one who gave the facts to John Mark. Let me give just a couple of quotations to support that statement. Papias, associate of Polycarp, heard the words of the apostles from those who were their followers. He writes: "Mark, the interpreter of Peter, wrote carefully down all that he recollected, but not according to the order of Christ's speaking or working."¹⁰ And Tertullian, one of the great minds of North Africa (he was from Carthage), wrote that the Gospel "Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter's, whose interpreter Mark was."¹¹ We find Eusebius says the same thing, and Clement says there was a group of Roman knights that requested Simon Peter to leave in writing the things he had taught them, and that it was John Mark who wrote for him.¹²

It was DaCosta, in his book on Mark, who said that the style of

¹⁰ Ibid., 152.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 153, 154.

Mark's Gospel is very much like the commentaries of Caesar. Mark is brief and blunt. Forty times the word "straightway" occurs. His most-used word is "and." Jesus did this...*and* He did that...*and* He did the other thing. That's Mark's Gospel.

Mark emphasizes the miracles. Of the physical miracles Christ performed, twelve of them are recorded in the Gospel of Mark. There are five nature miracles: He stills the storm, He feeds the five thousand, He walks on the sea, He feeds the four thousand, He curses the fig tree. And then there were ten spiritual miracles of casting out demons. Mark records only one supernatural miracle – Jesus raised the dead. (And you need only one to prove who Jesus is!) John Mark's account is the Gospel of the miracles. It's the Gospel of action. Jesus is the King, the almighty conqueror here. He eclipses all the conquerors and the Caesars of Rome, and He corrects what was wrong in them. And when you march through Mark, you're marching with One who is a Man of power who can reach men of power. Therefore, you do not have a logical or chronological order in Mark. He moves in rapid succession from miracle to miracle, culminating in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Now we are going to look at the first chapter of Mark. I may not get this over to you, so let me say at the beginning that here is, without doubt, one of the most remarkable chapters in the Word of God. All the facts that are here we find in the other Gospels, but they are not told as Mark tells them. Notice how he begins:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
(Mark 1:1)

Wait a minute, Mark, tell us about His birth. No, there is no baby in Bethlehem in Mark's record. What did Caesar care for babies? If you'd like to know whether or not he cared for them, he signed

the tax bill that commanded everybody to go and register. It was the winter season, and probably somebody with a heart protested, “Why do it at this time? There are many women with babies.” He probably said, “What do I care about babies? One born every minute. I’m not interested in them.” So the Gospel of Mark does not open with a baby in Bethlehem – that would have been weakness to the Roman mind. Matthew and Luke tell us about the Nativity, but not Mark. In other words, you’ll not find any baby pictures of the caesars. When I was in Rome, I went around to take a look. There were statues of the caesars. And, friend, I wouldn’t want to be in there at night. Even in chiseled stone they’re a fearsome-looking crowd. There is no baby there.

As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.
(Mark 1:2)

The second verse reveals another tremendous fact: there is no genealogy here. After all, the Roman couldn’t care less about Abraham and David. The Roman’s question was, “What can Jesus *do*? We want to know what He can do.” And when a man comes to your house to do a job for you, you ask him whether or not he is able to do the job. Suppose he says to you, “My ancestors came over on the *Mayflower*.” What do you care whether his ancestors came over on the *Mayflower*? You want to know whether he can fix the T.V. May I say to you, the Roman wanted to know what Jesus could do; he cared nothing for His ancestry. Mark begins with John the Baptist, who introduces this One. John steps out as the voice crying in the wilderness, making this tremendous statement the Roman wouldn’t miss.

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. (Mark 1:4)

The Roman at this point would have thrown up his hands and said, “No one can forgive sins, not even Rome. We give justice to the world, we give law to the world, but we do not give mercy.” Rome never exercised mercy. It was always justice. Sins were not forgiven. If you broke the law, you paid the penalty. And here is One who is talking about the remission of sins!

Notice that John now says that this One is greater than he is.

There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.
(Mark 1:7)

He is greater than Caesar. “He is so great,” John says, “I am not even worthy to untie His shoestring.”

I, indeed, have baptized you with water, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:8)

That’s the way in which He was going to be greater than John.

Notice what happens:

And it came to pass, in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. (Mark 1:9)

This is action, friend – “straightway” and “immediately” are used forty times in this Gospel.

And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him. (Mark 1:10)

Heaven responds to this One, by the way, and heaven had never responded to Caesar, although he claimed religious sanction.

And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Mark 1:11)

God in heaven identifies this One who is come, and God recommends Him.

Now Jesus is to be initiated. Can He stand the test? No caesar could – Rome fell from within. When the caesars began to give the orgies of Bacchanalia, which lasted, not a day or a week, but even a month, then Rome was no longer fit to rule the world, and Caesar became a pantywaist who did not venture beyond the walls of Rome, though the frontier was way up yonder in Gaul.

Now notice the temptation of Jesus:

And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. (Mark 1:12)

Note the urgency of all this.

And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him. (Mark 1:13)

He stood the test. And don't think the wild beasts were wild to Him. They were not. What Mark is saying is that both the wild beasts from beneath and the angels from above ministered to Him. He rules over nature, He rules over the animal world, and He rules the angels. Rome never had a caesar like this, by the way. They knew nothing of such a man as this.

Jesus met the greatest enemy of all. The greatest enemy was not what Julius Caesar met in the north in Gaul. Our Lord met Satan, the enemy that overcomes so many of us today. Satan tested our Lord but could not conquer Him.

He's marching now. Notice:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:14, 15)

What a message!

Now our Lord is calling His followers:

Now as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. (Mark 1:16)

Now Mark gives us one day in the life of our Lord:

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. (Mark 1:21)

He is working on the Sabbath day. When they questioned Him about it later, He said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). In other words, “We’ve got a man down in the ditch. We’re getting him out. We’re redeeming him.”

And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:22)

He spent that entire morning in the synagogue teaching.

What did He do in the afternoon? Mark tells us He went over to stay with Simon Peter at his house.

But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick of a fever, and straightway they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. (Mark 1:30, 31)

There’s none of this hocus-pocus healing when He heals. They didn’t fall over; they stood up and walked off.

Well, I suppose after a day like this He will take the evening off. But no.

And in the evening, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and those who were possessed with demons. And all the city was gathered together at the door. (Mark 1:32, 33)

You haven't read the Gospels aright if you have not discovered there were literally thousands of people of that day who were healed by Him. No wonder the enemy never questioned His miracles. There were thousands of lame men who were now walking, thousands of blind who could now see, thousands of deaf who could now hear. That's what He did all evening.

Well, He's had a pretty busy day, has He not?

Early the next morning He got up and went out to pray. He had another busy day ahead of Him. And when He came into Capernaum He healed a leper, and that leper disobeyed our Lord. Jesus told him, "Don't tell anyone." But he told everybody, and the crowd came so that Jesus couldn't do the work He had come to do. He was not really a thaumaturgist; He had come on another mission. His purpose was not to perform miracles but to prepare those who were around Him for the fact that He was going to the cross to die. Because of the crowds, He had to withdraw from Capernaum.

Sometime later He returned to Capernaum, and word went around that He was there. Again He was thronged so that in order to reach Him a man was let down through the roof. To him our Lord said something that shocked the Romans:

When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins are forgiven thee. (Mark 2:5)

Even the scribes who were there said, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:7). And Rome said, "Even God can't forgive sins. We punish them. Who is this One now who says He'll forgive sins?" Well, He is the Son of God. The world at this time was sick

and tired of justice. I hear a great many people say today, “All I want is justice from God.” No, you don’t. You’d be in jail if you got justice. My friend, what you and I want is mercy. And that is what Rome was wanting in that day; that’s what Rome wanted to hear.

Later on there came this man Paul, who wrote to these Romans. I’d like you to hear what he said to them. It is, without doubt, a remarkable statement.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.
(Romans 3:23)

This means Caesar is guilty. The Senate is guilty. Corruption is everywhere. All have sinned.

Being justified freely [without a cause] by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.
(Romans 3:24, 25)

In other words, Paul is saying that Jesus is the mercy seat for our sins. There was a poor publican who prayed, “O God, make a mercy seat for me to come to.” And many in the Roman Empire were weary of hearing about justice and law. Now here comes the message of a mercy seat where men can come and be forgiven. Yet righteousness is maintained, justice is maintained because this One (what a contrast to Caesar He is!) died for His subjects. No Roman caesar ever did that!

Handed over to a Roman centurion one day was a prisoner. He had taken that prisoner with the others – there might have been a hundred to three hundred there that day. But this prisoner was different, and he soon found that out. To begin with, in this business of nailing men to crosses he had been cursed in every language of

the Roman Empire – but not by this Man. He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The Roman centurion looked up and said, “He is different. I’ve never heard that before.” And then he witnessed the events that took place there. Three hours, Mark says, were in light, and man did his worst. Three hours of darkness followed in which God did His best, for in that last three hours the cross became an altar on which “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world” was offered (John 1:29).

When light breaks out again, the Roman centurion, who had been with the other crowd, now steps beneath the cross:

And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the spirit, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. (Mark 15:39)

Somebody says, “Well, he doesn’t know much theology, does he?” No, he never read *Strong’s Theology*, and he never read any of my books, either. But, you know, God never asks a sinner to do but one thing: take his place beneath the cross. And that’s what he did. He knew that much – he knew Jesus was the Son of God.

Men died for the emperor. Many a time in that great Colosseum in Rome the gladiators would come up to Caesar’s box and say, “We who are about to die salute you.” They were laying down their lives for their emperor. In contrast, Jesus, the Son of God, was laying down His life for His subjects. Paul said, “...that [God] might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

After World War II our nation became the most powerful in the world. We had a glorious opportunity to influence the world for good and for God. We didn’t do it. Americans began to travel throughout the world, and there appeared a book titled *The Ugly American*. The proud, arrogant, cursing, swaggering, and drinking

American was seen on every continent. “America is a Christian nation,” he said, but he took God’s name in vain and lived as though God did not exist – *he* didn’t need Him. Americans turned to Washington instead of to worship; believed in government, not God; went to the bureaus instead of to the Bible.

To put it quite simply, we are in a mess. James Reston, who is a liberal but a very brilliant writer, made this observation before an election:

What is wrong here is that none of the presidential candidates has the answer to the problems of the nation. If you read the political news these days, it is hard to escape the conclusion that nobody is fit to be President. Each candidate in turn describes our problems in such depressing terms that he inevitably eliminates himself as the man to solve them.

What a picture – a nation filled with insoluble problems! And there is no use looking to the church. The church today is in the position of compromise, corruption, and confusion. It cannot solve the problems of the nation.

Is there any hope for us? Yes. I hand you today the Gospel of Mark. It is the one for the strong man, the one who thinks he does not need God. The Roman finally came to the position, when his empire caved in, that he did not have the solution. And there went out over that empire the greatest movement the world has ever seen. It was greater than the Reformation. Literally millions turned to Christ. Why? Because they learned of the Man Christ Jesus, who died for their sins. Because of His sacrifice He could offer mercy and still be just. Today His offer is the same. He alone can solve the problems of your life.

Although He will save you by faith alone, when you become His

He will be a greater dictator than Caesar was. He says:

He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37)

He also said:

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (Mark 8:34)

Let's cut out all this nonsense of burning candles and saying, "I dedicate my life to Him." My friend, until you're ready to follow Him and pay a price, you are not following Him. You just think you are. He demands your surrender. He is greater than Caesar. He is the mighty Conqueror. Do you dare follow Him? I think He is sick and tired of all these shabby, flabby, compromising Christians who are afraid to stand for that which is right today. He is calling you. But don't come to Him unless you mean business.

Luke: Written for the Thinking Man

At the close of the nineteenth century, there was a wave of skepticism that swept over Europe and the British Isles. There was delusion and disappointment with the optimism the Victorian era had produced. There was, on the lighter side, a rebellion against it, which produced the "Gay Nineties." Also, it caused many scholars to begin a more serious investigation of the Bible, which had been the handbook of the Victorian era. They were skeptical before they began, and others had been cynical.

There was at that time a very brilliant young scholar in Cambridge by the name of William Ramsay. He was an agnostic and wanted to disprove the accuracy of the Bible. He knew that Luke had written a historical record of Jesus in his Gospel and of the missionary journey of Paul in the Book of Acts. And this brilliant young schol-

ar knew that all historians make mistakes and many of them are liars. In Will and Ariel Durant's work in the field of history appears this statement:

Our knowledge of the past is always incomplete, probably inaccurate, beclouded by ambivalent evidence and biased historians, and perhaps distorted by our own patriotic or religious partisanship. Most history is guessing; the rest is prejudice.¹³

It is safe to say that this was the same attitude of Sir William Ramsay when he went as an archaeologist into Asia Minor to disprove Dr. Luke as a historian. However, it didn't work out quite as he thought it would. He checked on the journeys of Paul. He is probably the man who has made the most thorough study of Asia Minor, and he came to the conclusion that Dr. Luke had not made one historical inaccuracy. It caused this man to become a believer and a defender of the faith.

Dr. Luke wrote his Gospel of the person of Christ for a twofold purpose. First of all, he had a historical purpose. Luke wrote the most complete historical narrative in the Bible of the Lord Jesus Christ. He definitely had a literary aim. He has more wide-reaching references to institutions, customs, geography, and history of those times than does any other Gospel writer. For instance, notice how he dated the birth of Christ in Luke 2:1, 2 – it was in the days of Caesar Augustus, and he even pinpoints it down to the time that Quirinius was governor of Syria.

I have great respect for Luke personally. He is the only Gentile who wrote or made any contribution to the canon of Scripture. He wrote two books, Luke and Acts. You may say to me, "How do you know he was a Gentile?" I think we have good evidence

¹³ Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968).

that he was. Paul, who knew him as a close companion, when giving a list of early church saints of that day, names a group of those who were “of the circumcision” (Israelites). He concluded this list by commenting, “These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God, who have been a comfort unto me” (Colossians 4:10, 11). That is, those named were Israelites who had been a comfort to Paul. But there are others to mention: “Epaphras, who is one of you” (Colossians 4:12) – the Colossians were Gentiles. Then in verse 14 he wrote, “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.” So in the list of Israelites he did not mention Luke, and when he mentioned Gentiles he included Luke. This leads me to believe that Paul, who knew him intimately, knew that he was a Gentile.

Now Luke was a medical doctor. He used more medical terms than did Hippocrates, the father of medicine. And as we’ve just read, Paul called him “the beloved physician.”

Luke was a companion of the apostle Paul, and went with him on at least two (and probably three) of his missionary journeys. When I say three, I consider his trip to Rome a missionary journey. A section in Acts 16 makes it very clear that Dr. Luke traveled with him. On the second missionary journey, Luke tells about Paul going through all the area of the Galatian churches, and that he wanted to go by Bithynia, “but the Spirit allowed them not” (Acts 16:7). And then Luke writes:

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore, loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis. (Acts 16:10, 11)

This is called the “we” section of the Book of Acts because it makes

it evident that Dr. Luke joined the missionary party in Troas. By the way, that was a place for him to join it because they were going into Greece, and Dr. Luke probably was a Greek. Many believe he was a convert of the apostle Paul. At the very end of Paul's life, when he wrote his "swan song" in 2 Timothy and knew he was going to die, he could say, "Only Luke is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). Luke stayed with Paul right down to the very end. He was a faithful friend.

Luke was also a poet. He alone records the songs of Christmas. If you've never read them, you ought to go through the first two chapters of his Gospel and read those songs. They are quite lovely.

Luke was an artist. We saw that Mark majored in the miracles of Christ, presenting the Lord to the Romans as the Man of action. But here in the Gospel of Luke, Christ gives His marvelous, matchless parables. Luke alone records the parables of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, and the rich fool.

Dr. Luke was probably equal to Paul in scholarship and in IQ. They wrote the best Greek we have in the New Testament. It was my privilege for two years to teach first-year Greek, and we always concluded the last semester by reading the Gospel of John in Greek. Very frankly, it's easy to read. Any of you could learn to read it in Greek. And many of the students, when they had finished reading it, thought they had Greek mastered. So I always turned them to the first sentence in the Gospel of Luke, which made them wonder if they knew anything at all about Greek. It is without doubt one of the most profound sentences ever composed. It reveals the fact that his purpose, the first one mentioned – the external purpose, as some like to call it – was historical. Notice this:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers

of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. (Luke 1:1-4)

There are several things in this first sentence that are important, but I must pass over them. I'm lifting out only two very important words: "eyewitnesses" and "ministers."

"Eyewitness" is the Greek word *autoptai*. Does that sound like a word you have heard before? *Auto* is the same word you find in "automobile," meaning that which is of itself. And from *opsomai* we get our word "optic." It means "to see," and "to see for yourself" would indicate an eyewitness. Although that is a good translation, we miss something in the translation because it is a medical term, and it means to make an autopsy.

The word "minister" here is another interesting term. It's not the word from which we get our word "deacon." Rather it's the Greek word *huperatai*, meaning "an under-rower on a boat." In a hospital, "the under-rower" would be an intern. Dr. Luke is saying that all of them were just interns to the Great Physician. But what Dr. Luke is telling us is that as a physician and a scholar, he made an autopsy of the records of those who had been eyewitnesses. And, friend, an autopsy of Jesus is very important. It means to dissect, examine, pour Him in the test tube, and look at Him under the microscope. An autopsy is used today by a coroner to determine the cause of death. Often this information is of vital importance. Dr. Luke who knew of this importance, said, "An autopsy was made of Jesus." Friend, that is important. If you are a skeptic, you ought to listen to a man who is a brilliant scholar, and he'll tell you the results of the autopsy.

Dr. Luke put his spiritual stethoscope of Inspection down upon the baby at Bethlehem, and he is the one who declares that He was virgin-born. I'd rather take his word than the word of any theologian in any seminary today.

Also yonder at the cross Dr. Luke put that stethoscope down upon Him and said, "He's dead." And then on the third day he said, "He is alive." Do you want evidence? Read Dr. Luke; he'll give you evidence.

Now Luke had another purpose in view when he wrote his Gospel. He presents the perfect, divine Son of God. In the Gospel of Matthew, He is the Messiah who fulfills all the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is the King, and as you go through the Gospel of Matthew you think of the words King Lear uttered, according to Shakespeare: "Ay, every inch a king."¹⁴ He is King in Matthew, but He's the Redeemer here. In the Gospel of Mark, He's the mighty Conqueror, the virile Ruler of this universe, the only One who can rule it. But in the Gospel of Luke He is our Great High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And today He can extend help and mercy and love to any other human being because He went through it all down here.

Dr. Luke wrote for his countrymen, the Greeks, just as Matthew had written for *his* people. We have seen that Matthew's Gospel was directed to the religious element, the nation Israel. Mark's Gospel was directed to the Roman government, which believed law and justice would solve the problems of the world. But Greece was another great segment of the population, and it was one of the most important segments of humanity.

In the fourth century BC, Greece placed on the horizon of history the most brilliant and stimulating display of human genius the

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, act 4, scene 6, line 110.

world has ever seen. To this day no age has even approximated it. They attempted to bring humanity to the place of perfection.

The Greeks are clearly distinguished from the other great historic races by certain marked characteristics. They were the representatives of reason and humanity in the ancient world. They looked upon themselves as having the mission of perfecting men.¹⁵

They thought they would develop the perfect man. You find it in their art and in their statuary. They attempted to produce the perfect man physically. And no one has ever sculpted or painted like Phidias and Praxiteles. They not only attempted to make him the beautiful person, but also mentally developed, to make him a man of reason, a thinking man. They produced Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in that period. And there is no system of philosophy in the world that's not indebted to these three men. Not only that, they produced literary giants. If you would choose ten of the outstanding poets, you would have to put Homer with them. Also, they produced the playwrights Euripides and Sophocles, and the most golden orator of all, Demosthenes. They attempted to attain the universal man. The world-man was the one they were after. Also, they made their gods in the likeness of themselves. They made beautiful statues of Apollo, Venus, Athena, and Diana. They deified, however, all of man – his noble qualities but also his base passions, such as in Aphrodite (you talk about sex – the Greeks knew something about it, too), Cupid, Bacchus, and Pluto. Not only did they make lovely graces, but the avenging Furies because they were making a projection of mankind. This was the culture they produced.

Then Alexander the Great came along. Of him, Conybeare and Howson said:

¹⁵ Gregory, *Key to the Gospels*, 211.

He took up the meshes of the net of civilization, which were lying in disorder on the edges of the Asiatic shore, and spread them over all the countries which he traversed in his wonderful campaigns. The East and the West were suddenly brought together. Separated tribes were united under a common government. New cities were built, as the centres of political life. New lines of communication were opened, as the channels of commercial activity. The new culture penetrated the mountain ranges of Pisidia and Lycaonia. The Tigris and Euphrates became Greek rivers. The language of Athens was heard among the Jewish colonies of Babylonia; and a Grecian Babylon was built by the conqueror in Egypt and called by his name.¹⁶

That city is Alexandria in Egypt, of course. This is the contribution the Greeks made to the world.

However, the Greeks lost sight of the spiritual. This world was their home, it was their playground, it was their schoolroom, it was their workshop, and it was also their grave. And when the apostle Paul entered the city of Athens, he began his message on Mars Hill by saying:

Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are very religious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. (Acts 17:22, 23)

They didn't know Him. The cultivated Athenians were skeptics – they called Paul a babbler and mocked him when he spoke of the

¹⁶ W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *Life, Times, and Travels of St. Paul*, vol. 1 (New York: E. B. Treat, 1869), 9.

Resurrection. And Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the preaching of the cross was “foolishness” to the Greek (1 Corinthians 1:23). When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he was writing for the Greek mind, for Asia Minor was settled by the Greeks, and in effect, he said to them, “In the past you were Gentiles, having no hope and without God in the world.” You see, Greek culture had not brought man to God.

It was then “when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,” to redeem them (Galatians 4:4). And down a Roman road came Paul with the gospel in a universal language. God had raised up Rome to build roads so that the gospel could penetrate that great empire. Over those roads went a global gospel about the perfect Man who died for the men of the world. The vehicle was the Greek language. And down yonder in Alexandria in Egypt, during the third century before Christ, seventy scholars got together and translated the Old Testament into Greek so that one of the best manuscripts we have today is that Septuagint. Also the New Testament was written in Greek. Neander made this statement:

The three great historical nations had to contribute, each in its own peculiar way, to prepare the soil for the planting of Christianity – the Jews on the side of the religious element; the Greeks on the side of science and art; the Romans, as masters of the world, on the side of the political element.¹⁷

This is the picture: The religion of Israel could produce only a Pharisee, the power of Rome could produce only a caesar, and the philosophy of Greece could produce only a global giant that was a baby at heart. And Dr. Luke wrote to the Greek mind. He

¹⁷ Gregory, *Key to the Gospels*, 55.

said, “Here is your perfect Man, Jesus of Nazareth. Here is the universal Man. Here is the One you’ve been looking for. Here is the One who can solve your problems if you’ll come to Him.” In the fullness of time, God sent His Son.

Will you look with me at the birth of this One? Since in Luke’s account He is the perfect Man, He has to be a perfect baby. You won’t find a baby in Mark, but you’ll find Him in Luke. The gods of the Greeks had offspring, but this account is so different. A peasant maid gave birth to a divine Son. Would you like Dr. Luke to tell you how it came to pass? He was in a better position to tell us this than is any man living today, regardless of who he is. Read Luke’s Gospel, beginning with chapter 1, verse 26. After the angel had appeared to Mary and made the startling announcement to her, Mary herself was the first one to question the virgin birth. She said, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34). Now listen to Dr. Luke:

And the angel answered, and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.
(Luke 1:35)

You either take it or leave it; that’s your privilege. But I don’t like these preachers who say the Bible does not teach the virgin birth. I’m not for sex education in the schools for little folk, but I think some preachers in the liberal wing need it because they don’t seem to understand what he is saying. It seems to me Dr. Luke made it very clear how it came to pass. He made it clear that Jesus is virgin-born. Dr. Luke is the obstetrician.

Now he has something else to say in this wonderful account of the birth of this boy:

And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (Luke 2:10)

Don't miss that – it's to all people. He is the universal and perfect Man.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

Greece was sinking, Rome was sinking, Israel was sinking. And Dr. Luke says, "He's the Savior for all men."

This is not only superb literature, but this is a doctor's report.

And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)

George MacDonald, in his lovely poem "The Holy Thing," said,

They all were looking for a king
To slay their foes and lift them high:
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.

He was born of a woman, and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes. Let's put it in our language today. Dr. Luke says that she put diapers on God – God the Son is born "a little baby thing!"

Dr. Luke is not through. He was not only the obstetrician, but he also became the pediatrician. He's the only one who tells us anything about the boyhood of Jesus:

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. (Luke 2:42)

He gives us the incident that took place when He was a boy. He put his stethoscope down on Him and gave his report:

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:51, 52)

He increased in wisdom – mentally, He was all right. He didn't need to go to a psychiatrist. He increased in stature – physically, He was growing. I don't like these people who say that He carried all the diseases in this world in His body. He did not. He was an example of perfect humanity. When He went into the temple that day to cleanse it, they saw His muscles, and that crowd of money changers went for cover because they were afraid. They saw that He was physically able to put them out. Also He increased "in favor with God and man." He grew spiritually as any other boy might grow.

Dr. Luke is not through. And if that's where you are going stop, you've missed even the Christmas story. Luke was there to record His death:

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, and, having said this, he gave up the spirit. (Luke 23:46)

Dr. Luke had been present at the deaths of many people, but Jesus didn't die like other people. When man goes after the last breath, that's called the death rattle. Jesus didn't die that way – He dismissed His spirit. That's different. He is the divine Man.

Not only does Dr. Luke give us a record of His death, but he was also present to put his stethoscope down upon Him after the Resurrection. Listen to Jesus as He talks with His disciples:

Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them

his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any-thing to eat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. (Luke 24:39-43)

A great many folk miss Jesus' point, but C. S. Lewis, the brilliant satirist, did not. He said that it is very peculiar to watch a spirit eat a piece of fish! Of course this was not a "spiritual" resurrection, as some say. Jesus came back in a *body*.

But that's not all. Listen to Jesus as He continues:

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44-47)

Notice that He says *all* nations. He's the universal Man, the Savior of the *world*. But the thing I want you to notice is that He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. Oh, that's devastating. The Greek had attempted to develop man mentally, and there were mental giants – Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, and many others. Dr. Luke says, "You need more than a high IQ to know Him. The Holy Spirit will have to open your understanding." And today there are those who are missing the point even as they read this. The Spirit of God will have to open your heart to see Him and know Him.

Not only did the philosophy of the Greeks fail, but today we're in the same predicament, only now it is science that has failed us. Science cannot solve the problems of the world. Science is making our world a great big garbage can, and man is perishing in it. The air is polluted, our rivers and streams are polluted, and we can hardly move on our highways. It is difficult to get a clean breath of air or drink of water today. We make detergents that clean clothes, but those same detergents dirty the rivers. Man is smart, let me tell you! We can walk on the moon, but we cannot make the city streets safe to walk on at night. We can invent gadgets that give man comforts of life and packaged foods, but still we have the poor with us, and they're getting hungrier every day. Not only is man sinking in the filth that science has made, but science created an atom bomb that has put fear in his heart. The wisdom of the Greeks only brought man to the position where he could see that he was helpless. And that is the reason the gospel had its greatest entrée in the Greek world of that day. They saw their need. And I can't help but believe that in America sometime, somewhere along the way, we're going to wake up to the fact that we are not nearly as smart as we think we are. We are going to face the fact that science cannot solve the problems of the world.

The thinking man needs a Savior.

John: Written for the Wretched Man

The Gospel of John was written for the wretched man, and we shall see who that wretched man is.

It is generally assumed that the Gospel of John is easy to understand. Often you hear the cliché, "The Gospel of John is the *simple* Gospel." The simplicity of the language has deceived a great many folk. It is written in monosyllabic and dissyllabic words. Let me lift out a couple of verses to illustrate. Notice how simple these words are:

He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name.
(John 1:11, 12)

We have no problem with the words themselves, but actually, we're dealing here with the most profound Gospel. Take an expression like this: "Ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). Seven words – one conjunction, two prepositions and four pronouns – and you could ask any child in the fourth grade the meaning of any one of those words and he could give you a definition. But you put them together – "Ye in me, and I in you" – and neither the most profound theologian nor the greatest philosopher has ever been able to probe the depths of their meaning. "Ye in me" we know means salvation, and "I in you" means sanctification, but beyond that none of us can go very far. We think, sometimes, because we know the meaning of words, we know what is being said. The words are simple, but the meaning is deep.

Jerome said of John's Gospel, "John excels in the depths of divine mysteries." And no truer statement was ever made. Dr. A. T. Pierson put it like this, "It touches the heart of Christ."

Though it is assumed that John is the simple Gospel, it's not always assumed that the apostle John is the author of it. The Baur-Tubingen School in Germany years ago began an attack upon the Gospel of John. This has been a place where the liberal has really had a field day. I had a course in seminary (even in my day) on the authorship of the Gospel of John. The professor finally concluded the course by saying he thought John was the author. A wag in the class remarked, "Well, I believed John wrote it before I started the class and I believe it now, so I just wasted a semester!" Let me assure you that we are not going to waste time here relative to the authorship of this Gospel other than to mention two statements

that make it quite obvious John is its writer.

One of the reasons it was felt that John might not be the writer was because Papias (I've quoted him now for each of the Gospels) was thought to have never mentioned the authorship of John. But Professor Tischendorf (the German who found the Codex Sinaiticus – which is probably our best manuscript of the Old Testament – down in St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinaitic Peninsula) was working in the Vatican library when he came upon an old manuscript that has a quotation from Papias in which it was clear that John was the author of this Gospel. I personally wouldn't want any better authority than that. Also Clement of Alexandria, who lived about AD 200, made the statement that John was persuaded by friends and also moved by the Spirit of God to write a spiritual Gospel. And I believe the Gospel of John is that spiritual Gospel. In my mind there's not a shadow of a doubt that John is the author.¹⁸

However, the more significant question is: Why did John write his Gospel? It was the last one written, probably close to AD 100. All the other apostles were dead, the writers of the New Testament were all gone, and he alone was left. In an attempt to answer this question, we find again a diversity of theories. There are those who say it was written to meet the first heresy of the church, Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that Jesus was God but not man at all, that the apostles only thought they saw Him, but did not actually. And Irenaeus expressly makes the statement that the purpose of John was to confute the Gnostic Cerinthus. But Tholuck makes it very clear that this is not a polemic Gospel at all, and he is not attempting to meet that issue. Also, there are those who say it is a supplement to what the others had written, that he merely added other

¹⁸ Ibid., 278-79.

material. But Hase answers that by saying, “This Gospel is no mere patchwork to fill up a vacant space.”

You see, these theories do not give an adequate answer to account for all the peculiar facts that are in this Gospel, which a true explanation must do. And, in my judgment, the only satisfactory explanation is that John wrote at the request of the church, which already had the three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke were being circulated) and wanted something more spiritual and deep, something that would enable them to grow. That’s exactly what Augustine, the great saint of the early church, said:

In the four Gospels, or rather in the four books of the one Gospel, the Apostle St. John not undeservedly with reference to his spiritual understanding compared to an eagle, has lifted higher, and far more sublimely than the other three, his proclamation, and in lifting it up he has wished our hearts also to be lifted.¹⁹

That was the purpose of the Gospel of John. That is the reason he wrote it.

Accordingly, therefore, when we come to the Gospel of John, we find that he does not take us to Bethlehem. We will never grow spiritually by singing umpteen times “O Little Town of Bethlehem” at Christmastime. John won’t take us to Bethlehem, because he wants you and me to grow as believers. So he takes us down the silent corridors of eternity, through the vast emptiness of space, to a beginning that is not a beginning at all.

In the beginning was the Word. (John 1:1)

Some say that this world came into being three billion years ago.

¹⁹ Ibid., 285-86.

I think they're pikers. I think it has been around a lot longer than that. What do you think God has been doing in eternity past, twiddling His thumbs? May I say to you, He had a great deal to do in the past, and He has eternity behind Him. So when you read, "In the beginning," go as far back as your little mind can go into eternity past, put down your peg – and Jesus Christ comes out of eternity to meet you.

In the beginning was [not is] the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

Then come on down billions more years.

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:3)

Then John takes another step:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.
(John 1:14)

The Greek philosophers and the Greek mind for which Luke wrote would stop right there and say, "We're through with you. We can't follow you." But John was not writing for them, and he goes even further.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.
(John 1:18)

"Declared him" is *exegeted* Him, led Him out into the open where man can see Him and come to know Him. The Man who had no origin is the Son who comes out of eternity.

Dr. Luke looked at Him under a microscope. Though John's method is altogether different, He comes to the same conclusion as did Luke. You could never call John's method scientific. The Christian who has come to a knowledge of Christ and faith in Him,

doesn't need to have the virgin birth gone over again and again – he already believes that. Therefore, when he comes to the Gospel of John, he finds sheer delight and joy unspeakable as he reads and studies it.

Unfortunately, though, he thinks the unbeliever ought to have it also. And you'll find it is used in personal work more than any other Gospel. After all, doesn't the average Christian consider it the simple Gospel? Is it simple? It's profound. It's for believers. It enables them to grow.

When I was a pastor in Pasadena, California, I had a doctor friend who, because of his position, was able to get together students at Cal Tech for a Bible class. Do you know what he taught? The Gospel of John. He told me, "You know, I really shook that bunch of boys with the first chapter." I met him several weeks after that and asked him how the class was getting on. "Oh," he said, "they quit coming." Well, after all, they had been in a school where you pour things in a test tube, where you look at things under a microscope. I said, "Why didn't you take the Gospel of Luke?" "Because," he said, "I wanted to give them the simple Gospel." Well, he didn't. John is not simple; it's profound. It is for believers.

Also there was a seminary professor in this area not long ago who was asked to teach the Bible to a group of businessmen at a noon luncheon. Guess what book he taught. You're right! He said, "They don't know very much, so I'll give them the Gospel of John." I wish he'd given them the Gospel of Mark. That's the Gospel of action, of power, for the strong man.

The Gospel of John is for those who already believe. When you come to the section of chapters 13 through 17 you can write a sign over it "For Believers Only" and you could put under that

“All Others Stay Out.” I don’t think that section was ever meant for an unbeliever. Jesus took His own into the Upper Room and revealed to them things that enabled them to grow. No other Gospel writer gives us that. Why? Because they’re the evangelists who are presenting Christ as the Savior of the world. Somebody asks, “But doesn’t John do that?” Yes, he does, but he is primarily writing for the growth of believers.

John has more about the resurrected Christ than does any other Gospel. In fact, more than all the others put together. Paul said that “though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more” (2 Corinthians 5:16). Rather, we know Him as the resurrected Christ. For this reason John attempts to give the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, and he mentions seven of them.

The first was one of the most dramatic as He appeared to Mary Magdalene there in the garden. The second was to the disciples in the Upper Room, Thomas being absent. The third appearance was again to the disciples in the Upper Room, with Thomas present (these three appearances are recorded in the twentieth chapter). Then (in the next chapter) we see Him appearing by the Sea of Galilee. Several disciples were out fishing, and He called to them from the shore, “Do you have any fish?” He is going to ask you that someday. Have you been doing any fishing recently? Well, you catch them only the way He tells you. You have to fish by His instructions. Then He prepared breakfast for them. I wish I had been there for that outdoor breakfast. That was a real cookout. And friend, He still wants to feed you in the morning – also during the day and in the evening – with spiritual food. Then He commissioned Simon Peter: “Simon, do you love Me?” (See John 21:15-17.) Jesus did not say you have to be a graduate of a seminary to be able to serve Him. He asked, “Do you love Me?” That’s

the one condition. Don't misunderstand me. If you love Him, you will want training to prepare you for the ministry He has for you, but He wants to know that you love Him. The reason multitudes of folk are not serving Him today is that they do not love Him. Then Peter was told that he was to be a martyr; but John, no, he will live on in order to write this Gospel, three epistles, and the Book of Revelation. There are the seven appearances that John records, and all of them are for believers; they minister to us today.

Now somebody is going to say to me, "Preacher, at the very beginning you mentioned the fact that the human family was divided into four major divisions at the time Christ came, and that John's Gospel was written for the Oriental, the people of the East." Yes, I did, and I'd like you to see what is a profound truth and a fingerprint of the Holy Spirit here.

At the time of the birth of Christ, there was a great expectation throughout the heathen world. That was a strange thing. Suetonius relates that "an ancient and definite expectation had spread throughout the East, that a ruler of the world would, at about that time, arise in Judaea."²⁰ Tacitus makes a similar statement. Schlegel mentions that Buddhist missionaries traveling to China met Chinese sages going to seek the Messiah about AD 33. So there was an expectation throughout the world at that time that He might come. And it was out of the mysterious East that the wise men came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2).

The marvel is that this Gospel of John, so definitely designed to meet the need of believers, is also designed for the Oriental mind as is no other. Whom do I mean by Orientals? The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the uncounted millions in India and

²⁰ Suetonius, *The Life of Vespasian*.

China. Even to this good day we know so little about that area of the world. What about Tibet or Outer Mongolia? It is still the mysterious East. We do know this: There is fabulous wealth there, and right next to it is abject poverty. Strange area. Out of this land of mystery came the wise men. They were bringing gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – for Him. There are a lot of questions to be answered there. Out of that land of mystery they came. That Oriental splendor we've heard so much about reveals unbelievable wealth, and it is still there – ornate palaces, gaudy grandeur, priceless gems. It has so entranced the West that when Columbus started out for this country (we give him credit for discovering America, but he wasn't looking for our continent), he was trying to find a new route to the East in order to bring back something of the wealth that was there.

By the side of that wealth there is extreme poverty of the basest sort, dire destitution, millions living in squalor and misery. Their worldly goods consist of the rags they have on their backs. One hundred million will die of starvation in this next decade, we're told. You may ask, "Well, why don't we send food to them?" There's not enough to go around. Our decision is, What hundred million will starve? Will it be these or those? But the thing that arrests us is that the poor were crying for help, and the wealthy had found no solution to the problems of life. The Orient gave freest rein to human desires. Although they had this freedom, there was no satisfaction. They've had the great pagan religions – Buddhism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Muhammadanism. Yet out of that area, with all they had, their wise men came, asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). They needed salvation. They had none, no religion ever gave that to them. This is the reason people in the mysterious East have reveled in the Gos-

pel of John as no others have. It is a mind today that will revel in the Gospel of John. The Lord Jesus can meet the need of this type of mind, as John reveals.

Out of heaven's glory He came, that One who was before any beginning we can envision. "And the Word was made flesh" and walked down here among men (John 1:14). The Orient had religion. After all, Israel belonged to that area of the world. They had temples – ornate, hideous, with degrading rituals. They had cults of the occult. And John tells us that the first public act of the Lord Jesus was to go into the temple of that day and cleanse it. By this He is telling them, these people who worshiped in their degrading temples, that God is holy. If you're going to worship God you'll have to be cleansed, the temple will have to be cleansed, for there can be no compromise with evil or wrong.

A religious ruler came to Jesus one night – John alone tells us this. Our Lord that night said to this religious ruler, who had everything and was religious to his fingertips, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). He needed to have a new life and get rid of the old religion. Jesus said that He had come not to sew a patch on the old garment, but He came to give them the robe of righteousness that would enable them to stand before a holy God. This is what that area of the world needed.

Womanhood was degraded in the Orient. Our Lord ennobled womanhood because He came, born of a woman. He went to a wedding to answer the mockery they'd made of marriage with the harems of the East. Christ went to a wedding and put His blessing upon it. Also Jesus sat down at the well and had a conversation with a woman of very questionable character. But she was a woman for whom He died. The soul of a woman was as precious to Him as the soul of a man.

Christ fed the multitudes, followed the meal with a discourse on the Bread of Life, and then escaped because He did not want them to make Him king of their stomachs.

Out of the East comes the inspiration for these lines, which may be found in several languages:

If of thy mortal goods thou art bereft,
And from thy slender store two loaves alone to thee are left,
Sell one, and with the dole
Buy hyacinths to feed the soul.²¹

The Oriental mind would understand Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life. It is unfortunate that the managers of our supermarkets don't understand it – they think it's bread and beans on the shelf that are important, and He said it's not. A man in the Orient who hasn't bread and beans will understand that. I am afraid some of us miss it today.

The Lord Jesus said in this Gospel, "I am the light of the world; I am the bread of life; I am the way, the truth, and the life." And the Orient was wretched and perishing in that day, as it is today. John says:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:30, 31)

The thing that they needed above everything else was life.

When I watch the multitudes of Christmas shoppers, they look like spiritual zombies. They need life – and they're buying presents.

²¹ Author unknown, but perhaps Gulistan of Moslih Eddin Saadi of Persia, thirteenth century.

A lady once called me on the telephone and said, “Dr. McGee, I used to attend your church, but I went into a cult [and she named it]. I’ve lost the glow that I had when I was down there, and I’m wondering today just where I am. You had some literature you gave me at that time. Would you please send it to me again? I want to get back.” The Gospel of John is for her. Oh, what we need today is life, not religion. Life!

Perhaps you will recall that I said at the beginning of this message the Gospel of John was primarily written for the church, also that it is the Gospel that will reach and touch the mind of the Orient, yet I say it is the Gospel for the wretched man. Now you may ask, “You don’t think believers are the wretched man, do you?” I sure do. Paul, in Romans 7:24, said, “Oh, wretched man that I am!” To whom was he speaking, and about whom was he speaking? He was talking to you and me, and he was talking about himself. He was not an unsaved man when he said that. That cry did not come from a man who was unsaved, but from a man who had met Christ on the Damascus road and who was trying to live the Christian life in his own strength, in ignorance of the Word of God. That is the reason God had to train the man as He did.

The most wretched people at the Christmas season are in two groups. One is the unsaved man who tries to drink his way through Christmas. The other is the uninstructed Christian. Dwight L. Moody put it in his quaint way: “Some Christians have just enough religion to make them miserable.” There are a lot of Christians today who are compromising, pussyfooting, running with the hare and the hounds. They’re trying to go with all the crowds and trying to please everybody. They live for the devil six days of the week and try to live for God one day of the week. Of course they lack that all-important sense of security. They have what the psychologist is emphasizing now: insecurity. That’s the reason a great many put

the Bible under their arms, learn a few Christian clichés, join a little group and lean on them – because they're insecure. They are not living for God or growing in grace and in the knowledge of Him. They're miserable. Some of you reading this now can put up a good front, but you're miserable down underneath.

It is interesting to hear a man, probably the greatest psychologist today, voice this same conviction. He says that the so-called neurotic is a bona fide sinner, and his guilt is from the past, that his difficulties arise not from inhibitions but from actions – actions that have been kept carefully concealed, unconfessed, and unredeemed.

That's the miserable man, the “wretched man that I am,” the Christian who tries to keep up a front. He is insecure and doesn't dare say he's a sinner. The first time I said this from the pulpit of a church I served, I received several letters from people who wrote, “Don't you dare call me a sinner. I've been a member of this church for years.” Friend, you are a sinner. Why don't you tell God about it and get the thing straightened out so the Spirit of God can move in your life with power and bring blessing to you?

The columnist Russel Kirk made this statement:

Disciples of Sigmund Freud notwithstanding, this commentator declares that there's nothing wrong with a sense of guilt. On the contrary, the man who thinks himself guiltless is either stupid or abnormal. And a society which has denied the reality of personal guilt soon becomes a decadent and indolent culture.

This is the reason many in the Orient have responded to the gospel. They don't mind coming and saying, “I have no front to put up. I do not need a status symbol. I have none. I'm a sinner.” To do that would bring joy in your heart because everything would be made right with God. Quit trying to please your little crowd. Take a stand

for God; stand tall and see how it feels.

Many people think of Ernest Hemingway as a swashbuckling, big, brave man. But his biographer says that his he-man swagger was a camouflage and that he had “the undruggable consciousness of something wrong.” Do you have this same feeling? And you can’t get rid of it? Oh, you can if you’ll come to Jesus Christ and be honest.

You and I need to sit at Jesus’ feet. *Living Prophecies* has translated Hosea 6:6 (it is more an interpretation than a translation): “I don’t want your sacrifices – I want your love; I don’t want your offerings – I want you to know Me.” This is what God is saying today: “I want you to know Me.” This is the reason the Gospel of John was written. And the reason Christians are miserable today is that they are too far from Him; they are not growing in their knowledge of Him.

However, over the years I have found that if I’ll just teach the Word of God, there are some who will listen, some who want to grow. May I say to you, friend, we need today to sit at Jesus’ feet and let Him teach us. He wants to talk with us. He wants us to grow. That is the reason He has given to us the Gospel of John.

You may be like the Israelite, a religious person. Jesus can speak to you today. You may be like the Roman, a person of action. God wanted to reach you, and He gave a Gospel for you. You may be the thinking man. He has written for you. He wants you to know Jesus Christ. You may be that one who today professes Him as your Savior and today you are miserable. He wants you to know Him. The only place you’ll ever get acquainted with Him is in His Book.