New Testament Introduction

Dr. Ben Witherington

Transcription

(unedited)

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Introduction to the Course

This course will help you to begin to weave yourself through the maze of NT studies. During the course we will be exploring several major subject areas: 1) the history of the period in which the NT was written; 2) the social and cultural milieu in which early Christians lived; 3) the practice of the scholarly study of the NT (source, form, redaction, genre, rhetorical criticism et al.); 4) questions of introduction about the books of the NT (authorship, date, audience, structure, purpose); 5) the practice of exegesis and hermeneutics.
Chapter 1

The Importance of Context (part 1)

When reading the Bible, there is a danger of reading our own ideas into the text and assuming they are there. A text without a context is a pretext for whatever you want it to mean.

It has been said that the past is like a foreign country—they do things differently there. I love to take people to the lands of the Bible. I like to create in them a sort of a sense of cultural vertigo and what I mean by that is, one of the places I love to take them most is the Luxor in Egypt where they go to see the Temple of Thieves. They’re standing in the Temple of Thieves and they’re looking at all these statues and Hieroglyphics. On the right there is a Japanese tour group and on the left there is a German tour group and in the minaret in the background start calling to prayer in Arabic and at this point they kind of get cultural vertigo. They realize they are not at Wendy’s in Columbus anymore. They realize they are in a very different world, different culture, different languages and they get a little squeamish. Now the last time I did this my Egyptian tour guide said to the students when he could see they were glazing over and getting a little dizzy, he said, “Turn around” and they turned around at the entrance to the Temple of Thieves and he said, “Right across the street is the American cultural embassy”. They turned around and what they saw was a McDonald’s—the Golden Arches. The past really is like a foreign country they do things differently there and the Bible was entirely written in a different culture at a different time in different languages than we have. So the first thing that I really want to stress to you is that our big problem as 21st century Christians reading the Bible is the danger of an anachronism—that is the danger of reading into the text our own late western even Christian ideas into the text and assuming that they are there. Now what I would urge us to do is realize that the Bible is God’s word to us in all generations in all centuries in all millennium. However, it was given incarnation ally at specific points of time to specific people in specific cultures and therefore a text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to be. Let me say that again because you are going to hear this mantra quite frequently, a text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to mean. Let me illustrate what I mean. When I was pastoring one of my churches, one of the first churches that I pastored, I had a brand new Christian who was a carpenter in my church and one day he called me up, I kid you not, and he said, “Dr. Ben I have a dilemma”. I said, “Glen Ray what’s the problem?” He said, “Well, my fellow carpenter he knows the Bible better than I do and I was thinking about breeding some of my hunting dogs and he said that in the Bible it says you cannot do that, it’s against the Bible to breed dogs. I don’t know my Bible like I should be, is that what it says?” I said, “Glen Ray I’m pretty sure it doesn’t say that but I’ll look up every pea picking references to dogs in the Bible and I’ll get right back to you”. So I hung up and I knew his friend was a KJV kind only guy and so I went to my KJ lexicon and I started going through all the references to dog in the NT and there was nothing of any relevance whatsoever. Then I started going through the references to dog in the OT and I came across this verse which read, “Thou shalt not breed with the dogs”. I called up Glen Ray and said, “Glen Ray I’ve got good news and I’ve got bad news. Here’s the good news, those furry four-footed tail wagging critters, you can breed all those you want. But there is this verse in the OT that says, “That Israelites should not sexual fraternize with foreign women and the way that is described is, Thou shalt not breed with the dogs as in a pejorative term for foreign women.” There was kind of a pregnant pause at the other end of the line while this was sort of soaking in
to Glen Ray’s cerebral cortex and he said, “Dr. Ben I’m feeling ever so much better now and anyway, my wife, Betty Sue’s just from Chatham County”. A text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to mean. Therefore, the value of contextual study of the most important book every written is paramount. When I talk about context I’m not just talking about the literary context OK, study this verse in its paragraph, in its chapter, in its book, I’m not just talking about literary context I’m also talking about the historical context, the religious context, the archeological context and the rhetorical context and the social context, there are a lot of contexts that help us understand the content of the Bible. So what we’re going to do is first of all we’re going to talk about the NT as a first century text. What I’ve got here for you, sparing no expense, are examples of the very earliest manuscripts we have of the NT. One of which is P46, I Thess 2 is what you’ve got there. Let me read you a verse from I Thess 2 which helps us get at the nature of the setting in which the Bible was written. This is Paul talking to the Thessalonians, this is verse 13 of chapter 2 of I Thess, Paul says this, We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers. Now this verse will preach in various ways but let me ask you a question, what did he mean by the phrase word of God, what was he referring to there? Was he referring to A) a text or a book? Was he referring to B) some kind of oral proclamation of a message about God? Or was he talking about C) Jesus, the incarnate word of God? It could be any of those 3 things, that phrase was used in all of those ways in that era, what here was he referring to? Well, the verse gives us the clue you heard from us the word of God. So which of these 3 is he referring to? He’s talking about the oral proclamation and here is something you are going to have a hard time getting hold of, I had a hard time getting hold of this, this was an oral culture, not a culture of texts, the world of Jesus, the world of Paul, the world of John the Baptist all of these folks the world of all the OT figures it’s an oral culture. There’s only about 10-15 percent literacy, it’s not a culture of texts, texts are rare and expensive. Let me tell you why. I brought this back from Egypt with me, this is the original paper, I’ll pass it around and let you look at it. This is a piece of papyrus, this is what that was written on, this is it right here. Look at this. It comes from a reed in the Nile Delta. It’s a triangular shaped reed shaped like a trinity, they take the reed, they slice it into thin strips and they lay them vertical and horizontal—you can see that in this piece of papyrus, look at that you see they run at 450 angels, you see that, horizontal and vertical. You just roll the rolling pin over the strips; you hang it out to dry in the dry Egyptian heat and voila you have the ancient equivalent to paper. It was written on this but this stuff was incredibly expensive. Paper was expensive, ink which was soot and water was expensive. Secretaries were enormously expensive, are you with me now. The cost of producing a document which you could not erase, no boo boos allowed, was enormous. This world was not a world that was a culture of texts. It’s an oral culture and the texts in that culture are an oral text, no that’s not an oxymoron, I know sometimes when I use the words oral texts people think, well that’s about as much an oxymoron as Microsoft Works. It sounds like a contradiction in terms. It’s not. Look at this text for a minute, OK, look at this text here. What do you notice about it? There is no separation of words, there’s no punctuation, there’s no separation of sentences, paragraphs and yea verily there’s not chapters and verses. Are you with me now? This is an oral text. How can you make sense of this? You have to pronounce the syllables out loud. You have to read the text out loud to even figure out where the words stop and start. It’s an oral text. Libraries were noisy in antiquity; everybody read out loud. This is not a joke. One of my favorite lines from St Augustine is he says, “St Ambrose was the most amazing of all early Christians that he knew, he was the first man he had ever met who could read a text without opening his mouth because everybody else read everything out loud.” It’s an oral text. Look at this one; this is the earliest fragment of the Gospel of John that we have yet found. This is from 125AD not long after this document was written, here it is. The letters are all run together,
they are all capital letters, and it’s like first grade writing out the alphabet. Here’s another one, this is done by a more elegant scribe, all capital letters, no punctuation, no hyphens, no commas, no periods and no chapters and verses which, by the way, were not put into the Bible until the late middle ages and they were put in the Bible by Archbishop Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury because he had way too much time on his hands. So he decided to divide it into chapters and verses and they are not inspired. Those numbers were put in by an Archbishop who figured we needed some divisions. This is what is called scriptum continuum; the words just keep on going and going and going and going. Look at this, this is an epitaph on a tomb, it’s a whole bunch of capital letters and this guy was not very good because look at the end of the line here, what happened? He got to the end of the line and he realized he was running out of room, can’t start over, no cut, delete and paste, end of the line, end of the line. He was not the best of stonemasons. Here this is an ancient text in scriptum continuum, it’s an oral text. Now here are some of the features of an oral culture that you need to understand. They preferred the living voice to the written text. It you were to ask them which has more authority the oral proclamation or the written text 99 out of a 100 are going to say which? The oral proclamation. It’s the living voice that they want that’s why I named the book that you’re reading, The Living Word of God. That was primary, they trusted the living voice over text, and they saw texts as simply surrogates or scripts for speeches or oral performances. Let’s go back and look at that again. Look at this, this is like a sermon manuscript, it’s something that has been prepared not to exist in itself but as a what? A prop for an oral proclamation, a verbatim for an oral proclamation. I once had a student at Ashland Seminary who was getting frustrated all this contextual stuff we were making and learning you know, he came to me after class one day and he said, “Dr. Ben I don’t know why I need to learn all this contextual and historical stuff, after all I can just get up in the pulpit and the Spirit will give me utterance.” I said, “Charlie, yes you can certainly do that but it’s a shame you’re not giving the Holy Spirit more to work with.” See the function of the text in an oral culture is to supplement the oral culture, not supplant the authority of the oral and living word but to serve it, to supply it with words, to supplement that’s the point and specifically for the literate people. Now here’s a question for you. If only 10 or so percent of the world of Jesus and Paul were literate, could read and write, what does it tell you about the earliest Christians? That we have a Canon full of 27 books from them. What do you learn about the leaders of early Christianity? Would they have been at the elite end of the educational spectrum or at the bottom of the barrel? They would have been in the elite. They were part of the ten percent, part of the ten percent who could read and write and not just write anything. Some of them were even eloquent. Some of them would be in the upper one percent of being able to read and write and be literate and well spoken. The leadership of early Christianity was not Joe the day laborer, it was people like Peter and Paul and James and others who could read and write. Now you may be saying, wait a minute, wasn’t there that meeting in the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem where Peter and John were called on the carpet for all this miracle working and preaching and they were objected to and somebody said these men are ungramatical you know that doesn’t mean illiterate it means not trained in our seminary. What it means is a person who did not get a Jerusalem education, in other words this is snobbery. It’s not a comment on these fishermen from Galilee being illiterate; it’s a comment about them not being, in the mind of the speaker, well educated. So it actually says more about the commentator than Peter and John to be honest with you. The leaders of the early Christian movement were literate and they produced remarkable documents that stand up against other first century documents in terms of grammar, style, skill, rhetoric, in so many different ways the living voice was the primary thing. Now let’s think again for a minute about this text that I read to you I Thess 2:13 We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a mere human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers. Oh, now
where else do we hear about that? Remember Heb the word of God is powerful like a two-edged sword piercing between bone and marrow. He’s not talking about somebody swallowing a text, he’s talking about the penetration of the oral proclamation of God’s word into the human heart, that’s what he’s talking about. The living word of God was the oral proclamation that was primary. The written word of God was the residue of the oral proclamation and then there was another word of God, not just the word of God written but this word of God. The word spoken, the word written, the word incarnated in a person. These are the 3 forms of the word of God. Think of it this way. We would tend to think that the text is primary and the speaking is secondary and after the text the most important, certainly before the text, would be Jesus himself as the word of God. The word of God incarnate, tangible, touchable like a text. The way the ancients viewed this would be the word living in a person is primary; the oral word is living and secondary and tertiary is the text. Now that’s so different from where we are. Ask people what is the word of God and the first answer you get 9 out of 10 times is what? This book. No, no. That’s not how ancients would look at it. The text is a surrogate for the oral proclamation or the living of the presence of the word. It’s third on the totem pole of words of God. Now I want to talk to you about how people viewed words from a deity. They believed that words form a deity had inherent power. We’re used to thinking of words as mere symbols or ciphers you know a combination of letters. This is not how ancients viewed words especially divinely inspired words. And in a largely oral cultural it’s not how they viewed a sacred text. A sacred text had an aura or inherent power to it that we would not attribute to a normal book. We’re a culture just full of books. We’ve kindled ourselves into electronic books. Ancient peoples could hardly afford to own pieces of papyrus never mind multiple pieces of papyrus. Only the wealthy could afford that. Therefore, for them sacred texts especially were inherently holy. Had an inherent power to them and if a word of a God was proclaimed and it was true, it had an effect. So we hear in Isa God saying my word that goes out of my mouth: it will not return to me void, see it’s not like our culture. Our culture says oh words full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Wrong. This is not how oral words; especially sacred words were viewed in the first century AD. So much did they believe in the power of the words of a God or sacred words that when somebody uttered a blessing and it went forth from the mouth of the blessor you couldn’t take it back. There’s no do over. Remember the story of Jacob and Esau? There are no do overs when the blessing is given. There are no do overs when the curse is spoken. It has an inherent power, it’s like a snowball going down a mountain, and you’re not going to stop it. That’s the way it was. True prophecy is true because it becomes true. False prophecy is false why? Because it wasn’t a word of God to begin with. But a real, sacred, living word from God had an inherent power and effect. And texts that were service for that had an inherent power. Now I want to show you some of the problems we have in dealing with oral texts. For example, here’s the beginning of a familiar letter from Paul, it reads, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—which letter is this? Can you remember? Where does he refer to the gospel of God. How about Romans, the beginning of Romans. But you see I already know this text so I know how to divide these words up don’t I. Suppose I were to write on this blackboard, let’s just do this now, this, what does this say? It could be Jesus is now here, you could divide it this way. What else could it be? It could be Jesus is nowhere, if you’re from eastern NC like I me it could be Jes, us is nowhere. This is what we’re up against with the Greek NT. Papyrus, secretaries and ink was enormously expensive so they are at a premium of space. This is the real problem. Of our 4 canonical gospels Luke is longest by word count. The Gospel of Luke is the maximum number of words, syllables, letters; you could get on one lengthy piece, normal lengthy piece of papyrus. So the author of the Gospel of Luke is boogying to the max here. He’s using every square inch of that papyrus he can use. Now I’ve passed the pieces of papyrus around and if you look at it again you’ll know that are they going to write on the front and the back? Not so
much. Why not? It’s basically transparent; it will bleed through because you’re using black soot for ink. You hold it up to the light you’ll see what I mean. So most ancients when they had a document written they wanted it plain text on the front, no divisions because it was a lengthy text. Now the exception to that is when you’re giving a receipt for a bill of goods or you know when you have given a legal verdict in a written form or when you’ve written the name of a king on a seal—those are not texts in the primary sense they are uses of letters but they are not text in the primary sense. People used all kinds of things to write on because papyrus was so expensive, they’d write on a piece of pot shirt, a little piece of clay, because this would be like you going out and buying a piece of vellum, scraped lamb skin and then writing the first 2 chapters of the Gospel of John on it. As expensive as that would be for you, that’s how expensive it was for anybody in antiquity. Now that’s very important because one of the things it means when we’re thinking about the spreading of early Christianity is that you shouldn’t think of everybody having their own copy of the Gospel of John or the Gospel of Mark or any of this. You’re probably not even thinking of every church having a wide array of documents. They had a few and they shared them. Now here’s the other thing and this is downside to us being living in a computer age and an age of texts. Living in an age of texts and computer screens disables your oral memory. You become dependent on the text and on the screen. One of the changes I’ve noticed since I began teaching at the dawn of time, in the early 80’s and unto now is that one of the first questions students always ask me is do you have handouts or do you have the power points that I could have. Because why? Because their oral memory has shrunk down and their writing skills are minimal. See the more that happens the less you’re like first century Christians who lived in an age where oral memory was huge. It’s an oral culture. You needed to hear it and remember it.

Now since it was an oral culture that brings me to the second aspect of these texts. You know the old saying, something gets lost in translation, well it really does. And what gets lost in translation is the oral dimension of the text, rhythm, rhyme, assonance, alliteration. These texts are full of mnemonic devices. They were meant to be heard, Jesus did not say let those with two good eyes read. He said, “Let those with two good ears hear” and the way he proclaimed his parables or the beatitudes in Aramaic was not merely memorable it could be memorized. It had oral devices in it that helped you. But what’s even more remarkable is these long documents that people like Paul produced. You do know Paul was long winded. There’s an appalling amount of Paul in the NT. More than Jesus, right? Right. You remember the story of Eutychus and what happened to poor Eutychus because Paul kept going on ad nauseam. Remember that? The thing that you notice even about Paul’s letters is that they are crafted in a way that in the Greek you can remember large chunks of it because it rhymes and it has rhythm and it has assonance and for the oral memory those are the catch devices that help them remember. All of that is lost by translating it into English. I would also say to you that when you have a translation that is a paraphrase you’ve doubly lost it. You are even further removed from the original text because what you’ve done is add so much yeast to the dough that what in Greek might be 2 words becomes in Eugene Peterson’s The Message fifteen words. You are very far removed from the original affect of the word. That doesn’t make The Message a bad thing in world full of texts and many, many Bibles, it’s a useful tool but it doesn’t really help you get back at the sense of the original text. Let me see if I can give you a little sense of the sense. The beginning of the Bible begins as follows, be-re-SHIYT ba-RA eh-lo-HIYM, In the beginning God created. You can already begin to hear where this is going; you have a b b sound be-re-SHIYT ba-RA In the beginning God spoke and said etc. A little further down two lines later it says and after what he had created it was, in English, formless and void or I prefer the translation wild and wooly. In the Hebrew it
reads tohu wa-bohu what God had made was tohu wa-bohu. Now you can remember that, it has a ring to it; it’s got assonance alliteration and rhyme to it. You go to the NT over and over again even in Paul’s lengthy letters you have a whole string of words that begin with the same consonant, have the same verbs, end with the same endings. It’s not like the English that you read. It’s much more memorable and it can be memorized and that was by intent because the only word of God most of them knew was what? The oral spoken word, it’s the only word they had. So make it memorable, make it memorizable. Now the application today would be to preachers who are able to preach in a way that makes it memorable for the audience and not just throw out words. There was a skill in this proclamation and there was a power inherent in the words, let those with 2 good ears hear. Ancient texts were the residue of speech. OK, we have thus far been stressing the orality of the world in which the Bible was given and in our case the NT was given. It cannot be stressed enough but I think we’ve had enough stress on that so let me pause for just a minute and ask what questions do you have about the oral character of our NT text or the oral culture in which they were given.

Question from student could not be heard. Dr. Witherington continues, what I would say for a person who, let’s say you are language challenged. Greek is going to be Greek to you now and forever, amen, right? What can you do? Then you need to rely on good translations and good commentaries to help you get an understanding of the original content of these texts. And that would be also relying on good teachers and preachers who rely on good texts and commentaries that help them in their teaching and preaching. So it’s a pedagogical process and that would be also relying on good teachers and preachers who rely on good texts and commentaries who help them in their teaching and preaching. So it’s a pedagogical process, you have a spectrum of translations. On the far left end would be periphrastic ones like The Message or The Living Bible that kind of thing. In the middle you would have what are called idiomatic translations which are sense translations, sometimes word for word for they basically sense unit for sense unit and over on the far right of the spectrum you have more literal translations. Now what would be the problem with a literal translation? The big problem with the literal translation is the idioms, for example, if I call up my friend Schultz in Dusseldorf and say, “Hi, Schultz. I have an axe to grind today” he’s going to say, “Auch du liber Ben have you become an axe man”? Why? Because he doesn’t know the English idiom, I have an axe to grind. I don’t mean I’m actually grinding an axe, I have an agenda right? The problem with a literal translation is that if you literally translate the idioms in the Bible into English they don’t mean the same thing that they meant in the original language. A really good example of this would be in the story of Paul’s conversion. There are 3 accounts of Paul’s conversion, Acts 9, Acts 22 and Acts 26. In one of them Jesus from Heaven says to Saul flattened on the road to Damascus, Saul it hurts you to kick against the pricks. That’s the KJ translation which is so not working modern English. It doesn’t work for 2 reasons, one reason is that prick means something different today than it meant in 1611 but the second reason it doesn’t work at all is because the basic original idiom was part of a preindustrial culture. Literally it reads, it hurts you to kick against the goads. How many of you know what a goad is? It is a cow prod. It’s a stick with a point on it. But the idiom meant it is futile to resist your destiny. Saul, it’s futile for you to resist my plan for your life is what Jesus is saying. Now would you rather have a translation that gives it to you literally and then you kind of say, “What, I don’t get that. In fact it might be offensive. I just read it in the KJ and I went whoa, oh dude, R rated passage. Not going there again.” Or would you rather have a sense translation. My preference is for a good idiomatic translation that translates the meaning from the sender language to the receiver language and of course that’s a moving target in both ways. English is a living language, it keeps changing. What prick mean in 1611 is not what prick means now. One of the reasons you have to keep having translations is a) English
New Testament Introduction. Dr. Ben Witherington

keep changing. The reason is we keep learning more about the Greek NT. We keep finding more and more manuscripts; we’re closer and closer to the original Greek text so on both ends we need more and more translations. For me, the bottom line is that as a pulpit Bible I would prefer to use the TNIV or the NRSV. They are not perfect translations but they are better than most of the other idiomatic translations. Those are the ones that I would normally use. Now the honest truth is that in a class like this I’m going to do my own translation. The Bible that I read from is this one, Novum Testamentum Graece this is what I translate from, I do my own translation. But when I’m using other translations I’m going to use this, the NRSV and the Wesley Study Bible with notes that it has. It’s very good. It’s not perfect. A word about translators, they are notoriously conservative. They try to be careful; they know the whole history of translation in English all the way back to William Tyndale. When they are in doubt about a translation of something they will tend to go with the dominate translation from previous major translations. That’s how they tend to go. There are places where that causes real problems, I’ll give you 2 examples. Here we go, this is Heb 12:2, Looking to Jesus the trailblazer and finisher of faith or another translation would be, Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Now how many of you have a translation in front of you that has the word our before the faith in English? Probably most of you. I’m glad you don’t because the word our is not in any single Greek manuscript. That’s an interpretation; it is assumed that what Jesus is the Alpha and Omega of our faith. That’s a translation began with the Reformation and continues to today but it’s interpreted. It’s reading into the Greek text a word that is not there in any manuscript. I actually think it’s wrong. The reason I do is because Heb12:1-2 is actually the conclusion of Heb 11. What’s in Heb 11? It’s the hall of faith, remember, Abraham by faith did…Isaac did…Jacob did…and so on and so on. I think that Jesus is being presented as the climatic example of the person from start to finish who trusted God. He’s the Alpha and Omega example of faith. It’s not about our faith, it’s about him trusting God and being obedient even unto death on the cross. That’s what it is about. Not about our faith. This is where a more literal translation at least leaves the door open for a various reading of the text but when you put the word our in there there’s no doubt it’s not about Jesus, it’s about us. I give you one more example; this is the superman verse that was on the face of Tim Tebow quite regularly from Phil. You notice I can do all things through him who strengthens me, you know that one. Well that’s not quite what it says so let’s look at Phil 4:13 is the verse in question but I’m going to back up and give you a more literal rendering of the whole paragraph—always a good thing to back up and get a running start on an important verse, 10 I rejoice[g] in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.[h] 11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. Remember how Paul elsewhere says Godliness with contentment is great gain—same message here. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. (NRSV) And then here’s the translation, I am able to endure all things through him who strengthens me. Now how is that different from 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (ESV) There’s a big difference. He’s talking about being able to endure plenty or want, good times or bad, up or down, suffering or bliss, the context is perfectly clear. It’s not about him being able to do anything and everything in him who strengthens me, he’s not suggesting that if I jump off of a tall building I will not be feeling a heavy bit of gravity. He’s talking about being able to accept, endure, go through, get through any and all circumstances. That’s what he’s talking about through the one that strengthens me I can endure all things. That’s the point of that verse. It’s not a superman verse. When you get back to the original text a lot of this comes to light and that’s why the next thing I must say to you and just emphasize is, translators, bless their pea picking hearts, they are wonderful and they work hard they really do but they are human beings and of course they make
mistakes. There is not an inerrant translation; the inerrancy is in the original Bible, the infallibility is in the original inspired words that God inspired. The translations are hopefully faithful approximations of the original, that’s what they are. That’s what we want. Therefore, I have to stress to you that every translation is already an interpretation. Why? Well let’s take the English word love. English is a very Plebeian language compared to Greek. There are 5 or 6 good words in Greek for love. We just have love. There’s agape, philia, there’s storge for family love, there eros for erotic love and I could keep going. Here’s the problem, how do you render a Greek original into English when the sender language has all these words to use and we have only one or vise versa. Sometimes there’s just exactly one word in Greek for a particular thing and we’ve got like 5 different words in English to render it with. Every time you come across the fact that there’s not commensurability, a one-for-one thing, this means this and this means this, and the sender language has all the possibilities of the receiver language well then the translator has to make an interpretation. He has to make a decision and there are thousands of decisions made in any translation. Some of them are minor and inconsequential; some of them are major, like, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, a major decision. You’ve decided to put the word our in their to make clear that it’s our faith, not Jesus’ that we’re talking about here. Well that’s a decision you made without any textual support. Not a single manuscript says our in the Greek and they had words for our. That’s the kind of things that we face when we’re dealing with the Bible as the Word of God. So the first thing that I have been trying to emphasize to you is that we need to study the Bible in its original context and the first context we talked about is the oral context.

I want to move now to a second context and that is the social context. That world was really different from ours. I can hardly begin to tell you how different it was. Here’s 3 good examples. A) There was no free market economy, that’s one. B) It was basic a barter culture, money was not used a lot except for special purposes like paying taxes and not everybody had money. People didn’t go around with wallets all the time in antiquity and they certainly didn’t go around with purses. C) The main labor force in much of the Greco-Roman world was slaves. At the time that Paul was executed in Rome, in the 60’s AD, the estimate is that fifty percent of the population of Rome were slaves. You want to talk about slave labor, I’m not talking about working at Wendy’s, I’m talking about slave labor that built the pyramids, that built all these incredible temples, that built all of the statues and we could go on. The basis of that economy was slave, literal slave labor. You think what is going on in the factories in China is slave labor? Not so much compared to the first century world. Slaves were property, they were owned. They did not have unions; they did not have a minimum wage. So, let’s talk about the social world and the way we’re going to talk about it is we’re going to talk about concepts that were crucial to family values in that world that are different from ours. Here are some of the concepts we are going to talk about. Honor and shame, limited good, reciprocity, patriarchy, and there are others but these are enough to start with. Let’s talk about honor and shame first. Let’s think back for a minute to WWII, Pearl Harbor Day, Dec 7. What happened on Pearl Harbor Day? Young Japanese boys, not merely bombed our naval fleet in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, many of them crashed bonsai, their planes, into the decks of aircraft carriers setting them alight. Now, Americans were not merely horrified because it happened to them, they couldn’t understand this. Why would an eighteen year old boy with everything to live for, in perfectly good health, crash an airplane into the deck of an aircraft carrier? Let me go you one higher? Why would a young man from Nigeria get on an airplane heading for Detroit and try to blow himself up and 259 other people? Let’s think about this for a minute because these are major cultural differences. Every culture has a hierarchy of values. I’m going to give you 3 choices for America. At the top of the hierarchy of American values are
one of the following three, truth vs. lies, life vs. death, honor vs. shame. What would you say is at the top of American hierarchy values on the basis of how they spend their money? Or even on the basis of their clichés? It’s life and death—there’s no question. Look at our clichés. Well it’s not a matter of uh huh, here’s the primary value of the cultural right there. This was not true for the Japanese at the beginning of WWII. This is an honor and shame cultural. Honor and shame, more important than life and death, willing to sacrifice life for honor. So what were those boys doing? What was the terrorist doing on the airplane? He believed that he was honoring his god and those whose opinion that matter the most to him in his religion by sacrificing his life so that the balance of honor and shame could be upheld. Life and death further down the value hierarchy. Right? Americans find this inexplicable because that is not what is at the top of our hierarchy. For sure, truth and lies are not at the top of our value hierarchy, just go to Washington and watch what happens for awhile. Clearly the truth is not believed to set us free in America. It has a lot more to do with money and politics and other things. Always good to know what the real values of your culture are. In Jesus’ world, in Paul’s world the primary value was honor and shame. For honor you would be prepared to lie. For honor you would be prepared to die. It’s closer to the Marines, simper fi baby. It’s much closer to a military set of highly regimented priorities but in that culture honor and shame were number one. People would rather die than live in shame. Why did Judas hang himself? The Gospel of Matthew tells us, what does it say? Judas was ashamed of himself and what he had done and he went out and hanged himself. Rather die than shame others and yourself. America’s not like that and let me just say to you that when you lose your sense of honor in a society you lose your sense of shame. No good preaching against sin unless the culture also believes in virtue. Sins are just arrows or booboo, these concepts are dyadic and they go together. The opposite of sin is something sacred. Doing something virtuous and good, right? The world that Jesus and Paul lived in was an honor and shame culture. You tried to establish your honor in public and you tried to avoid shame. One of that ways that that played out in that culture was that men in a patriarchal culture were responsible for maintaining the public honor of a family and women were responsible for protecting the family from shame. Now how would a woman protect the family from shame? What was her chief role in a patriarchal society? Being the faithful wife, the good wife, and raising the children and avoiding sexual immorality. You want to know why that story about the woman caught in adultery is such a voluble story? It’s because she is believed, that woman is believed to have done the one thing that above all a woman is supposed to avoid in that society, avoid sexual shame. By the way it’s still that way in the Middle East today. And yes, there was a double standard. Women were in charge of avoiding shame, men not so much. OK for the men to go visit the prostitutes, that wasn’t shameful it was just avoiding having another baby, OK, go, this is Greco-Roman world, it’s not the Jewish world but that’s the dominate world of the Roman Empire. It was a double standard, hold women to a higher standard of sexual ethics than men. And it had to do with this whole concept of honor and shame. Men established the honor of the family and the women protected the family from shame at the core identity of their family by protecting the bloodline by raising the children by keeping the heredity intact. All of that very different from our culture. Let’s talk about the other aspect of that. All marriages or almost all marriages in antiquity were arranged marriages. There were no romantic Harlequin romance novels, there were no romantic movies. Arranged marriages. Most people in early Judaism were engaged by the age of twelve or thirteen if they were women, fifteen or sixteen if they were boys. And who got them engaged? The two sets of parents, it’s arranged. No dating, going to the movies, parking, holding hands, yadi yadi yada. In many of these cultures you wouldn’t even see the wife until the day of the wedding period. This still happens today, this is who different this society was from ours. Marriage was a property contract. It was property exchange. It was viewed basically as a property exchange. So there would be a haggling over the bride and what
was called the bride price, the ketubbah, the bride price. My daughter is fairer than 10,000 camels, well I should hope so you know, and therefore she is worth 10,000 camels says the first century Jew. Aw but your daughter is older now, who knows how fertile she still is. And the argument would go like this. They would haggle over the price of the bride. What was she worth in land and property and what little liquid resources they might have had. Not like marriage today, a very different proposition. In Jesus’ world when you got married you did not get married in a synagogue or a church. You did not get married with benefit of clergy and no there was not a piece of paper from the State of Ohio saying that you were married. The essence of ancient marriage was very different from what we take for granted as marriage today. It’s a different world. Ideally in a marriage contract the husband is hoping to do what? Improve his honor rating and avoid shame. So how does that affect the reading of the Christmas story, hello Joseph and Mary. We have a little problem; I mean picture Mary coming home to her parents. Mom and Dad you need to sit down. I have some good news and some not so good news. Here’s the good news, I’m going to be the mother of the Messiah. Well, honey every Jewish mother would like to be the mother of the Messiah and this is good, OK. And how do you know this? Well, an angel came to me and told me that I was already pregnant. Un huh, an angel told you this. Was it night time and was it dark? And how were you pregnant? I was pregnant by means of the Holy Spirit. Right, Mary I think you need to get out of town just now because what is the penalty for a betrothed woman who is pregnant out of wedlock?” Suddenly this is not a nice little squishy romantic Christmas story it is a dark and dangerous story. Her life is in danger and Joseph was so not going to be able to divorce her quietly in a one stoplight town like Nazareth. Nazareth was about as big a Lebanon, Ohio, less even. This is an honor and shame thing, Joseph is trying to avoid shame until he has a dream that says you should take Mary to be your wife, it’s OK. See all of that whole cultural convention is in play in their minds and Mary’s afraid of being stoned, Joseph’s afraid of marrying a shamed woman, not a good thing. Honor and shame. Now we need to talk about these two concepts together. Let’s talk about reciprocity first. If you want to see reciprocity in action in America watch the Sopranos or before that the Godfather, “I do you a favor in exchange for what you would do me a favor after which I would do you another favor, then you will do me a favor, or you will sleep with the fish.” Don Corleone, Godfather Part 1. Reciprocity, where does the mafia culture come from? The Mediterranean world, it’s a Sicilian culture which is simply a microcosm of ancient Greco-Roman culture. It was a I’ll scratch your back you scratch mine culture. It was a culture that believed you don’t get something for nothing. It has to be an exchange. Let me ask you this question; is America more like a reciprocity culture or a culture of grace? See grace means unmerited favor, grace means undeserved benefit, grace means unearned privilege/gift. I think our culture is very much like this culture in this respect, we’re an exchange or reciprocity culture. You’re not satisfied with that product madam why you can exchange it—our reciprocity cultural. You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours and the world goes round and round and round. That’s how that world worked. Do I need to tell you that there were no democracies in Jesus’ world, no free market economy, there were patrons and clients. You know how you get ahead in a culture of patrons and clients? It’s kind of like teachers and students; you practice the art of sucking up. Patrons and clients. In a reciprocity culture that is not a democracy and isn’t a free market economy the way you get ahead in life is not what you know it’s what? Who you know and how well you’ve sucked up to them. That’s how you get ahead in that world. It’s the way it works. You gotta know how it works; you have to be able to work the system. Now here’s the thing. The reason you needed patrons, if you were not an über- wealthy person, the best we can tell in the world of Jesus and Paul there really isn’t a middle class. There’s the über-wealthy that are about two to five percent and then there’s everybody else on some gradient less than that. There’s not anything that you could call the middle class in antiquity. There are people that are less well off like day laborers and landless peasants.
There are people that are more well off like artisans, carpenters, stonemasons but the disparity between wealth and poverty was huge in this culture. Two percent very well off everybody else not so much. In that world when you’re wanting to try and get ahead here’s the problem, limited good. You know we have commercials that perpetuate the myth that we have endless resources. Eat all you want and we’ll make more. When I talk to children in elementary school, you’ll love this one, I say, “Where does food come from?” You know what the number one answer is, survey says the grocery store. And how did it miraculously appear on the shelves at the grocery store? It was trucked in, and from where? You see what I’m getting at. In antiquity everybody knew there were limited resources, limited goods to be had, there’s not an infinity of potato chips, there’s not an infinity of dips, there’s not an infinity of potatoes. There’s a limited number and it runs out and more likely than not the über-wealthy have it and you don’t. So how do you get it? You can’t go to the grocery store and buy it, most of the time it’s not there. It’s like the famine lines in Russia under the Soviet Union. How do you get it? You suck up to somebody who’s got it. And if he’s got it you don’t because you’re assuming there is a limited number of them. Right? Limited number of cars, clothes, food, shelter, clothing, etc. Limited. Limited edition. Limited goods. Our culture believes we can always make more. Never mind that probably in another twenty-five years all the fossil fields will be drained from the earth, we can always make more. That’s OK we’ll go to the planet Pandora and find unobtainable and then we’ll be good again. Right? No. Because you see we’ve bought the myth of modernity that through progress and intelligence and technology we can solve all our problems and there really aren’t limited goods. It’s a myth. We’re going to run out. Absolutely we are. Well ancient people didn’t have any problem with that did they, they were constantly running out. They understood this, not a problem in their culture. If you spend time as I have even in a place like Appalachia working with the vista workers you understand the concept of limited goods. I was working with a family that had sixteen children and the husband and wife were in their mid thirties. There was not enough food to go around no matter how hard the husband worked in the strip mine, no matter how much extra work the mother did—I mean it was peanut butter for a lot of meals. You with me now? Limited goods. The more I study ancient culture compared to our culture where there are similarities is not a good thing and where there are differences we’re on the short end of the stick in terms of spiritual values. Why do you think it was that Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor.” I’ll tell you one reason they are not foolish enough to think that something other than God can be God in their life. They are not foolish enough to think that they can create their own security by owning things. They are not foolish enough to think that they can protect themselves from all harm just by spending money on security systems and homeland security and that sort of stuff. Here’s a real sad moral truth when your enemy is able to produce in you an enormous reaction of fear an overreaction to what they might do the enemy has already won because what you are going to do is spend your money and your time and all your interests on the basis of fear factor not faith factor. And that’s where our culture is right now, right now. The values that existed in Jesus’ world some of them he did not affirm. Some of the family values of his culture and Paul’s culture he did not simply affirm. Let me give you an example, in that world your family and kin group was primary. Any other associations you had in a city as a citizen of the city or in a gild or a military unit whatever it may be your primary sense of belonging was your family and your kin group. Just look at all of the genealogies in the Bible. Into that world comes somebody named Jesus who says, “Who are my mother, brothers and sisters? They are whoever does the will of God.” This is enormously threatening to a “my physical family is first in my life”, enormously threatening. The primary family for Jesus was the family of faith, the primary family for Paul was his brothers and sisters in Christ. The secondary family was the physical family and if there was a tug of war between the physical family and the family of faith what did Jesus say about that? “Do not think I came to bring peace but a sword for the members of your own family, if
they are divided about me it will be mother against father and brother against sister, etc. Because how they view me is the primary thing in building the family of faith. One of the great problems I think we have in the church is that the church, today, thinks it’s job is to nurture nuclear families, not a bad thing, instead of being primarily a family. When people talk about a family church today they normally mean a church that is user friendly for families, physical families, and again, not a bad thing. But it is not the primary purpose of church. The primary purpose of church is to be an eternal family of faith, brothers and sisters in Christ forever. That’s the primary family that Jesus set up. He was deconstructing old school patriarchy. This is why he not only had male disciples, the apostles. One of my favorite answers on a NT quiz recently, first question, what were the Apostles? The answer’s pretty good. Second question, what were the Epistles? Answer, the wives of the Apostles. Jesus had both male and female disciples and what is unique about that is not that he had male disciples; lots of Jewish teachers in that age had male disciples. What is unique about that is he had Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and various other women who not only learned from him but traveled with him and not only traveled with him but were patrons of the Jesus movement. This would have made the Galilean Gazette headlines, Radical Rabbi on the Road Again with men and women he’s not related to—news at 11:00. This is radical. There are some aspects of this that he’s deconstructing, he’s not simply affirming first century family values. He’s deconstructing them because the Kingdom is coming, that eschatological saving activity of God is happening and new occasions teach new duties. It’s a whole new world. It’s a radically different world, it’s not the world we wake up to every morning over our cornflakes.
Chapter 2

The Importance Context (part 2)

Angels and demons, now we may talk a lot about angels and demons but in the world of early Judaism that Jesus lived in those were living palpable realities of day-to-day life, not just special occasions. In this confrontation one of our problems, as I said, in reading ancient text is anachronisms. Where did this close encounter of the worst kind with the nefarious one happen? In the wilderness or desert, that’s right. What wilderness meant was not a forest but the chalk wilderness of Judea or near the Dead Sea. What happened there? For forty days he’s tempted 3 times, he resists the temptations, he’s really hungry and he’s ministered to after the forty days. This is a description of a visionary experience. Jesus was a visionary person and he walked around saying things like, “I saw Satan fall like lighting from the sky” and the disciples were all going, “You know, I didn’t see that”. That’s why I like to call them the duh disciples because they don’t get it. Jesus has a revelation and they’re kind of going, “Did you hear that Vern? Really, I don’t know about that”. Jesus was a visionary person. He had a vision at his baptism that the sky cracked and he saw something like a dove descending from Heaven, he heard a voice from Heaven just like John of Patmos said he heard a voice from Heaven when he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day. This is a typical first century description of a visionary experience. Yes, Jesus was really in the wilderness and yes, he was really fasting and yes he was really having a tussle with a demonic being. But it’s a visionary experience. He’s not really jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem he’s in the wilderness. He’s not really standing on top of Mount Hermon and seeing the whole world, he’s in the wilderness, that’s where he is he’s in the wilderness and he has a vision of Satan, his plan, Satan has a nefarious plan for Jesus’ life and Jesus is resisting it. Now what you should notice about this is that it has all the earmarks of a visionary experience. Satan is not a physical human being, he’s a spiritual being. He can appear in many guises, he appears says Paul as an angel of what? Light. Real but you see what we assume is reality is not what first century people saw as reality. When we hear the word vision we think subjective experience may be caused by too much pizza. When an ancient person thought about a vision he thought about a revelation that came from outside of himself to him from some supernatural being. You with me now, you see the difference? Not the weird imaginings of the subconscious of the human mind, no, a revelation from outside of yourself to you. Jesus had a vision in the wilderness and this is what he heard and what he saw and it was just as real as any encounter with a human being. It just wasn’t the same kind of encounter. Now here’s what’s so interesting about this story. Who is called the ruler of this world in the New Testament? Who does Jesus call the ruler of this world? Satan. He says the ruler of this world is what? Judged but he still calls him what? The ruler of this world, so did Satan have on offer all the kingdoms of this world if he wanted to give them to Jesus? Would that have been logical to Jesus in that kind of setting? This is a real temptation, let’s take the shortcut, let’s bypass the cross, let’s get to the finish line before we even start running. He’s not even begun his ministry. Now there’s something else interesting about this isn’t there. He doesn’t say, if you are a human being then let me help you. What does he say? He says, “If you are the divine Son of God then turn stones into bread”. Now I’ve known people who could turn bread into stones but I’ve never yet met somebody who could turn stones into bread. This is not a temptation for an ordinary mortal. These are temptations that only the divine Son of God could have. Think about this for a minute. This is a powerful, powerful story but it only makes
sense in its original context. If you are the divine Son of God throw yourself off the pinnacle of the Temple, a thousand angels will come and bear you up and everybody will go wow I’ve never seen anything like that before. If I throw myself off the pinnacle of the Temple at the Wailing Wall you know what’s going to happen? A heavy bit of gravity that’s what’s going to happen. I’m not the Son of God, Jesus was. These are temptations tailor made to the divine Son of God to make him become the wrong kind of Son of God. The Son of God who uses his power aggressively for non Godly purposes. If you are the Son of God then just one time, just once, bow down and worship me. Then you’ll already have the kingdoms of this world, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our lord and of his Christ, shortcut. Not at the New Heaven and New Earth – now, Jesus. You don’t have to pray that Kingdom come we can get to the finish line now. That’s a big temptation. Wouldn’t it be nice to get to the finish line without all the suffering and mess in between, especially without the cross. You shall not put God to the test says Jesus. You see the temptation for Jesus was to so use his divine power that he obliterated his humanity and could not be the example for us to follow. Here’s the real temptation, the temptation was for him to so act in such a divine manner that he obliterated the other half of who he was. One of the problems for conservative Christians is when they think about Jesus they tend to think of him as a sort of 90% divine and 10% human. This is a problem as the church fathers always said; Jesus is 100% divine and 100% human. Now how do you get those two things together? New Testament writers understood it; it involved divine condescension, and divine self limitation. When Jesus became incarnate in the womb of Mary he took on all limitations of time and space and knowledge and power willingly to be fully human. The one human limitation that he did not take on was sin. He was like us in every regard says the author of Hebrews save without sin. Limitations of time and knowledge and power, the Omnis, he put the Omnis on hold. When he was in Nazareth he was not in Judea. When Lazarus died in Bethany he was somewhere else. See his life was not a charade; his life was a real human life without sin. And it was meant to tell us that sin was never intended to be an inherent part of the human life. You didn’t have to sin to be human so the story of the temptation is all about. Jesus is Adam gone right, the Son of Man who is also the Son of God. We were Adam gone wrong and Jesus came to fix that. When you begin to look at the story of Jesus through the eye of what you know about apocalyptic visions and the way people thought about the humanity and divinity of Jesus in that culture it begins to make sense. What would people have understood Jesus to mean if he went around and said to everybody, “Hi folks, I’m God”. Well they would not have understood that to mean that Jesus was the second person of the Trinity. Really Jesus would have understood that to mean that he was Yahweh only he wasn’t Yahweh; he prayed to Yahweh, he called him Abba. So how does that person in that culture convey his divinity as well as his humanity in that monotheistic setting? Well he had to do it differently, he accepted limitations of time, of space and knowledge and power. In Mark 13:32 Jesus says this, about this second coming he says of that day or hour no one knows, not even the Angels in Heaven, not even the Son only the Father. He wasn’t fooling. There were some things he did not know when he was a human being because he accepted limitations of time and space and knowledge and power. This is what Paul says in Philippians 2 though being equal with God he did not consider having equality with God something to take advantage of but instead did what? He stripped himself; he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant among human beings. Talk about powerless, a slave among human being. Jesus said I did not come to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many. He came to be fully human in order that he might truly die in order that he might redeem human beings. Without giving up his divinity he just limited himself. His great temptation was to push the God button. Now me, I don’t have a God button, there were times I wished I did. When I was sitting outside of Columbus for an hour and half grinding away at one inch an hour I wished I could push a button and be instantly here but I couldn’t do that. Jesus’ temptation
was to push the God button but he didn’t do that. Look at the Garden of Gethsemane what does he pray? If it be possible let this cup pass from me nevertheless thy will be done. What’s his temptation? To bypass the cross. He can go right on to glory why not. Beam me up Scotty now. What’s the ultimate evidence that he would be truly human and not only truly human but make a sacrifice that’s an atonement for sin, he had to die. T’was much that we were made like God long before said John Dunn but that God should be made like us much more. Once you begin to study these stories in their original context they really come alive and you begin to realize the cost of what it cost Jesus to limit himself as the Son of God to be fully Son of Man and to be our example. Take up your cross and follow me. Now when I was in Sunday School growing up my Sunday School teacher was always saying, “Be like Jesus, be like Jesus” and there was this little impish voice in the back of my head that said yeah right, I can so not be like Jesus. Jesus has a God button. But then one day I learned Jesus willing gave up the right to push the God button so that I could be like him. Look again at that temptation story how does he resist the temptation of the Devil? By citing the Word of God and relying on the Spirit of God, the same two resources every one of us has. Let me say that again, how did he resist temptation? By relying on the Spirit of God in his life which he had already received into his life and relying on the World of God, the same two resources we have to resist temptation so that he could be our exemplar that we should follow. This is why Paul in I Cor. 10 says no temptation has overcome you Corinthians that isn’t common to humanity such that with the temptation God can do what? Provide an adequate means of escape. Hello! You have the Holy Spirit in your life, you have the Word of God in your life and guess what that Holy Spirit that is in you is not a quart low. It’s not Holy Spirit light, less filling. It’s the same Holy Spirit that was in the life of Jesus. It’s the same Holy Spirit by which Jesus performed his miracles. That’s how he did the miracles he says so, if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons. He does not say if I by my divine nature cast out demons. He says if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons and so when we get to the Book of Acts do Peter and John and the other disciples, the apostles and the epistles perform miracles like Jesus did? Yes. And did Jesus say and you can perform even greater miracles than I did? Yes he says that too. Why is it then, dear friends, that our natural default is I can’t be like Jesus in these ways. What’s that all about? Jesus said if you have even the faith that microscopically small you can say to this mountain be cast into the sea and it’s moving. What we have to do, by an act of creative imagination, is enter into the world of Jesus such that the text comes alive and we imbibe the text and we become what we admire and it transforms us so that when people see us they glimpse Jesus. We don’t just point to Jesus we are the incense of Christ, we are the talisman of Christ, we are Christ-o-fers, Christ bearers that’s what we are, take up your cross and follow me says Jesus. When we go back to this culture what we see is that Jesus redefines honor and redefines shame. He tells us that God is the only one that doesn’t run out of resources. He tells us that there is something greater than payback, it’s grace. He tells us that patriarchy was a result of the fall not God’s original plan for humanity. Let’s talk about that last one for a minute. Did you notice that when Jesus finally wants to talk about marriage he goes back to the creation story? He talks about the original couple becoming one flesh, remember that? He’s quoting Genesis. When you go back to that story like Jesus did and talk about the original creation, order design of God, when you get to the punishment for the sin listen what the curse was on Eve. The curse on Adam was labor pains in the field. The curse on Eve was labor pains in the babies, but that’s not all. Notice what the other part of the curse says, your desire will be for your husband and he will lord it over you. This is the result of the fall. This is the original creation order design. In the creation order design Eve was the crown of creation, the completed human kind. After God made Eve he said I can’t improve on that we’re done here, I’m resting now. The order of creation is an ascending order of creation. The greatest of creation was human kind and Eve was the last of these. The original design of God was complimentary—each is indispensable to the other. As Paul says neither is
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man independent of woman nor woman independent of man but all are one in Christ Jesus. The creation order of design was reaffirmed in Christ for men and women but the fall created this system, your desire will be for your husband and he will lord it over you. The other interesting thing about the creation story that Jesus cites when he’s reconstructing and deconstructing first century cultural values is he says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Now this is just the opposite of patriarchy. In patriarchy who leaves home? It’s the wife. She becomes Mrs. Husband—that’s not what Genesis says and it’s not what Jesus reiterates. He says the husband will leave his family and cleave to his wife and begin a new family. It’s different from what we have. What we see as the first century cultural values, and these are only a few of them, each one of them in some way Jesus is deconstructing. To me the thing that stands out the most about all of this is where is truth in all of this? Have you noticed that? I’ve hardly mentioned truth in these first century values. What was the value placed on truth? In most ancient cultures you only owed the truth to your own inner circle. You didn’t owe the truth to strangers. You only owed honor amongst thieves, amongst your circle. See Jesus came to change that as well. It’s not an accident in this culture that he does not come and say, “I am the unlimited good”, what does he say? “I am the way, the truth and the life”...
told me about giving them your best? I don’t think so. You know it’s important that when you
contextually study the Word of God that you don’t just study in the abstract. Some people when I start
talking about studying the Bible in its original context they think oh that’s boring all that history stuff all
those begats—it’s boring, dry as dust. No, friend, this is the living Word of God. What’s boring and dry as
dust is us until we are revivified by the living Word of God. It has been said about boredom that boredom is
the state of mind of those who lack imagination. The Word of God wouldn’t want us to be that way.
Now, we’re going to stop this is the second part of something I want you to understand about the first
century context of God’s Word, what questions do you have about first century cultural values. [Question
by student could not be heard]. What I’m saying is that God set up the original creation word that the
completion of all creation was the creation of woman from man, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. That
was the crown of creation so in the new creation when Jesus talks about marriage he’s saying that it is
restoring the original creation order of design of how men and women were intended to relate to each
other at the beginning and before the sin. Before sin ruled the way we relate to each other and bent our
wills and our desires and everything else. He’s saying that the kingdom is coming and new occasions to
teach new duties so we’re not making allowances any more for sin. God’s grace is greater than our scope
of our sin. Remember when he’s having this argument with his fellow Jews and they say, “Well, why did
Moses allow them to divorce”? And Jesus’ answer is profound, he says, “Moses allowed divorce because
of the hardness of your hearts” but in the original situation it was not so. He’s trying to take us beyond
exception clauses and taking into account our fallowness. He’s trying to say that in the Kingdom of God
we’re going to try to do a better job of mirroring the original creation order intent, that’s what he’s saying
really. And what’s interesting to me about that is the way Paul spins that out in places like I Cor 11 and I
Cor 7. In I Cor 7 he says something so radical for the first century that most men would have taken him
out and horsewhipped him. Not only does he say the wife’s body belongs to the husband he turns
around and says just the opposite of that as well. And he says that the husband’s body belongs to the
wife. Now not any Greco Roman ethicist would have affirmed that in the first century AD. A man’s body
belongs to himself and he will do with it what he sees as honorable. Paul is saying that there is this inter-
dependency of husband and wife such as the wife belongs to the husband and the husband belongs to the
wife and it is exclusive monogamy on both sides of the occasion. Now that’s something radical and new.
We might take it for granted in the evangelical Christianity but it was radical and new in the world of
Jesus and the world of Paul. He’s taking away male privilege, this is why the disciples in Matt 19 when
Jesus says no divorce they say well if that’s the way it is between a man and a woman a man just better
not marry said the disciples. And he said well there’s another alternative, you can be a eunuch for the
sake of the kingdom and they’re going, “Yikes.” One life, one wife, or eunuch could. Here are your
options baby and the disciples are going shazam, this is radical. And Paul understood that. He’s saying
that by the grace of God and the light of the coming of the Kingdom we’re going to live a different way.
We’re not just going to live with concessions to sin anymore. We’re not going to make those concessions
anymore; we’re going to try to live according to first principles, both the creation and the new creation.
[Question by student could not be heard] That’s an excellent question and most of these values they
accepted and modeled with the exception that they understood that God’s sacred text, His Word, was the
truth and that the truth had to be the arbiter of and the critique of all of these other values. So they
accepted that, they just didn’t approach it in as radical fashion that Jesus did. I’ll give you an example,
early Jews believed that it would was the obligation of every able bodied man and woman to get married.
Why? Because Genesis commanded thou shalt be fruitful and multiple. It was not an option it was a
commandment, it was like almost the first commandment. Right? Be fruitful and multiple. No. 1 on the
hit parade, right? Jesus says it’s a blessed option. This was radical and new, he says you can either be
celibate for the sake of the Kingdom or you can be married, join together by God. Now you have two options. You know who this gives the most freedom to? Women because before they had only one option, be a wife and bake the babies. Right? Not anymore. You know why Mary Magdalene and these other women were lining up to follow Jesus? Because he said it’s OK to be single for the sake of the kingdom. Because it gave a whole new opportunity for ministry roles they could not have taken before and did not take in Judaism by in large. There’s a rare prophetess, we’ve got Deborah, we’ve got the sister of Moses, there are a few people, Miriam. What’s interesting to me all of those women that surrounded Jesus were Mary, Mary, Mary and Mary. But actually their name was Miriam, Miriam, Miriam and Miriam. The Aramaic name is Miryam and it’s named after Moses’ sister who had a ministry role. Isn’t that interesting, Jesus was surrounded by women named for somebody who performed a ministry in the Old Testament. Now that’s really interesting. So we have these women following Jesus and there is a reason why they were last at the cross and first at the tomb and first to see the risen Jesus. They had sold out for him. They had left home for him. They had left husbands for him. Just like Peter said the men did. The most amazing thing to me about the end of that story is that if you’re going to make up a world religion in the first century AD, when that whole world is profoundly a man’s world, you don’t make up the idea that the chief witnesses to the virginal conception, the death of Jesus, the empty tomb and the resurrection, the first witness to the resurrection are women, you just don’t make up that idea. These stores are too improbably not to be true, the must be true because they make women primary witness to the chief tenants of the Christian faith. So what we’ve got both in the events and in the way Jesus treated women is a whole new approach to women. And Paul lived that out, he’s got female coworkers, he’s got women he calls deaconesses, he’s got women who he calls prophetess, this is not a problem for Paul, he’s not having a problem with that. What he does do and what Jesus does do is that he starts with people where they are. If you’re going to deconstruct patriarchy you have to start somewhere. People are already in this system so if you’re inside the system how do you change the system? You change if from inside out. You change it by instituting new principles, that’s how you change it. And that’s what he was doing within his community of disciples, we’re going to model what the change looks like. So when he says to the men, you know you’ve got two options boys, marriage and celibacy and singleness. Go for it. Take your pick. Well, the neat thing about that is celibacy and singleness. When you get to Paul in I Cor 7 what does he say? I wish more of you were like me, which is just to say unmarried. Now he was previously married, he was a Pharisee, this means he got married at 12-14 but he was converted late, relatively late in life, he was in his late 20’s or early 30’s when he was converted. No he was probably shunned. What happens when you go over to the dark side of a new religion if you’re a Pharisee is that you don’t exist anymore with that family. It’s the same thing that happens with Amish, you get shunned. So he’s separated, not allowed to be part of that family anymore and he probably did not remarry. [Question by student, cannot be heard] It has nothing to do with his connection with the Father it has to do with the recognition of the city of Rome of him. He doesn’t get that by inheritance he gets that by the Roman government deciding that he is a Roman citizen just as his parents were Roman citizens. It’s not something that’s part of the hope chest passed on to him by his parents. It’s some that is a recognition that comes from Rome. [Question by student could not be heard] You know that’s a wonderful question and my answer to that is this is what the New Testament is if we’ll just listen to it. What it is is not a full blue print. God reveals enough about the future to give us hope and direction but not so much that we don’t have to walk by faith. So what he gives us are glimpses of how the Kingdom is how to look and where we’re going. So the question is are we going to live on the basis of what we know the future is going to be like or are we going to live on the basis of what we knew the past was like. Jesus came proclaiming that the eschatological Kingdom of God is breaking into history now and we’re going to start mirroring those final Kingdom values now. This is
why he says things very different from the Old Testament. He says things like love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile with somebody who impresses you to do a job. This is not what Moses said. [Student] Yes, absolutely they’re trying to do that but not according to the teaching of Jesus. They are doing it on the basis of the prophecies of Isaiah, which by the way, [Student could not hear]. Clarence Jordan started such a community in Georgia in the 60’s and it was a pretty radical place to start in south Georgia let me tell you. You’ve got men and women treated as equal and raising crops and preaching the Gospel and working for civil rights and all kinds of things. It was a pretty radical place. It caused a lot of mayhem when he wrote the Cotton Patch Gospel. Have you ever read the Cotton Patch Gospel? You ought to read it, it’s pretty amazing stuff. When Jesus went down to Birmingham the white folks shunned him but he set down at a table with the Afro-Americans and they had some good ole BBQ and chittlings and things were fine. And Pharisees amongst the white folks were scandalized by Jesus doing this therefore, it kind of goes like this. Very unliteral translation of the story of Jesus indigenized for American culture. But very affective in its day, very affective in its day because it was critiquing some of the very same things Jesus was critiquing the hypocrisies in his own culture. Hypocrite—the word comes from hoop-ok-ree-tace' the Greek word which means play actor, it means somebody who is an actor in a play. We have taken the word literally into English but the basic meaning is somebody who appears to be something that they aren’t, acts as if they are someone they are not that’s a hoop-ok-ree-tace'.

OK, we need to move on we’ve looked at two contexts, we want now to begin to look in our last 45 minutes we want to look at yet one more context and that context has to do with genre so I’m going to see if I can’t beam up for us some PowerPoints real quick here. Before I get to that I want to tell you an amazing story. Here’s a story that will preach, I want to tell you the story of Joanna. Joanna is mentioned first in the scriptures in Luke 8:1-3. Here is what is said about her, Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2 as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, really it’s Miryam from Migdol a fishing village from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward estate manager Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them[a] out of their resources. Now that’s an interesting remark. Now what do we know about Joanna and Jesus? First of all she’s a traveling disciple of Jesus. If you follow the Gospel of Luke you will find her also in the Passion narrative, she’s going up to Jerusalem with Jesus during the last week of his life, she’s there at the cross, she’s there at the empty tomb, she’s one of the women that sees the risen Jesus. The second thing we know about Joanna is that she’s a patroness, that’s what Luke 8:3 says, she’s a sponsor, she’s a person who has resources and provides for the traveling band of merry men and merry women marching through Galilee together proclaiming the Kingdom out of their own resources. We learn the most important thing when we hear that she is the wife of Herod Antipas’ estate manager or steward, Chuza. Now you know that may seem to be an innocuous fact until you realize the following. Were Jesus and Herod Antipas on good terms with one another? What did Jesus call Herod Antipas? That old fox and what you need to know about the Herod’s is that they were half Idumaean they were not full blooded Jews. What’s an Idumaean? It’s an Edomite. How well did the Israelites and the Edomites get along? Not so much if you know your Old Testament history. Esau and Jacob all of that sort of stuff. Well Herod Antipas was considered by most Jews a not very legitimate ruler of Galilee and Jesus himself called him that fox. The wife of Herod’s estate manager is running around Galilee with Jesus. Now can you imagine the conversation between Herod Antipas and Chuza, “Chuza, you gotta choose, you can’t control your woman, she’s running all over the place with this other prophet, some
kind of relative of John the Baptist whom I just chopped the head off, if you can’t control this woman you’ve got to choose. You either want to be my estate manager or you want to have her as your wife. You choose”, I can hear the conversation now. You see because the behavior of the wife would be shaming Chuzu in the eyes of Herod Antipas over and over again. “Where’s your wife why isn’t she fixing breakfast?” “I think she’s in Nazareth today, there’s going to be a sermon in the synagogue there” “What is wrong with you man? Can’t you get your wife in line?” I can see the conversation now. Or as the Australians would say, “Joanna went walk about.” She chose to be a disciple of Jesus and that was going to be number one in her life not honoring her husband. She went with Jesus and the 12 in Galilee, she was there at Golgotha and beyond. When you look at the Luke account of the Easter story she is one of the women that went to the empty tomb, she one of the ones who saw the angels, she one of the ones who saw the risen Lord, you know one of the things I love most about the John 20 Easter story is Mary Magdalene’s at the tomb and she sees two angels, that shows a certain amount of spiritual sensitivity.

When Peter and the beloved disciple get to the tomb they don’t see nothing. They just see a wrapped up grave cloth. They go home scratching their heads going, “What happened to him”? It’s interesting the contrast between the way the women react to this event and the way the men do. She saw the risen Lord and she testified to these things, even more to the point she hung around in Jerusalem and was present in the Upper Room with the mother of Jesus, Mary, at Pentecost, Acts 1:14. Now I’m going to turn the page to Rom 16:7, Paul in the late 50’s is greeting some of his compatriots, coworkers and fellow Jews. I want you to hear carefully what Rom 16:7 says, it says this, 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia,[c] my kinsmen or relatives[d] who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Now that’s a mouth full, we need to deconstruct, we need to exegeses each of those phrases. First of all let’s start with the last one, they were in Christ before I was. What do we know about Paul’s conversion? Paul’s conversion happens within 2 or 3 years of the death of Jesus on Damascus Road. You do the chronological thing in Acts you get to the conclusion that Paul was converted no later than 34-35AD if Jesus died in 30. If Andronicus and Junia were Christians before Paul they were Christians before there was a Gentile mission. Are you getting the picture here? Where would they have to have been to have been in Christ before me, that would be Jerusalem. This is where the movement starts right? You getting the picture so far? OK. Secondly they are Jews only these two names are not Jewish names, these are Latin names. Andronicus is a nickname, it’s not a proper name, it means the manly man. It’s actually a nickname for a slave; you wouldn’t call a Patrician Roman Andronicus. This is the name of somebody who was a former slave. This is when the master of the house said, “Call the man, I need a man to move that log” that would be Andronicus. Here’s where I tell you that the name Junia is the Latin equivalent of the name Joanna. Now here’s where translation gets really squirrelly. If you look at the inscriptive evidence and the use of names, Latin names, we have hundreds, thousands of examples of the female name Junia. We have no examples of a male named Junias but some translators so freaked out with the notion that there might be a female apostle that they rendered this in English Andronicus and Junias even though the two pairs before this example, and the pair after this, are husband and wife, Priscilla and Aquila for example, are you with me now? There’s no example of the name Junias in antiquity. There just isn’t. This is a husband and wife power couple, they are apostles. They were in Christ before him and they are my kinsmen says Paul. That probably just means my fellow Jews but it might even mean my cousins who are part Jews, OK. Now notice what else is said in verse 7 which is pretty darn striking, not only are they my kinsmen they were in prison with me. Now how did they get into poking with Paul? They were his coworkers. They were doing mission work. They were doing public preaching and teaching. They were helping like Apollos and Priscilla and Aquila and others did. That’s how they got in jail, for being a public nuisance. They didn’t get in jail for weaving tents in somebody’s
they didn’t get in jail for mailing Paul’s letters for him. They got in jail for being a public nuisance just as Paul did. Propagators of a superstition—Christianity. A) they were my kinsmen, B) they were in prison with me, C)they are notable, noteworthy, prominent amongst the apostles. Now the question then becomes what does Paul mean by apostles? Well if you study the way he uses the word elsewhere in his large corpus of letters, an apostle is A) somebody who has seen the risen Jesus like he did. You know when he’s really pressed, “Are you an apostle?” Look what he says in I Cor 9:1-2, he says, Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Am I not an apostle? Those two words come out of his mouth back to back why because the criteria for being an apostle according to Paul is among other things you had to have seen the risen Lord. You become an apostle when you’ve seen the risen Lord that’s the chief criteria and you have to have been called and commissioned by him. So now what do we know about Andronicus and Junia from Paul’s point of view? They saw the risen Lord. So how are we to make sense of the rest of this story? Here’s what happened. Chuza, divorced Joanna after she went walk about because he really kind of liked this standard to which he had grown accustomed up there in Tiberias and Galilee as the estate manager of Herod’s multiplying estates. Thereafter, she met some Christian man, probably in Jerusalem, who was of low social status but that didn’t matter in Christ, he was still a man in Christ and that was what he’s called, Andronicus—the man, the Christian man and they got married and after that were Paul’s coworkers. This is the story of a woman who went from being a follower of Jesus in Galilee to Jerusalem, last at the cross, first at the tomb, first to see the risen Jesus there for the Pentecost event, saw the risen Lord and became perhaps the first woman apostle with the male apostles. Now I don’t think there were a lots and dozens and dozens of women apostles but my point is there was no problem with that. It was something different in that culture, it was something different from Judaism but there wasn’t a problem. Paul says they are outstanding amongst the apostles, that is they served well and ethically and honorably. These structures were assumed by Paul to be in process of obsolescence and deconstruction since the Kingdom was coming. Since the Kingdom was coming, the way men and women should relate to each other was on the basis not of the past but of the coming of the Kingdom so that they would model the new man and woman in Christ. This is why Paul, himself, later in Gal 3:28, for in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, no male and female; but all are one in Christ Jesus. This is the Magna Charta of human freedom, neither sexual nor social nor ethnic nor gender distinctions define who you are in Christ Jesus nor limit what you can do for God. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it’s a radical Gospel. It changes human lives.

Now I do want to take time and get going on the next context that we need to look at. I want to begin talking to you tonight and we will finish this in the morning about genre criticism. The third context that I want to talk to you about is the literary context. Let’s start just with the word, genre. It’s a French word; it means literary type or kind. When we ask the question what kind of literature is the Gospel there have been a variety of suggestions as to what they might be like. What kind of literature are they? The reason it’s important to know what kind of literature you’re reading is this gives you a avenue of knowing how to read it. It’s one thing for me to get up in the morning and read the cartoons in the paper. I know what kind of literature this is, I’m not going to read it as if it were either a factual news report or even it was an ??? piece on the editorial page. Because why? Because it’s a different kind of literature and it has its own literary conventions. So the first question to ask when we’re working through the New Testament, we’re going to ask this about all the New Testament is what are the Gospels, the New Testament begins with the Gospels. First of all, what are the Gospels? What are they like? What other kind of literature are they like? There’s even one more possibility that has been suggested by New Testament scholars and that is that they are kerugma or preaching. So modern biography, they are like modern historical monographs,
or they are like novels, are they like myths, are they like legends. Are they like preaching the kerugma? Or are they like something else. Well let’s start with modern biographies. What are modern biographies like? Modern biographies are, generally speaking, womb to tomb descriptions of somebody’s life. We’re going to tell the story of Winston Churchill from womb to tomb, right? And then access his impact—that’s a modern biography. Or you know, a famous president, John F. Kennedy any number of biographies written. What happens in a modern biography is they tend to be long, if somebody has lived a long time, and exhausting and exhausting and you never get through it all. Modern biographies are very much affected by modern psychology. Who were the two great exponents of modern psychology? Jung and Freud. So the basic assumption of a modern biographer is that, yes or no, early childhood experiences are crucial to understanding a person, especially traumatic early childhood experiences. Well look at the movie Citizen Paine which begins with the word rosebud. If you haven’t seen this movie sell the dog and watch the movie. It is a quintessential American movie which talks about how you’re life is shaped by your early childhood experiences, that’s really the essence of it, Citizen Paine, Orson Wells. It’s a famous, famous movie. Modern biographers assume that they need to tell the story of a person’s birth and his childhood and his upbringing and who was his third grade teacher and what happened when he got his first kiss, etc. etc. Are you with me now? Because they assume that the infancy and the youth periods are crucial to the formation of the character of this person, right. Here’s where I tell you that ancient people didn’t believe that. Ancient people believed that you were born with a personality and then you were stuck with it. They did not believe in a developmental model of personality. They didn’t think that early childhood experiences were particularly important. When an ancient person wrote a biography most of the time he didn’t feel like he had to start with the childhood at all, he would start with the full adult life. Consider the Gospel of Mark. Mark starts when Jesus is how old? He’s an adult. Would this rule out Mark from being a ancient biography? No. Would it rule out Mark from being a modern biography? Sure. But you see the conventions of ancient biographies are not like the conventions of the modern biographies at all. In a lot of different ways. Well here’s something else about modern biographies. Modern biographies involve a lot of psychoanalyzing of the person, by which I mean, a person is psychoanalyzed in the biography. He did this because this who happened when he was this age and etc. There’s a lot of that in modern biographies, even the most objective ones. You may have noticed that the Gospels don’t do a lot of editorializing. The Gospels basically just let Jesus’ words and deeds speak for themselves without a lot of editorial comment. There are a few asides; a few guiding comments here and there but not much. But again that’s not how ancient biographies were written. Ancient biographies believe in a model of indirect portraiture. Let the words and deeds of the person speak for themselves. You don’t need to psychoanalyze this person. That will reveal the character and the personality of the person, the adult words and deeds of the person. Now we have two Gospels that have birth narratives. We have exactly one Gospel that has a story about Jesus as a boy, Luke 2:41-52. Remember that one? The wonder kid in the Temple, wowing the Jewish teachers, remember that one? Age 12, Jesus’ bar mitzvah, that story, a very interesting story indeed but it’s the only one we have in all four Gospels about Jesus as a youth. Basically even Matthew and Luke skip right from the infancy of Jesus to what? To his adult life and not just the beginning of his adult life, I mean this is Jesus when he’s about 27. We skip over all the pimply part. Nothing about Jesus as a teenager at all in any of the canonical Gospels. Zip, zero, nada. You know why? Because ancient people did not idolize youth they idolized oldth and the older I get the better I like that. The most revered person in the society that Jesus grew up with was the man with the horey head, the senior citizen was the most revered member of society because he was believed to have the most experience and knowledge. We worship the Pepsi generation. We idolize and infinity of youth. So we watch and listen to college football games and basketball games and go, “Wow, if I could only jump like
that again.” I used to play basketball, I went to Carolina, I used to be able to dunk the basketball. Guess
what—when I get on the basketball court now all I feel is a heavy bit of gravity. My mind writes checks
my body can’t cash anymore. My mind says go ahead make your day. My body says you are so not doing
that. You see the thing is that our culture is fixated on youth and looking young. It’s embarrassing to have
gray hair. It’s embarrassing to look old. This was considered an achievement in the world of Jesus. Being
old is an accomplishment in a world where most people die before old age. Before modern medicine. You
get the picture? It’s a very different world. So no stories about Jesus as the pimply teenager. None. It
wasn’t necessary. Here’s something else ancient people believed. They believed that gender, we’re going
to hit the 3 g’s here, gender, geography and generation determined your identity at birth. Ancient people
believed that gender, geography and generation determined your identity at birth. It was a man’s, man’s,
man’s world as that great philosopher James Brown once said. Have you notice the people in the New
Testament don’t have last names? I’m trusting that you know that Magdalene was not Mary’s last name.
I’m trusting that you know that Christ was not Jesus’ last name. Are you getting the picture? You see
cities had honor ratings. Tarsus one of the highest honor ratings of any city in the ancient world. Saul of
Tarsus, high honorating, why because he came from Tarsus. Jesus of Nazareth not so much, like Jesus of
Chittlin Switch, Ohio. Remember what one of the first potential disciples said when said somebody said
to him come meet Jesus of Nazareth, he could be the Messiah. The first words out of that man’s mouth
was, can anything good come out of Chittlin Switch, Nazareth doesn’t have an honor rating, it’s off the
chart on a rating. If he came from Nazareth he can’t be much. Cities in antiquity had honor rating. Your
identity determined by geography, gender and generation. That is, where you came from, what sex you
were and who’s your daddy. Not who’s your mommy, who’s your daddy. Big problem if you don’t have a
daddy. Big problem in the patriarch culture if you don’t have a daddy. Jesus goes to preach in his
hometown synagogue according to Mark 6 and the people in the pews are right royally ticked off. And
one of them says, “Is this not the son of Mary”? Now let me tell you with no offense to all the nice ladies
that is here present, calling somebody a son of their mother even long after the father is dead was like
calling them SO…you know what. It was pejorative, it was not flattering. They suspected something was
wrong about Jesus’ origin and if your personality is determined by geography, gender and generation,
who’s your daddy, and you don’t have a proper daddy, how could this person possibly be a prophet or
Messiah? It’s not possible, he ain’t got a daddy. You see what I’m getting at here. That’s the way this
culture worked. Here’s another little fast fact that makes a big difference in that culture. Not only did they
believe that how you were born and where you were born and what gender you were born with
determined your identity they believed that how you died most revealed your character. What’s the
problem with Jesus’ demise in an honor and shame culture when you die the most hideous and shameful
way possible to die, a slave’s death. Now we begin to understand why all four Gospels spent a third of
their verbiage on explaining the last week of Jesus’ life and how he got himself crucified and yet still was
the Savior of the world. That took a lot of explaining because people believed, in that culture, how you
died most revealed your character. If you died on a cross and you’re a Jew who has read Deu what does
Deu say about that? Cursed be he who dies upon a tree, he’s cursed by God, he’s not blessed by God. He
can’t be the blessed one of God, the anointed one of God the proof of that the thing that scotched that
rumor was the death on the cross. Look at the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we had hoped he
would be the one to redeem Israel. What had changed their minds? Death on a cross. Let me tell you right
now if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead there’s no explanation for why Christianity should have ever
started. Because that death should have the end to the Jesus movement. A public death, the most
shameful death of all. Personality believed to be determined by gender, geography and generation, death
most reveals the character. Now we’re beginning to see the real factors and the culture that shaped why
the Gospels look like they do. Have you noticed that there is no physical description of Jesus in the Gospels? What’s up with that dog? There’s no physical description of Jesus and yet all of us know what he looks like. We’ve got his picture hanging in the church. He’s been hanging in all kinds of galleries for a long time; we all know pretty well what he looks like. We’d recognize him in a minute, except we wouldn’t. The only story that might give us a hint is the story of Zacchaeus, here’s that the Greek says, and Zacchaeus the tax collector climbed up into a tree to see Jesus for he was short. Wait a minute, what is the antecedent of the phrase he was short. Could it have been Jesus or was it Zacchaeus? If it was Jesus we have to change our Sunday School song, Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he...well in fact I think the Greek favors the translation that it is Zacchaeus who was short therefore being vertically challenged he climbed up in the tree to see Jesus. So in fact we have no long physical description of Jesus in the New Testament. You see that culture was not all caught up with image is everything. That’s our culture—appearance is everything in our culture. What happens when the reality is radically disjunctive from the appearance? Take for example Tiger Woods, sports star, model for children, and founder of a foundation right? What happens when you discover that supposedly this family man who has two children is running around with 3, 4, 5, or 6 other women? All during the period of time when he supposedly a faithful family man. Does that matter? You see when the culture loses its sense of shame it loses its sense of honor. Oh that’s too bad, it was a boo boo. No it was a sin, it was a big sin it’s called adultery. You see antiquity did not judge people on the basis of their PR, their constructive public image. They believed in judging people on the content of their character, not how they appeared in public. And the physical appearance was the least important thing. There could never have been a cosmetic surgeon in the first century AD. Ancient peoples were not hung up with their physical appearance and you can really tell that from some of the statues that some of the Romans who were really ugly and had no teeth and etc. No the Gospels are not like modern biographies. What about modern historical monographs? Well modern historical monographs are chronicles of important deeds that’s what they are. And they are very much concerned with precise chronology and getting the order of events exactly the same, exactly right. Ancient historical monographs were not that concerned with precision, nobody was running around with a sun dial on their wrist saying, you know, it’s 14 grains past mid-day just now, it’s we who are concerned with precise chronology, not ancient historians. One of my favorite words, Greek words in the Gospel of Mark, our earliest Gospel is this word euthus, it means immediately. Well, it’s translated immediately. This word shows up 45 times in the first half of the Gospel of Mark. It’s intending to give paste to the narrative, immediately Jesus got in the boat and went to the other side of lake, immediately he got out of the boat and went up the hill and met the Gerasenes demoniac, immediately he cast out demons from the Gerasenes demoniac and immediately they went into the pigs and ran into the water and immediately Jesus got back in the boat and left and went across the lake again, immediately he went up into the hills to pray, immediately begin praying, immediately the disciples came to him and said we need to go away to another place because there are all these people that want more healing and immediately he left and went to Nazareth. This story keeps going like this and you have this image in the Greek of Jesus panting with his tongue hanging out running all over Galilee. Only you see immediately doesn’t mean immediately, it means something like next or a word my grandfather used all the time, good southern gentleman that he was, directly. I’d say, “Granddaddy when are we going to the store” and he’d say, “Directly.” That usually meant after while, it didn’t mean directly it meant after awhile. And immediately didn’t mean immediately either in the first century it meant well that’s the next major thing on the agenda. That’s what’s happening next that’s big, right? Even when they used time words they didn’t use them the way we use them. Let’s take another good example. Have you noticed that in some of the passion narratives it says and Jesus arose on the third day. And there are other
narratives that say he will arise after 3 days. Oh no, we’ve got a chronological contradiction here. Oh dear, there goes the Word of God. Well, no, you don’t because the phrase after 3 days was a common idiom in the Old Testament and in early Judaism that meant after awhile. It meant after several days, it was not a chronological precise phrase at all. If you wanted to be chronologically more precise you would say on the third day. If you said after 3 days people would say well that means after awhile. That could be 2 days, 3 days or 10 days. It’s not a precise chronological phrase at all. Now here’s what’s happening when you try to read a modern way of reading history into an ancient historical document. There’s a famous book written by Harold Lindsell in the 70’s called the Battle for the Bible, any of you old enough to remember this book? Well, it just means you and I are both old as dirt, that’s what that means. Well, Harold Lindsell was not an ancient historian at all. He didn’t know how ancient historians wrote, he was a modern historian and he got his knickers all in a knot over the fact that there were these cock crows and there were these denials and the relationship between the denials and the cock crows didn’t seem to be identical between Mat, Mar and Luk. Are you with me now? So how many times did the cock crow after Peter denied the first time. How many times did the cock crow after Peter denied the second time, you see here’s the problem Harold Lindsell thought well I’ve got to reconcile all these accounts. So you know what he came up with? He came up with something that none of our Gospels say, he came up with Peter denied Christ 6 times. Now Mat doesn’t say that, Mar doesn’t say that and Luk doesn’t say that and John doesn’t say that. Something is wrong with this picture. And what is wrong is imposing a modern concern with precise chronology on an ancient text that is trying to give you a general picture. Yes, Peter denied Christ 3 times and yes the cock crowed and beyond that they weren’t very much concerned. That was it. So one of the things you have to do, with ancient historical documents, is when they want to be general you gotta let them be general. When they want to be specific they’ll be specific but rarely that specific. When it comes to chronology they’re usually pretty general really. That’s the way it works. The Gospels are they like modern biographies? Not so much. One thing they are way too short and they leave out too much of the life. Are they like modern historical monographs? Well no they’re not because they don’t have precision of chronology like modern historical monographs do and they don’t intend to. Are they like novels? There are actually scholars who argue these days that the Gospels are more like novels, they are some kind of historical fiction so there’s little sprinklings of history in there and you have to ferret out in the history from the non history but largely these are more like novels. The problem with that friend is that if you read these stories as novels they don’t read anything like ancient novels. Ancient novels were romances, were tales of great daring-do of military heroes, OK? What happened in Jesus’ life is not the story that anyone would tell if they wanted to glorify Jesus. You don’t tell a story about someone who ended up on a Roman cross and say, “And he’s my hero”. That’s not how an ancient novel worked. That’s like going to the movies today to a great romantic thriller and expecting the consummation being a wedding and discovering they murder each other at the end. You know that’s a real buzz kill. That’s not a romance. Well the thing about the Gospels is they have too many sharp troubling elements to be like ancient novels which tried to affirm general values and create a feel good mood. This is not the way the Gospels are written. I mean at times Jesus bites people’s head off, right? The young man comes to Jesus and says, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life”? And he says, “Why do you call me good”, nobody’s good but God alone”. Whoa, Jesus, dude back off. That’s harsh. Rich young ruler comes to Jesus and Jesus says it’s easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God; this is not a favorite verse of prosperity preachers. A lot of Jesus’ teaching is offensive even today. One of things I would urge you never to do is don’t whittle off the hard edges of the Gospel. The parts of the Gospel that most disturb you will tell you more about you than maybe you even want to know. Let those stories disturb you and then ask yourself why does this upset me? What is it about me,
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don’t ask what is it about this text, ask what it is about me. No, the Gospels were not like ancient novels and they’re certainly not like modern novels either. Some people have said well the Gospels are like myths; have the read the Greco Roman myths? The Greek word mythos simply means a story about the Gods, OK, was Jesus God? OK, so in a very broad sense if you were witnessing to a pagan you could say let me tell you a story about a deity, his name is Jesus. See the problem for us is the word myth means in little Johnny’s vocabulary something that we know ain’t so. This is not what mythos meant in Greek, it meant a story about a deity. It could be a true story about a deity, it could be a fictional story about a deity, but the word myth itself did not mean fiction in antiquity it simply meant a story about a god. Well in a very general sense I guess you could say that the Gospels could be myths not in the sense of fiction but in the sense of being a story about a supernatural person. But that’s not how they present themselves. They don’t read like Greco Roman myths. Now here’s the beginning of a Gospel, inasmuch as many have undertaken to give an account of the things that have happened amongst us, oh noble Theopolis, I too, having observed things for a long time, and having consulted the eye witnesses and the original preachers of the word have resolved to provide for you an account in good order so that you might note the straight story about the things that have happened amongst us. This is Luk 1:1-4. Now he’s presenting himself as not presenting a myth or a novel but a historical account about something. He’s presenting himself as an ancient historian in Luk 1:1-4. Not this, not this, not this, not this, what about a legend? A legend is a story about a real person but it’s written up long after that person has come and gone. A good example of this would be Homer’s Odyssey and Idyllic. The Idyllic is the story of the Trojan War, are you with me now? Was there a Trojan War? Yes there was. Were there Greek heroes and Persian heroes and etc in the Trojan War? Yes there were. But the story was written hundreds of years later, are you with me now? How long after the death of Jesus were the Gospels written? Within the same century but let’s just speak very broadly now. I would say within a generation or two at the most. So were some of the eye witnesses still alive when the Gospels were written? Yes, so could these things be called legends by ancient standards? No because the gestation period is not long enough. There would be people who would raise their hand and clear their throat and say now you can’t put that in the story because that ain’t true. And that’s actually the way it was. So if we have eliminated all of these what’s left when it comes to the genre of the Gospel? Well the answer is they are like ancient biographies and ancient historical monographs. That’s what they are like and they are not actually examples of the preaching. They are the basis of the preaching, they are the back story to the preaching. Now if you read the Book of Acts preaching doesn’t look like telling a whole Gospel. Preaching looks like what? One of two things, either you take an episode from the life of Jesus and preach on it or you summarize the story, the life of Jesus and its salvific significance because they want to get to the chase of converting people. And while I’m on that subject most ancient people did not believe in conversion as even a human possibility at all. They didn’t think it was a divine possibility even most Jews didn’t believe in this. Remember Nic at night? One of my favorite stories we will look at it later. Jesus and Nicodemus, remember that? What does Jesus say? Jesus says you must be born again and Nicodemus says what are you saying to me Jesus? Are you telling me I should crawl back into my mother’s womb and call for womb service? I’m thinking not. They didn’t believe in being born again. They didn’t think it was a human possibility. They even misunderstood the language. Conversion was simply changing your religious allegiance, it wasn’t a spiritual experience. Not in antiquity. Generally not. I don’t think many modern people really, genuinely believe in conversion. We have cliché like this, you can’t teach old dogs new tricks. We ask rhetorical questions like can a leper
change it’s spots? And what’s the assumed response? No. I don’t think we believe in conversion any more than ancient peoples do in some context, especially secular persons don’t. In that regard this world is like that one. Now what we have in the Gospels is the back story, the basis story, the foundational historical and biographical story about Jesus and when we get up in the morning, after our cornflakes, we’re going to talk about the what the Gospels really are and how they work in their original context.
Chapter 3

Biographies vs Monographs

We have been talking about the nature of the gospels and we need to continue to talk about the whole issue of genre because genre sets up for us the signals of what we are dealing with. Alright.

The first attempt to write a gospel was Mark's gospel. When we ask the genre question “What is it?”, the thing...thing to do, to figure out what it is, is to compare it to other documents from the same time period and ask the question: "How would the audience of Mark's gospel have viewed this?"

Would they have seen it as [inaudible 00:01:21] and say it’s some kind of unique document, unlike anything they had ever seen before? But if they saw it that way, if they saw the Gospel of Mark as some kind of unique document, then how would they know how to read it? You see, the way that you know how to read a document is when you know the literary signals of a document. I mean, when you go to a bookstore and you go to one section or another of the bookstore and pick out something that's prose and fiction as opposed to prose and historical fact, you know that you're expecting different kinds of literature from different times of intended documents.

When you're dealing with the genre question about gospels, here is what I think we have to say: That we have some gospels that are like ancient biographies, not modern biographies, but ancient biographies that are like the biographies of Plutarch and Tacitus and others who wrote biographies in antiquity. And those would be Mark and Matthew and John and then we have a two-volume work, and it really is a two-volume work, Luke-Acts. And it's not a biography. It's far more like an ancient historical monograph. So we have within the first five books of our canon two different types of ancient literature.

We have three samples of ancient biographies and we talked about what were the conventions of those a little bit last night. We didn't talk a lot about the conventions of ancient historical monographs, but we’re going to do that some.

But let me explain to you a few things about ancient biographies and ancient historical monographs in general. Because ancient documents were written as oral texts and in scriptum continuum, that's continual flow of letters, right? The way you figured out what kind of document it was, was chiefly by reading the first few lines of it.

That is, the genre signals are in the first few lines of a given document. Are you with me now? Do you get the picture? And the reason for that was, because it doesn't come with headings. It doesn't come with a title. It just begins this continual flow of letters. That's the way the ancient document worked.

Now ancient documents also had at the end of the document, on the end flap if you will, the end of the piece of papyrus, they would sometimes put on what I would call a toe tag. That is an identification marker. And it would always be at the end of the document, not at the beginning.

Now why would you guess that they would put it at the end of the document? Why wouldn't they have, "According to John" or [unintelligible 00:04:51] according to Mark" at the beginning of the document instead of at the end of the document?

Man: Maybe give him more authority so it wouldn't look like it was coming from "a person", perhaps?
You know, that’s not a bad idea. I hadn’t really thought about that one, but actually it’s a practical thing.

Remember VHS tapes? Do you remember how you watched a movie on a VHS tape and then if you had rented it, it said right on there: "Please be kind. Rewind." Ancient people were no more apt to rewind things than we are. So what they would do is they would create a document like this from left to right if it’s Greek, from right to left if it’s Hebrew. When they got to the end of the document did they rewind it all the way back to the beginning of the papyrus? Not so much. They’d simply put it in the pigeon hole where it came from. And therefore the identification marker of what this document was, was at the end flap at the bottom of the piece of papyrus to let you know what it is. So that when you go back to the pigeon hole and you’re looking for a particular document the identification marker would be at the end.

Now with gospels, with gospels, the identification marker would be very simple. It would be something like this to give you translated, read in English. It would be like "Cata Luka". Okay? That’s all it would say. Or "Cata Matheos", or Cata Markos, or Cato Iowanes. Okay? That’s all it would say. According to Luke. According to Mark. Very brief telegraphic title, not a great big, long wordy title because of course you couldn’t get all that on a label. Right? And that’s the way it would be identified. Especially when it came to a document like an ancient biography or an ancient historical monograph. It mattered who wrote these documents. Why? Because the documents were making historical claims. Are you with me now? If it was simply a novel or a novella, and there were ancient novels, right? It doesn’t matter so much who wrote them. Its fiction anyway. But when you have a document that’s making some kind of truth claims...truth claims, right? Then you need to have an identification as to where it came from. Sometimes modern people will tell you, "Well, you know the ancients were primitive. They didn’t have a big concern over intellectual property rights, and that sort of... That’s a modern preoccupation." This is absolutely false. Ancient writers were very concerned that somebody else did not claim that they wrote what they wrote. In fact, [laughing] Galen, the famous ancient physician, once published a book that simply listed the books that he had written so that his audience would not buy phony Galen books. Phony books by Galen. So yes, there was a concern for who wrote something. If it was making historical or some kind of truth claims. Philosophical claims. So the labels on these documents would not give you the genre of the document. They would refer to who? The supposed source or author of the document. Now this leads me to another point as we’re beginning to explore these gospels. And this point is sometimes hard for us to understand. The concept of authorship in antiquity was a little different than it would be today. Okay?

What do I mean by that? I mean, that a document would be labeled in one of several ways. And I can illustrate this from the psalms. In Hebrew, if you go to the psalms, you will remember that many of the psalms begin with the phrase that says "A Psalm of David". Right? See the problem with that is, that’s the tag. Right. The problem with that is that that could mean one of three things.

It could mean, in Hebrew, [inaudible 09:15] is the Hebrew. It could mean a psalm about David. A good example of this would be Psalm 51. "Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me." The Bathsheba story...you know, the aftermath of Bathsheba story. That whole thing. Alright. It could mean a song about David. It could mean a psalm written for David, dedicated to David. Right? Or it could mean a psalm written by David.

There are three possibilities. A psalm about David; a psalm written for David; or a psalm written by David. Well, that phrase is just as ambiguous as [inaudible 10:00] is in the psalms. This could mean a story according to Luke. Okay? And immediately that leads to two possibilities. Luke is the ultimate source of this material, but he didn’t write the document. Some scribe has written the document. Compiled some sources and written the document. Right?
He's anonymous. We don't know who he is. The point is: Who is the source of the material? Luke. With me now? Okay. The other thing this phrase could mean is that this person actually wrote the document. So this phrase could have one or two meanings. According to Luke could mean the ultimate source of this material was Luke, or it could mean that he actually wrote this document.

What you must not assume is that when you see a label on a document it means that they actually produced the document. It is making some kind of claim of the connection of this person to the document, but the question is: What kind of claim? Now we know, in the case of Paul, that he used scribes.

He tells us that he did and he tells the audience how you can know it's a document by Paul. Namely, that he signed the document near the end. He tells this to us in Thessalonians, and also Galatians: "See with which large letters I write my name. This is the way I write my name in all my documents," says Paul. And the reason he mentions that is because he has just now taken up the pen. Who's been producing the document? It's the scribe...the secretary slaving away over a piece of papyrus and some water and some soot, writing away at 900 miles an hour. Right?

One of my favorite verses in the Bible...in the New Testament is in Romans 16. After writing 16 chapters of Romans, in the middle of Paul greeting people and sending greetings from people, we have these words: "I, Tertius, greet you in the Lord."

Who is Tertius? Tertius is the scribe who got himself into Holy scripture [laughing] after slaving away, writing 16 long chapters of Romans. And he got in there and said I'm gon' greet these babies, too.

Audience: [laughing ]

You know? The production of documents in antiquity was different from the production in documents today. And the way you look at the question of authorship in antiquity was different than the way you would look at it now. Okay? So that's the important word.

Man: You're talking about scribes...could you be more...explain that a little bit more. I mean...to me that would mean strictly a secretary writing down things, but...

Yeh.

Man: ...could be a researcher, or something else.

Alright. There's a sliding scale as to what scribes did. And part of it depends on how much the author trusts the scribe. Okay? Here is the sliding scale. On one hand, a scribe could take dictation, right? And when he took dictation, there were slow scribes and there were fast scribes. Just like there are slow writers today, and fast writers. Right?

There was actually an art that had developed just before the New Testament period, which was called tachygraphy. Tachygraphy. That means literally fast writing. Shorthand. The ancient equivalent of shorthand. Right? This skill had actually only developed in the first century B.C. He wanted a scribe who knew shorthand, because you didn't want to have to stop. You didn't want to have to slow down when you're dictating a document, or a letter. Especially not a big old hunkin' long document, like Romans, or 1st Corinthians. You wanted a good scribe. Right?

What tended to happen in the dictation of long documents is you end up with incomplete sentences. And guess what. That's exactly what we have in 1st Corinthians. Sosthenes, who's mentioned at the beginning
of 1st Corinthians as a Christian brother, is probably the scribe of this document. And it's pretty clear he's not as good a scribe, not as fast a scribe, as the person Tertius, who produced Romans.

How do we know this? In the Greek, in 1st Corinthians we have a good number of incomplete sentences. And it's like taking notes when Dr. Ben's lecturing at 900 miles an hour after having drunk a white chocolate mocha. Right?

Audience: [laughing]

Can't keep up! Right? So skip to the next sentence. We'll start over again. And you do have that in 1st Corinthians. There are several places that are called lacunae, or a [inaudible 14:55], or incomplete sentences. Right? And the reason for that is the scribe, bless his heart, has gotta move on, 'cause Paul ain't slowin' down. You know? That's kinda the way it is.

Romans is the much more complete document that really doesn't have too many incongruities, or incomplete Greek sentences. So...so, a scribe, to answer your question, on the one hand could simply take dictation. More often than not, if you worked with a scribe for considerable period of time...let's say a scribe for 1st Thessalonians was Timothy, a co-worker of Paul.

In fact, if you look at 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, this is a jointly authored two documents. Have you noticed that? It's by Paul and Sylvanus, aka Silas. Sylvanus is the Latin form of the name Silas, Jewish name, Silas. Okay? And Timothy. We have three authors of those documents. So here is the trick question now. New Testament 101, who wrote 1st Thessalonians? You get one-third credit if you say Paul.

Right. Because there were several people involved. If the person had had a long relationship with the speaker, in this case Paul, but the author might well say to the scribe, "Look, you know what I want to say in this case. Compose the document for me. I will review it at the end, and if it's fine, I'll sign it." Okay? Now...so on one end of the scale, you could have a scribe who composes the document, knowing the mind of the author very well. On the other end of the scale, you could have a scribe who simply takes dictation. And there were variations in between, in that spectrum. Okay? So there would be some times, when a person would say, you know, "Okay, I need to dictate to you these bits of the document. You know what I already think about idolatry, so give them a couple of paragraphs about idolatry. You compose it."

I do think we have that variation within the Pauline corpus. How many documents in the New Testament are attributed to Paul? Come on now. We have 27 total documents. How many are attributed to Paul? And I'm not counting Hebrews.

That would be...about 13. You with me? Okay. Now, of those 13 documents, you do have some variations. Most importantly, the pastoral epistles use pretty different grammar and syntax, and vocabulary to the earlier Paulines. Okay? This is part of the reason why you have debates about authorship of some of Paul's letters. Because the grammar and vocabulary and syntax are different.

Especially so between the pastoral epistles and the earlier Paulines. Okay? So what's going on there? Well, you could say he's using a different scribe and he's not dictating here. He's just asked the scribe to compose these documents, and he's accepted them. But where was Paul when the pastoral epistles were composed? Let's think about that just for a minute. Where was he? Well at the very least he was under house arrest. At worst case scenario, he was, in fact, in the Mamertime Prison, in a dark hole in the ground, which you can still see today in the Roman forum. Okay?
Not composing too many documents without papyrus and ink and stylus, in a dark hole in the ground. Right?

Audience member: [coughing]

So what does the pastoral epistles tell us about who can get access to him? Well he says in a telling moment, "Luke alone is with me." Uh-huh. Okay. Now you got to put on your Sherlock Holmes hat and think a little bit. Why are the pastoral epistles so different from the earlier Pauline letters? Because a trusted co-worker of Paul wrote these documents for him.

Now, it’s from the mind of Paul, but the hands, probably the hands of Luke. And here’s the reason I say this: Because guess what? In those three short documents we call 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus, there are over 50 Greek words that you find no where else in the New Testament except in Luke Acts. But that’s not all. In addition to the word count, you’ve got about seven or eight distinctive Greek phrases that you find in the pastoral epistles, that you do not find in the earlier Pauline letters, but you do find in Luke Acts.

Hello? You know, the more you explore the grammar and the vocabulary and the syntax of the pastoral epistles, the more it looks like Luke wrote these documents. Now...he wrote them on behalf of Paul. He would not want credit as the author of these documents. But here is a trusted colleague who knew the mind of Paul, who had traveled with Paul, who was with Paul at the end as well. Who has helped in the composition of the document, and yet he doesn’t want that document to say on the toe tag "Cata Luka". Why not? Because it didn’t come from his mind.

The question of authorship has to do who is the originator of this source material, not who wrote it down. Okay? These are two different questions and we tend to look at authorship so differently because of modern concerns about copyright. That is a text-based culture concern. They weren’t concerned about copyright. They were concerned about idea rights. Where did these ideas come from. Okay?

Now how does that help us when we’re going back to look at the gospels. Okay. First of all, our four gospels are formally anonymous. That is, the name of the author is not mentioned within the inspired verses of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John as the author. There is no sentence in any of those documents that says, "Hi. My name is Mark and I wrote this document." You know, there is nothing like that in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Those four documents internally are formally anonymous. Now they provide us clues with who they came from.

One of them says it’s by an eyewitness whom is simply called "the beloved disciple" and there has been endless debate as to who the beloved disciple is throughout church history. Here are three answers that the church fathers have given about who the beloved disciple was:

A. It's John's son of Zebidee;
B. It's Lazarrus;
C. It's John of Patmos

Those are three options from the early church as to who in the world the beloved disciple was. The point is, he’s anonymous. In the text he’s anonymous. He’s not identified with a particular named character in the text, clearly. Okay?These documents are formally anonymous. So, the labels on our gospels are added after the fact to make clear where they came from. You with me now? You get the picture? However, this phrase could mean Luke is the source, Luke is the writer. There are a lot of things it could mean. Okay, here’s where it gets even more, as my granny used to say, "complexified".
My grandmother made up all kinds of wonderful words. She used send us to the store for "complexionary sugar". [unidentified sound 23:22]

"Son, I need some complexionary sugar." "Okay, Grannie." Were we patted directly on the cheeks when we get it, you know? Then we'll be sweeter. What complexifies this whole thing is that these labels on the gospels are not part of the original inspired text. This inspired text starts with verse one and ends with the last verse of each document. The label in your English Bible, "The Gospel According to John", is a traditional label that has some basis in church history, but it's not an original part of the document. Okay? You with me now? You've seen the documents. You saw what they looked like. They just start with a flow of words. There's no labels. The labels are added to the document after the fact.

Alright. Now here's something else interesting about this label. You don't use this phrase unless there's multiples of them. That is, you don't talk about a Gospel According to Luke unless there is also a Gospel According to "somebody else". If there was only one gospel created by one person, you don't use the phrase "Cata Luka". You just simply say "Luke's". You don't say "According to Luke" because "According to Luke" means as opposed to "According to Mark" or as opposed to "According to Matthew" or whoever. Alright? These labels were given after the fact.

So what do we know about ancient biographies? Did people care about who wrote them? Well, yes they did. And they knew who wrote them but the name of the author is not always mentioned in the document. For example, if you look at Plutarch's "Parallel Lives", one of the things he liked to write about was the lives of the Caesars. Okay? And he'd take one of the Caesars and he'd compare him to Alexander the Great. Why? Because these two people were world-changing rulers. Right?

But when you read this parallel life of Caesar and Alexander within the document he nowhere mentions his name. His own name. "I, Plutarch, say this to you." Right? He doesn't. That's something added to the document after the fact as a label and it was important who wrote it. So, did they care when they wrote ancient biographies about the issue of authorship? Yes, they did. It wasn't the primary concern. Did they care when they wrote ancient historical monographs about authorship? Yes, yes they did. But they cared about it in a different way than we do.

Now let's consider, if we can, how we got what we got. [unidentifiable sound] One scholar has suggested, and I think this is probably right, that these labels "According to Matthew", "According to Mark", "According to John", first originated in the early second century A.D. to distinguish the most widely circulating gospels about Jesus. And in fact, they may have originated when the gospels were first put together in a single book. One of the things we know that happened in the second century A.D. is that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - stick with those and you can't go wrong - circulated in the form of a codex, which is the earliest form of a book in the early second century A.D.

Martin Hengle, a good German scholar, says: "Probably these labels distinguishing the four gospels were first fully and widely used when they...the four canonical gospels were circulating together as a single document." Because if you've got four iterations of the same story, you want to know which one is by whom. Right? This one's according to him, this one's according to him, and so on. So it looks like that by about 125 A.D., we had a codex, which is the ancient form of a book, not a papyrus roll, but papyrus pages, somehow glued or tied together that had four gospels clearly labeled.
Now what do we know about these labels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Let's concentrate on Mark and Luke for a minute. What do we know about Mark and Luke? Were Mark or Luke, or either one of them members of the Twelve? Were they original disciples of Jesus? No. Were they disciples of Jesus at all during the ministry of Jesus? No. So our earliest gospel Mark, and either our second or third earliest gospel Luke is written by non-apostle, non-eyewitnesses. And here's the good news about that. The good news is the early church would not have made up these names and slapped them on gospels.

Why not? These are relatively obscure figures that are co-workers of some of the early Christian leaders. Right? If you're going to make up a name to append to a document to add authority to it, right, what kind of name are you going to add? You're going to add a name like Peter. Do we have a Gospel of Peter in the New Testament? No we don't. We do have an apocryphal Gospel of Peter from the end of the second century A.D. Within the canon we do not have a Gospel of Peter.

Now that leads to this [inaudible 29:18] historical conclusion. Whoever it is who told us that Mark wrote a gospel and Luke wrote a gospel, they were probably telling us the absolute truth because there's no reason to have made up those names and appended it to our earliest stories about Jesus. So, most scholars accept, most scholars - liberal, moderate, conservative - accept the label Mark and Luke as appropriate for these documents, because there's no reason to suspect that these are important authoritative names later add...later added to the document. Pseudonymously. Okay?

Mark was a co-worker of first Paul - that didn't go so well - and then Peter. When we catch up with the story about our earliest gospel the story of our earliest gospel comes from a church father, a bishop whose name is Papias, about whom I have written my third novel. Papias is an exceedingly important figure. He was born in the late first century A.D. He traversed the end of the first century A.D. He became a bishop in the early second century A.D. and his bailiwick was Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Three cities all mentioned in the New Testament. Pauline territory. You with me now? Okay.

Here's the important thing about Papias. Papias wrote a commentary on the oracles of our Lord Jesus. And, he comments on the authors of our gospels. More specifically, he talks about the gospel that was composed by Mark, and he talks about the Gospel of Matthew, and he talks about the gospel we call John's. He doesn't say anything about Luke, really. Okay? But this is a Christian bishop in the early second century A.D., that believed that Mark wrote Mark, and that Matthew had something to do with the composition of Matthew, and then there is this fourth gospel which he's especially fond of. And he says that somebody named John had something to do with that. Okay?

Now here's where it gets really interesting. In regard to Mark he's most specific. He says Mark was the interpreter of Peter and so that what you have in a Mark's gospel is in fact, the testimony of Peter, written down by Mark. And here's the other thing that he says which is so interesting. He says that Peter normally gave his testimony to Jews and he spoke to them in their ancient language. That would not be Greek. That would be in this case, Aramaic. So what we are dealing with in the Gospel of Mark, is not merely Mark writing down what Peter said, but what? We are dealing with a translation of the way that Peter told Jesus's story, translated from Aramaic to Greek.

Jesus's spoken language was Aramaic as well. We shouldn't be surprised that that was true of Peter as well, though I'm quite sure that Peter knew some Greek and certainly spoke some Greek. Papias says Mark was the interpreter of Peter and he wrote down an account of the life of Jesus but not in chronological order, says Papias. About the Gospel of Mark, he says not in chronological order. He wrote down the words and deeds of Jesus, but not in a clear chronological order.
When was this document written? It’s the earliest of our gospels. It was probably written shortly before the fall of the temple in Jerusalem. Which is to say, shortly before 70 A.D. Our earliest gospel was written during the lifetime of some of the eyewitnesses and certainly of their co-workers and written before the fall of the temple. Now why do scholars think that?

Well, there’s a very specific historical reason. One of those reasons is that in Mark 13 when he’s talking about the abomination that makes desolate in the temple in Jerusalem there is this little inserted phrase. “Let the reader understand.” The verse says this: “When you see the abomination that makes desolate in the place that ought not to be, parenthesis, let the reader understand, that’s a way of saying, ”Hello. Wakey, wakey! This is happening now.”

Okay, you should realize that this prophecy of Jesus is coming true. Correlate what’s happening, that you know is happening in Jerusalem with what Jesus said. That’s the whole point. That’s the whole point of a parenthetical remark like that. Okay? Gospel scholars have concluded from that remark, and quite a few other ones in the Gospel of Mark that he must be writing during the ‘60s, before the fall of the temple in Jerusalem. But he foresees it’s going to happen soon. So most scholars would date Mark in the late ‘60s.

Now lets go to our second gospel just for a minute, and lets deal with it. The second gospel composed probably was Matthew. And here’s where it gets interesting. First of all, what Papias says. Papias says that the Gospel of Matthew was originally composed in Hebrew. Well that’s not quite what he says. What he says is that Matthew [coughing] the scribe, which is what he was, he was a tax collector and a scribe, also known as Levi, okay? See you could preach a sermon on Levi’s jeans and talk about his heredity. [chuckling] What Papias says is Matthew wrote down the oracles of Christ in Hebrew. He doesn’t quite say Matthew’s gospel was composed entirely in Hebrew. What he says is basically that the sayings of Jesus were composed in a Semitic language. Whether make of that that he’s referring to Hebrew or Aramaic we could debate that. But clearly that’s not what we have in this document, is it?

Is our Gospel According to Matthew in Hebrew? No. Are even the sayings of Jesus in this gospel in either Hebrew or Aramaic? Not so much. No. Whatever Papias’s talking about, that’s not actually what we ended up having in our canon. And there is reason to think that Papias is not talking about the final form of the document that we have. What he’s talking about is what Matthew originally had to do with it. Here’s the important point. Now lets consider what we actually have in the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew is much longer than the Gospel of Mark. Have you noticed this? The shortest of our gospels is Mark. Matthew is, oh, not quite a third longer.

But here are some facts that we have to take into consideration. First of all, 95 percent of Mark - Mark’s content is found also in Matthew. Of that 95 percent of Mark that also occurs in the Gospel of Matthew, 52 percent of it is verbatim. [tapping sound] Okay? Now, lets do a little deduction here for a minute. If two term papers are submitted to me in this class and I find 95 percent of one term paper in the other, and of that 95 percent it’s 52 percent verbatim, I’m going to know there’s some kind of literary relationship between these two documents.

A literary relationship. Somebody has copied from somebody. You with me now? Well now, that then leads to the question. Here’s Mark’s gospel. Here’s Matthew over here. Ninety-five percent of Mark plus other unique material shows up in Matthew, and of that 95 percent 52 percent is verbatim. Now that’s very interesting. Matthew was one of the original Twelve.
Why would origin...an original apostolic eyewitness be busily copying from a non-eyewitness’s gospel? See this is the historical question you gotta ask. How come, why? What's up with that? Well that's weird. That doesn’t make sense. Matthew traveled with Jesus as one of the original Twelve. He saw it with his own eyes. Why in the world would he be copying from Mark? Well that's a good question to ask. It's a really good question to ask.

Here’s the way I think it goes down. The Gospel of Matthew is called "According to Matthew" because there is unique material in this Gospel that goes directly back to Matthew. When you look at the composition of Matthew’s gospel, there are three parts:

A. There’s Mark. That’s his biggest source;
B. He’s got a source of sayings material; and
C. He’s got material that you don’t find in any other gospel.

We’re going to call that Special M. Not to be confused with Special K. Okay? There are three sources of material in Matthew’s gospel. Markan material, sayings material that is not found in Mark, and Special M material, like the birth narratives. A classic example would be the birth narratives. Clearly not found in, nor derived from, a reading of Mark. Okay? What I’m saying is, that the unique material in the Gospel of Matthew, this stuff, which there’s a considerable amount of, okay? This stuff comes from Matthew, the tax collector, the eyewitness. This material comes from, wait for it...Mark. the Markan material comes from Mark. This material comes from Matthew. And then you have collections of important sayings of Jesus, in addition.

Now here’s another practice that you need to understand about ancients. When you have a composite document - so I’m arguing that Matthew is a composite document - what the Matthew that we have in Greek is a composite document. Okay? When you have a composite document the normal ancient practice was to attribute it to its most famous author. Okay? The other practice was to attribute it to the author whose portion of the document is mentioned first. Okay? Well, of Matthew and Mark who’s the more famous? Clearly Matthew. Right? And of Matthew and Mark, if you’re reading Seriatim through the document and you start with Matthew 1:1, who’s the first contributor? That would also be Matthew. The birth narratives: Matthew 1 and 2. That’s uniquely Matthean material not found in any other gospel.

So on both counts the reason for calling this document Matthew’s gospel is he's the most famous and most unique contributor. Whereas Mark is repeating material that he himself has heard second-hand from Peter. Much more important to mention the apostle than the non-apostle contributor. Right? Now for us, I mean we do have documents like that. I mean, I have been the editor of documents where you know I’ve had 10 or 15 scholars collect essays and contribute essays to a compiled document, a compilation document. Right? But the document is attributed to me. I’m the editor. Why is that? Well, because I’m the most well-known person and the publisher decides that they want this to sell, so they want my name on the document. Right?

The more things change the more they stay the same. The ancients felt the same way. Who’s the most important contributor to this document? Who is the most famous contributor to this document? In the case of the Gospel of Matthew, yes, there is original eyewitness material from Matthew in this gospel. What is it? It’s the uniquely Matthean material in this gospel. Now when you get to Luke, he has a disclaimer. Now listen closely to the beginning of the document. [background chatter]
Remember when I told you that the way you tell what the genre of a document is is by reading the first few verses? That's how you tell what kind of literature it is. Well that's clearly true in Luke. It's not always true, but it's clearly true in Luke.

Here's what he says. We're going to look at the beginning of Luke and the beginning of Acts. He says: "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled amongst us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word, I, too decided after investigating everything carefully from the very first to write an orderly account for you, Most Excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

Now that's the beginning of his gospel, as we call it. If you turn to the very first two verses of the Book of Acts, we have these words: "In the first book Theophilus wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up into Heaven..." and so on. Okay? Now clearly, two points: Number one: Acts is seen as a continuation of Luke. Written to the same person. Who is this person? Theophilus. This is probably an actual individual, although his name means lover of God. Theos...philos...lover of God. Okay. But it's probably an actual person. It's probably Luke's patron.

It's probably the dude who paid for the writing down of this document...both of these documents. Let's go back now to the prefix, the preface, to the Gospel of Luke. We need to look at that in some detail and listen to what he says. The first thing I need to tell you about Luke 1:1-4 is this would clearly signal to the audience that this is not a biography. In fact, if you're reading the Greek of Luke Chapter 1, this word just in: Jesus is nowhere mentioned in the first few paragraphs of this document. You would never guess that this document was about Jesus. Not from reading the first few paragraphs because you have the preface and then you have the story of whom? Elizabeth and Zach and John.

You wouldn't know it's about Jesus. In fact, Luke says this is not a biography, it's about the things that have happened amongst us. It's not about a personality study. It's about the events that have happened amongst us. Not a biography, no, this is a historical monograph. The important historic events that have happened amongst us. You know, it's like a documentary on the History Channel. That's what he's writing. He's writing history, ancient style, but nevertheless, he's writing history. That's what he's writing. He's writing history. Very important. Now listen to what he says about this history.

First of all, he says "Since many have undertaken to write an account." Now what does that tell you? Have there been documents like this written before? He says they have been written before. He doesn't just say, "Since many have told the story of Jesus." No, this is very significant in an oral culture. Since many have attempted to write an account before. Hello? Now this means Luke is writing late in the game. He's not writing the first gospel. Definitely not. What he is doing is he's writing a document that he wants to be considered a document that is in a certain kind of order.

Now listen to his claim about himself: "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled amongst us. Just as they were handed onto us by those who from the beginning were eyewitness servants of the word."

Now let's listen to that. Who's the "us"? That would be the author and others. Is he claiming to be an eyewitness, or original servant or preacher of the word? No, he is not. He's claiming that he's in touch with those folks. Right? All he's claiming is "I sought out the eyewitnesses. I did my homework. I did good research." That's all he's claiming. "I consulted with the original eyewitnesses and the servants of the
word who were from the beginning eyewitnesses. I, too, decided after investigating everything carefully..." [musically] Ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum.

Now, we're talking about writing critical history. Said, "I have explored all of these stories and tales and claims, and I'm going to give you the straight poop." I'm mean, that's what Luke is saying. "I am gonna to give it to you straight. I am not gonna sugar-coat it. You're gonna get it straight. And since some of the other accounts were not a particular kind of order, I'm gonna give you an orderly account that'll make sense to your historical sensibilities," says Luke.

That's what he's going to do. He's not going to write a biography. Now here's the big difference between a biography and historical monograph. A biography is person-focused. It's concerned with the character about whom the "bios" is written. The word biography comes from two Greek words: "bios" which means life, and "graphy" - writing. A writing about somebody's life. Right?

That's not what Luke's gospel is. It's a writing about the events that have happened amongst us. And by the way, that's also true about Acts. You know a lot of people have puzzled, "I don't get Acts. I don't get the end of Acts. What happens at the end of Acts?" Did we hear about the death of Peter? Did we hear about the death of Paul? No. Now if these had been biographies, if Acts was in fact the stories of Peter and Paul, if that's what they were, we would have expected to hear about the end of their life. Why? What did I tell you last night about how people viewed the end of somebody's life?

Audience member: [inaudible]

It was crucial because it most revealed their character. It most revealed their character. This is not a character study of Jesus in the first book. Nor is it a character study of Paul and Peter in the second book. This is about the historic events that have happened amongst that fulfilled scripture. That's what it's about. That's what Luke Acts is about and therefore it is very different from Mark or Matthew or John, which are indeed, focusing on the character of the central figure: Jesus. That's the difference. So, Luke Acts is a different animal than Matthew, Mark and John. Matthew, Mark and John didn't feel like they needed to sequel. [pause] Luke says we need a sequel 'cause we got to tell the story of the events that kept happening, that were fulfilling scripture after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So, to ancient peoples, Matthew, Mark and John would have appeared to be some kind of ancient biography and Luke Acts would have appeared to be some kind of historical monograph. And that's exactly what Luke claims that he is doing, and therefore his document stands out from these others as a different kind of critter. And you can see that. [pause] You know, really, already from the birth narratives the only person of those four gospel writers that is concerned about historical synchronisms, matching up the macro history of the empire with the micro history of the Christian movement is Luke. For example, look in the beginning of Luke Chapter 2. This is what Luke says: "Now in those days a decree went out from the emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered." This was the first registration and it was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria and all went to their own towns to be registered.

What has he done? He's connected the macro history of the empire with the specific story of Mary and Joseph and Jesus. Or look at chapter 3. The beginning of chapter 3 is even more convoluted. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Laussaneus Ruler of Abilene, during the high priest of Annas and Caiaphas the word of God came to John."
Now coulda just cut to the chase and said, "The word of God came to John," if this was just preaching. But it's not just preaching. It's history. He's syncing up the macro story with the micro story. And why? Because he's writing as a historian. This is how ancient historians wrote. What he is saying, dear friends, is that what happened in the lives of Mary and Joseph and Jesus are not merely just as important as the Emperor Tiberius and all of these governors.

No, what had happened in the life of Mary and Joseph and Jesus are even more important because unlike the claims, the grandiose claims of the emperor to be the savior of the world, the real savior of the world was Jesus. That's what Luke wants to say. And it's not an accident that it's only Luke who stresses in his gospel that Jesus is the savior of the world. Not just the savior of Jews; the savior of the world. Okay?

So he's trying to show the significance of Jesus and His followers for world history. That's what he's doing. He's writing to somebody who was probably a new convert - Theophilus - who knew something of the history of the world, who was a literate person, a well-educated person. And he's saying "Now this is the significance of Jesus." And the early Christian who went for world history. And, "Aren't we glad that you're a part of it, Theophilus? Oh, noble, Theophilus."

Okay? So, something very different is going on in Luke Acts, and it's going on in the other three gospels. In these other three gospels they have less concerns for historical minutia, or chronological precision. Luke has more concern for that. The other writers have less concern because their concern is to portray the character of Jesus authentically and accurately. And how are they going to do that? Well, the same way that other ancient biographers did that. They're gonna use a method of indirect portraiture. That is, let the words and deeds of Jesus tell themselves, without commentary.

In an ancient biography there's not all that commentary. There's not all that explaining the significance of this. It's indirect portraiture, words and deeds. When you have a limited amount of space, and producing a document is expensive, what are you gonna focus on? As my old president of Asbury Seminary used to say, "You gotta make the main thing the main thing."

What's the most important thing? I want to know what Jesus said and did. If I'm gonna understand who He is, I want to know what He said. So that is the main thing in the gospels. What Jesus said and did. Other characters in the story, you know we hardly have a full character description of any of the disciples except maybe Peter. The other figure in the gospels that we know the most about in the synoptic gospels is Peter, and even then the writer of those gospels is not interested in Peter for his own sake. He's only interested in Peter in so far as he's related to Jesus. He comes on the scene after Jesus comes on the scene. Right? 'Cause there's not an independent interest in these people for themselves. They are only presented in this story because they help us to understand who Jesus was. What he did. Why he did what he did. Indirect portraiture.

Alright. [sighs] Why then are Matthew, Mark and John so different? Oh, boy are they different. But especially John is different from Matthew and Mark. Well, to get at that, we're gonna have to look at, in some detail, some of the specifics about Mark and then Matthew and then John. But unless you're really read these gospels closely, you might glaze over that fact because of course there's a lot of common material in Matthew, Mark and John, and Luke as well. Right? There's a lot of common material.

But here are - there are big differences. For example, in the Gospel of John, how many parables did Jesus tell? Zero. In the gospel of John, how many exorcisms did Jesus do? Zero. Begin to get the picture? The most important public form of Jesus's speech is set in the synoptics to be parables. To everybody out there
New Testament Introduction. Dr. Ben Witherington


What's the most frequent miracle of the early Galilean ministry According to Mark? It's exorcisms. You got exorcisms right, left and center in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Zero exorcisms in the Gospel of John. Not a one. How come this big difference in what Jesus said and what Jesus did in these two gospels? Well you gotta explain that. Where did that come from? My answer would be to follow the Gospel of John as written from the perspective of a Judean disciple. The beloved disciple is a Judean disciple. And secondly, it's mainly reflecting on Jesus's Judean, not His Galilean ministry. More on that it a minute, but those two points are crucial. It's written from the perspective of a Judean disciple and from the perspective of what Jesus did in Judea largely.

Here’s another fast fact. What’s the only miracle story from the Galilean ministry that’s in all four gospels? This obviously was a very important story because all four gospel writers thought they had to include it. It's the feeding of the 5,000 and walking on water tandem. Those two stories, which are connected, that's the only Galilean miracle story that's in John that's also in Matthew, Mark and Luke. That's the only one.

Now that's bizarre. I mean, all of the miracles Jesus did in Galilee, right, left and center? John has none of them except the feeding of the 5,000, walking on water which is also found in the Synoptic gospels. So, there are big differences between Mark and Matthew on the one side and John on the other side and we have to figure out why.

Well let’s start with the earliest one. As I said, Mark was written in the ’60s and it sort of sets the pattern for how to write the story of the adult life of Jesus. It begins, of course, with the story of John the Baptist. Now here is something in which Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all agree. The story of Jesus begins if the - we’re talking about the adult story of Jesus. The adult story of Jesus begins with the [coughing] story of John the Baptist.

Did you catch that? The adult story of Jesus begins with the story of John the Baptist. Now that’s very interesting. That’s something that all four gospel writers agree on. So, in the middle of the Christological hymn that we looked at on the video in the beginning was the word and the word was God and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning, etc., etc., etc.

Right in the middle of that beautiful poetic phrase we hear about "and there was John". Right in the middle of that. Interrupting the beautiful symmetry of the poetry of John 1-14 is a reference to John the Baptist in order to tell us he ain’t the one. He had testified to the lie but he wasn’t the lie. All four of these gospels start the story of Jesus by telling us something about John. Very important. Obviously John the Baptist is an important figure to understanding Jesus and the relationship of John the Baptist to Jesus was crucial to understanding the identify of Jesus and we’re all being told that.

Now when we look at the Gospel of Mark, it has a tripartite structure. Here’s where I tell you that ancient biographers and historians, especially biographers, more biographers than historians - ancient biographers believed they had a certain editorial freedom to arrange their material in an order they found most convincing. In Mark we have tripartite structure. Mark 1:1 through Chapter 8, the first part of Chapter 8. Then we have Mark 8:27, that paragraph, and then after that we have the three-fold prediction of the death of the Son of Man, and then we have what I will call "mission accomplished". Mark 11 through 16, mission accomplished.

There are three major parts with a little addition. Mark 1 through 8 is the first half of this gospel. In the first half of this gospel there are no Passion predictions. There is no Son of Man must suffer many things
and be killed and on the third day rise. Nothing like that before Caesarea of Philippi in Mark 8. Okay? This is very important. You would never know from reading the first seven and a scosh chapters of Mark, that Jesus was the man born to die. You would never know that he came not to be served but to serve and give his rans- life as a ransom for many. You would never know this just by the first seven and half chapters of Mark.

I had the privilege of going to see a one man performance of the Gospel of Mark, which by the way, there is somebody right here in Columbus who does this, who’s connected with Trinity Lutheran Seminary. He's fantastic. You guys ought to have him come and do a one man verbatim performance of the Gospel of Mark from memory. It’s electrifying. An oral presentation of the gospel in person. One person. It’s powerful.

I saw this done on the stage in London by Alec McGowan, who is the Shakespearean actor, and it was done [inaudible 1:04:18] in the authorized version, King James, so we had a lot of “thee's” and “thou's”. But it was still powerful. It was still really good. The first half was Mark 1 through 8 and then we had intermission. We went out and had popcorn in the middle of the gospel story.

When I was standing in the lobby, half-way through, one person - I was just a fly on the wall listening to conversations, because I was by myself - one person said, [imitates woman's voice with British accent] "It began rather abruptly. Where were the birth narratives then?" Well, at least she knew there were birth narratives. They're just not in Mark. You know? Another person, [imitates man's voice with British accent] "Where is the Sermon on the Mount? I miss that bit. Will it be in the second half, then?"

Well, no, there's no Sermon on the Mount in Mark, but God bless him for knowing there is a Sermon on the Mount and it's in some gospel. That's better than no knowledge of the gospels and I'm encouraged. They knew something about the gospels, you know. Mark 8 - Mark 1:1 through Chapter 8 was the first half of the story and then Mark 9 through 16 was the second half of the story. And roughly speaking, that's actually how Mark divides up his account.

Remember I told you last night that in the first half of Gospel of Mark the adverb "euthus" - "immediately" - is used 40 some times, and immediately Jesus [inaudible 01:05:40]. It starts to disappear in Mark 8. Suddenly things slow way down and then when you get to the last week of Jesus's life, it's blow-by-blow. It's minute-by-minute. Wow! What happened? A modern biography that squished into ten chapters the whole story of Jesus's life up to the last week of his life, and then spent a third of the account on the last week of His life, would be considered grossly out of balance in proportion even if somebody was martyred.

You wouldn’t write a modern biography that way. Each of the four gospels spent a third of their verbiage on the last week of Jesus’s life. And there’s a reason for that. I’ve already given you that reason. It’s because they had to explain how it is that the savior of the world could end up on a cross. They had to explain that in detail. And they had to show how it fulfilled scripture because nobody was expecting it.

They were not looking for a crucified Messiah. That also was as much of an oxymoron as Microsoft Works. It was an oxymoron. They were not looking for that. In this part of Mark, we have a whole series of questions raised. [imitates high-pitched voice] "Why do your disciples not - why do you eat with the sinners? And why do your disciples pluck the grain?" Oh. There are all of these people asking questions. The crowd in the synagogue and Kepher Nahoom, Calpurnia says, "What’s this? A new teaching and with authority. Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
In the first half of the Gospel of Mark all kinds of questions were being raised about Jesus. Even the disciples, the [voice] "duh-sciplies", don't get it. Jesus is in the boat. He stills the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and the disciples say, "Shazam. Who then is this who can still storms?" They're kind of like, "Whoa, Dude." But they don't get it. They don't understand.

So what is happening in the first half of the Gospel of Mark is the who and why questions are being raised. Who is this? Why is He doing what He's doing? Why is He saying what He's saying? Who is this? The "who" question is going to be answered in Mark 8. At Caesarea Philippi. [pause] And for the first time a disciple is going to clear his throat and say something that matches up with the very first verse of the Gospel of Mark. The very first verse of the Gospel of Mark says: "This is the beginning of the good news about whom"? Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. That's the preface to the Gospel of Mark. Verse 1 - the heading, if you will, to what this document is all about. Good news about Jesus, who's the Son of God. Right?

So what happens at Caesarea Philippi? This story is powerful. First of all, where is he? He's not in the Holy Land. Caesarea Philippi is out of bounds. It's not part of the Holy Lands. It's Herod Phillip's territory. It's in a town that was a Greek city, originally called Panaia or Banias, named after the Greek god Pan. Remember him? Greek god, Pan, the piper, right? Not to be confused with Peter Pan. Okay?

The city was renamed by Herod Phillip after himself and after the emperor. Caesarea, the emperor; Philippi - Herod. The city was becoming his capital city. It was a city full of pagan statues and statues of pagan gods as well as pagan heroes. Probably statues of the emperor, too, since it had been renamed from - for Caesar Tiberius. Okay. Why would Jesus leave the Holy Land, go to a city full of pagan statues, and statues of pagan deities and at that juncture ask his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Think about this for a minute.

Audience member: [inaudible 01:10:21]

Absolutely. I think that's part of it. I absolutely do. I think part of it was to get away from - mainly to get away from the clamor for healing. 'Cause Jesus was being trailed by all kinds of people who wanted to be healed and in Mark's gospel you get the sense that this is a huge burden.

At one point early in the Markan narrative, Jesus says, "We need to go to another town because I came to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. I didn't come mainly to be - you know - Dr. Oz here. I came mainly to proclaim the good news of the gospel." So, yes, you're right. I think part of it is to get away from the clamor of the crowds so that they could focus. I think - I think that's - but there's another reason that has to do with the nature of Caesarea Philippi itself.

So let me describe for you a little bit about Caesarea Philippi and then you're gonna get the picture, I think better. Caesarea Philippi is probably one of the first places near the Holy Land where you begin to have emperor worship. In fact, just outside, just south of Caesarea Philippi at Omrete, they have now dug up a temple of Augustus. This is a pagan temple, not only in honor of, but recognizing the divinity of the Emperor Augustus. Are you with me now?

This is a pagan temple, just north of the Holy Land, just south of Caesarea Philippi. It's on the road to Caesarea Philippi. It's just about a mile out of town. A temple to the Emperor Augustus. They would have gone right by this on the way to Caesarea Philippi. That's point number one.

I do think that in our gospels there is a deliberate, implicit critique. Jesus is the savior of the world and the emperor is so not. Jesus is the Son of God, and the emperor is not. And see, here's the thing - about
only two historical figures in the first century A.D. was it ever claimed that they were the savior of the world and the Son of God. I mean, real living human beings. right? Only two persons was this claimed about in the first century A.D. The emperor and Jesus. That's it. Nobody else.

About nobody else was it said this person is the savior of the world and the Son of God. So I think we are dealing with, at - not just an affirmation, but a denial here. The affirmation is Jesus is the Son of God and the implicit denial is the emperor is not. The emperor has no clothes. Right? I think that's part of what's going on here.

But there's more to it than that. Because also at Caesarea Philippi, there is this huge cave. A cave that has a river and it was believed by Gentiles that this was one of the entrances to the River Styx and hints to the underworld. Hades! Are you with me now? You gettin' the picture? So what happened at Caesarea Philippi was not just an affirmation of who Jesus was. It was also an affirmation about who His lead disciple was. Remember? You are Caiaphas, the Rock.

They went to Rock City to affirm that Peter was "the Rock". And then what does Jesus say to him? Jesus says, "The gates of Hades will not prevail against my community." And he could have simply pointed to this hole in the ground. He's not talking about Hell in the Biblical sense. He's talking about death. Hades, the underworld, where the dead people go. Alright? What is He saying? "The gates of Hades will not prevail against my community." It will not die out. You. I will build my community on you and those like you who make this confession. And this community is going to be deathless.

It's not going to go down to the underworld. It's not going to die. Jesus very specifically chose this location because of what was there. Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Jesus could have turned around and said, "These boys right here - Augustus, Tiberius - not so much. They're not the Son of the Living God." And then when he talks about Peter, he says, "You are Caiaphas, the Rock." And on this Caipha in Aramaic is a shelf of rocks. "On this shelf of rocks I will build my community, and the gates of death will not prevail against it." This is a powerful moment.

And in Mark's outline, here's the significance. Until you know who Jesus is, you can not understand why he came to die. You gotta answer the "who" questions first. And the first eight chapters of the Gospel of Mark are about answering the "who" question. Which is finally correctly answered in Mark 8:27-30. It's only after that in the Mark outline that we hear this: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be killed, and on the third day rise." Or an elaboration of that, a further spinning out of that.

In Mark 8, we have this Passion prediction. In Mark 9 we have it again more elaborately. In Mark 10 we have it a third time, more elaborately. And then at the end of Mark 10 we have, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many." In three straight chapters there are four Passion predictions of which we had none before Mark 8:27.

This is a deliberate theological schema. The material is arranged to help us understand not only who Jesus is, but why we have the Passion narrative. Why He had to come and die. So, the basic three-part structure is: The Who and the Why questions are answered. Then we have the prediction of Jesus the Son of Man's suffering many things and being killed and rising again. And then we have the record of mission accomplished.

In the Passion narrative Jesus accomplishes the chief purpose for which he came. Now, I happen to agree with Mark that the chief reason Jesus came was to die. Let me put it to you this way. When we're talking about Soteriology - salvation, alright? If Jesus had never told the parable of the sower, wou - could we still be saved? Sure. If Jesus had never raised Lazarus from the dead, could we still be saved? Sure. But if
Jesus had never come and been born, and died on a cross and risen again, could we be saved? The answer is no.

If we're asking the question, "What are the moments in His life that are of most Soteriological weight?" It's the birth, the death and the resurrection and everything else is not window dressing, but everything else is revealing the character of the one who came and saved us. And Mark understands that. Make the main thing the main thing. The main thing is who He is and why did He need to die?

Now this tells us an awful lot about the character of God. I mean we could reflect at length on this. Let me put it to you as starkly as I can. If it was not absolutely necessary for our salvation that Jesus died on the cross, then the father of Jesus is in no sense a loving father. For what father would ask of His only begotten child that He die the most hideous, horrible and painful death known to humanity at that point in time if it was not absolutely the necessary means and the sufficient means of accomplishing God's purpose of saving the world? [pause]

Some scholars have even said, "If this was not necessary to save the world, if God could have just said, 'All is forgiven. Come home now, without the cross.' And what we have on the cross is child abuse. We have a god who's asking of His child to do something hideous that was unnecessary." Oh, but friends, if this is the sufficient and necessary means of our salvation, then what you see in the cross is the most complete expression of both divine love and God's holiness; of both righteousness and compassion; of both justice and mercy.

Consider these three statements. Justice is when you get what you deserve and you know there are far too many people in America clamoring for justice. Let me tell you right now, you don't want justice, 'cuz it's going to entail your judgment, too. Okay? Mercy is when you don't get what you deserve. And grace is when you get what you don't deserve. Justice is when you get what you deserve. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and deserve to be judged. Mercy is when you don't get what you deserve. Grace is when you get a good thing that you never deserved.

On the cross we see the completion or fulfillment of justice, mercy and grace. All three things in the cross. It is not an accident that the gospels are Passion narratives with a long introduction. It is not an accident because the most important thing Jesus ever did was die for us, and rise again. It's the heart of the gospel and the gospel writers got it right. And this, by the way, is one of the reasons the Gnostic gospels were never even considered to be included in the canon of our scriptures. Because the Gnostic gospels don't think history really matters.

They have Jesus the talking head, Jesus the pundit, Jesus the pithy quoter. You know, it's kind a like a Jay Leno monologue. Read the Gospel of Thomas. Jesus the talking head. His death and resurrection is not the center of attention at all. The Gnostic gospels got the significance of Jesus all wrong. The canonical gospels got it right. The life and death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the matter. It's the center of the universe. It's the axis on which history turned. And the gospel writers got that right. Absolutely. The gospels are Passion narratives, as I have put it, with a long introduction, because the real moment of Soteriological weight is that last week of Jesus's life.

Now, Matthew's gospel, which we turn to now, was in the early church, you may be surprised to hear that, the most popular gospel. That's not so today. Today, the gospel most frequently translated first would be what? What would you guess?

Audience member: [inaudible]
Mm-hm. Absolutely. John’s gospel is the first gospel to be translated into a new language for a language group. That’s correct. This would not be true in antiquity. In antiquity the gospel that was most frequently copied was Matthew, and that is probably why it’s first in the canon. Because it was everybody’s fave. It was the most popular gospel of the second and third and fourth century churches. No question. By far the most copied gospel. The least [coughing] copied gospel was Mark.

Well now think about it for a minute. If 95 percent of Mark is in Matthew you got limited paper, limited time and limited scribe. Right? Which of the two gospels are you gonna copy? Matthew, which has value added birth narratives, Sermon on the Mount, etc., etc.? Or Mark? You’re not gonna copy Mark. You’re gonna copy Matthew ‘cause you get far more material on your piece of papyrus. Alright? And that is exactly what happened. Mark became the neglected gospel. Even though it was the earliest gospel it became the neglected gospel. So Matthew was put first in the canon as the most popular of the gospels. It draws on Mark. It draws on sayings material.

Now scholars have a name for the sayings material that are common to Matthew and Luke but are not found in Mark and is called "Q". You may see this in your reading of New Testament material. It comes from the German word ‘Quelle’ which means source. That’s where the "Q" comes from. It’s a sayings source. It’s material that’s non-Markan, that’s found in both Matthew and Luke.

Matthew’s gospel is very interestingly arranged. I think it’s written for Jewish Christians. Maybe an Antioch. Maybe even more likely in some place like Capernaum and Galilee Jewish Christians who are struggling to find their identity, vis a vis, the Pharisees and others. It’s written after Mark’s gospel and draws on Mark’s gospel. Whoever actually put it together used Matthew’s material as a source, used Mark as a source, used sayings material of Jesus that had been collected and maybe written down as a source. This is a teacher’s gospel.

Unlike Mark - Mark has two big blocks of teaching. Mark 4 - a chapter on parables. Mark 13 - a chapter on the Apocalypse. That’s it. Right? Two blocks of teaching: early and late. Not in Matthew. You’ve got six blocks of teaching. Six blocks of teaching material. The way that the compiler of Matthew’s gospel has operated is he’s taken the Markan outline and he’s taken over 95 percent of Mark.

That’s the skeleton, into which he has inserted: A. A birth narrative at the beginning, and then six blocks of teaching that you don’t find in Mark. It’s very interesting, and if you read through Matthew’s gospel, what becomes very clear when you compare it to Luke, which also has a lot of teaching material in it, is that Matthew has arranged his material in a schematic way.

Remember I told you biographers were not all that concerned about chronological precision in accounting for certain events. They were more concerned about revealing the character of the central person and what is the significance of these events. Right? Well, in Matthew what you have after the birth narratives is we have a block of narrative followed by a block of teaching and a block of narrative followed by a block of teaching and a block of narrative followed by a block of teaching followed by a block of teaching, and trust me, Jesus didn’t get up on a Monday morning and say to his disciples, “You know, this week I’m just doing healings. I’m not saying anything.”

Audience member: [chuckles]

"Next week it’s all teaching. Get ready. Okay?" That’s not the way it happened. The schematization of blocks of teaching versus blocks of narrative about miracles and other events in the life of Jesus is an artificial schema so that you could group together the teaching material. I mean, that’s the reason for it because this is a document used to catechize new disciples. This is the gospel that’s got the blocks of
teaching where you can get into them what is the teaching of Jesus at length. And you can expound on it in various ways. So, the Sermon on the Mount - let’s take that first block of teaching of Jesus. Matthew 5 through 7. This is probably Jesus’s greatest hits. What I mean by that is it’s a collection of some of the things that Jesus said - some of the most memorable things Jesus said into a single setting in the gospel. Collected together into one place [coughing] so that you would have it conveniently together as the first significant for the Magna Carta of Jesus’s teaching.

Now why do I say it’s probably collected from a variety of things that Jesus said on various occasions? Because, in fact, the Sermon on the Mount is spread in various places in the Gospel of Luke. You find some of it in the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, but you will find some of it spread throughout elsewhere in Luke’s gospel. Which suggests that Matthew 5 through 7 wasn’t originally a single sermon of Jesus given on one occasion. It’s a deliberately collected block of teaching materials. Just like the other blocks of teaching materials. For example, in Matthew 13 you have a whole chapter of parables. Okay. Did Jesus wake up one morning and say, “You know, it’s riddles today, boys. Just get ready.” You know?

Audience members: [chuckles]

No. No I don’t think so. I don’t think so. No. I think what we have is the pedagogically arranged document. That we have a broad chronological frame. Jesus was born before He had a ministry. He had a ministry before He died. There’s the chronological framework. Within that framework an ancient biographer, or even a historian to a lesser degree, had some freedom to arrange his material according to his purposes. And in this case the purposes were theological.

Mark arranges his narrative according to a theological structure. You need to know who Jesus is first. Okay? Once we’ve gotten that clarity, then we can talk about why He had to die at length. Wh-what was the reason for that, and then we can go carefully and prayerfully, moment by moment, blow by blow through the last week of His life and explain how this was the fulfillment of scripture and what God had intended.

That’s kind of the plot line that Mark is working with and it’s as Papias says, it’s not in strict chronological order. This brings me just for a moment to the Gospel of John, and this is one of the things that of course most puzzles Christians who actually know their gospels, is - [pause]

Now let’s, let’s approach this this way. How many times did Jesus cleanse the temple in the Gospel of Matthew? [pause] One time. And when does that happen? [pause] The last week of Jesus’s life. You with me? How many times did Jesus cleanse the temple in Mark’s gospel? [pause] Survey says: Once. And when does he do it? The last week of Jesus’s life. How many times does Jesus cleanse the temple in Luke's gospel? Survey says: (There’s a pattern here.) Once. During the last week of Jesus’s life. Right? How many times does Jesus cleanse the temple in John’s gospel? Some people instinctively say twice. Wrong. Jesus does not cleanse the temple during the last week of his life according to the Johanna account? It comes up front. It comes in John, Chapter 2.

Now, modern people may well get their knickers all in a knot about this, but it didn’t bother the ancients. Why did it not bother the ancients? Because, chronology was not that crucial in a biography. The placement of the cleansing of the temple in the Gospel of John is not chronological. It’s theological. Because at the beginning of the Gospel of John the author is trying to show how Jesus replaces the institutions of Judaism with Himself. His body is the temple. He is the paschal lamb, and so on. He’s the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. He’s the fulfillment of the Feast of the Passover, etc., etc. He even turns purification water into the new wine of the gospel. Okay?
So - the placement of materials in Mark's gospel and Matthew's gospels and John's gospel is largely theological and for pedagogical purposes. It's not largely chronological, although, of course, they all would only place the teachings and healing of Jesus during their account of the ministry of Jesus. Of course. They're not going to place it back in the birth narratives, or later in the Passion narrative. That's true. Now, if in Gospel of Matthew there are six blocks of teaching, where in the Old Testament do you find five blocks of teaching, and by whom? [pause]

What are the first five books of the Old Testament called? The Pentateuch. "Penta-" as in five. Like pentangle, right? Who was supposedly the source of this material?

Audience member: [inaudible 1:32:54]

Very good. So, if you have a gospel that presents you with six important blocks of teaching, some of which are given on a mountain, the first of which is given on a mountain. Okay. What would a Jew think about this material? This gospel was written for Jewish Christians? Well, here is somebody who out-Moses Moses. He went one better than Moses. He gave us six blocks of teaching instead of five.

Torah means instruction. That's the basic meaning. It doesn't mean law, it means instruction. The five books of instruction, the Torah, have been exceeded by the six collections of instruction by Jesus the sage. Jesus, the wise man.

Matthew's gospel absolutely thorough-goingly emphasizes the Jewish-ness of Jesus - in many different ways. Not only do you see Jesus having purely Jewish controversies over things like Corban and washing of hands. Which, by the way, were not matters that were of great concern to the church. These kinds of things don't come up in the Book of Acts and they certainly don't come up in Paul's letters. Okay. It is a thoroughly Jewish discussion and debate.

You have a debate about Levirate Marriage. Remember that one? Okay, why was this woman so hard on men that she killed off six brothers? You know? Inquiring minds want to know. [chuckles] Levirate Marriage - what did Jesus think about that. Well, this is not a subject of debate by the time we get to Paul's Gentile churches. It's a thoroughly Jewish issue and a thoroughly Jewish debate.

Even in the way the Kingdom of God is referred to in Matthew, it is largely referred to not as the Kingdom of God but as the Kingdom of Heaven. These are not two different kingdoms. It's just that Jews avoided saying the word "God" by using a circumlocution, namely "Heaven".

It's like my granny. My granny would never "For - For God's sake do this." No she would always say "For Heaven's sake do this." Right? Saying God that way in some kind of strong negative language was too much like cursing for my granny, and that's exactly true for Jews as well. The sacred name you did not want to mispronounce. You would use the sacred name in sparingly if at all, and you'd go a round about way of using it. You'd say "Heaven" instead of "God".

So the Kingdom of Heaven is not a different kingdom that the Kingdom of God. It's just that in the - Matthew's gospel it's called the Kingdom of Heaven because he's avoiding using the word "God" in sensitivity to his Jewish audience. That's the way that works and I'm sure Jesus did that as well.

Now here's what's interesting about this. Early Jews would avoid saying the name "God'. [sound of bumping microphone]They would avoid saying "Yahweh" altogether, and yet right in that first block of teaching in Matthew, what does Jesus teach his disciples to do? Not merely to name God, but to call Him "Abba". Father, dearest. Which, by the way, does not mean "daddy". It's not informal language.
It’s a term of endearment. It’s not slang. God is not called "daddy" by Jesus. He’s called "Father, dearest". Dear Father. It is a term of respect, but it is a term that a child would use for their father. When they honored their father in early Judaism they would call him "Abba". "Father dearest, may I do "x"?" Right? It’s a term of respect. It’s not slang. Jesus says when you pray, pray this way. "Abba. Father." And that had to have been quite the cup of coffee for them. Because in their whole life they had been told you are distant from God, God is so other than you are, that you should not even be pronouncing his name because you might get it wrong. "No," says Jesus. "God is so close that He is like your human father. Call him Abba. You may have the same intimacy with God that I have," says Jesus. "Call Him as I do. Abba."

Now that’s one of the things that makes so striking the end of the story of Jesus. [pause][chuckles] The only time Jesus addresses God as simply "God" is from the cross when he says, quoting the Psalms, Psalm 22, "My God! My God! Why do you forsake me?" That’s Psalm 22:1. "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" That’s the Aramaic translation of Psalm 22:1. That’s what Jesus said. Everywhere else in the gospel He calls God "Abba". Even in the Garden of Gethsamene, "Abba, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass. Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done."

Matthew’s gospel is a Jewish gospel. It’s ironic that the Gentile church of the second century liked it better than all the other gospels. Mark’s gospel is probably the most Gentile of the gospels, or Luke. Well, you could debate. Maybe Luke’s the most [chuckles 1:38:42] but Matthew’s gospel was number one on the hit parade, top of the billboard charts for the church in the second and third centuries, even though the church was overwhelmingly Gentile by the second and third century A.D.

Now one of the things that was crucial to Jews was the issue of what was the function of the Twelve? I’m gonna sit down for a minute. What was the function of the Twelve? The Gospel of Matthew is especially concerned about this issue. "I send you only to (whom)?" says Jesus to the Twelve in Matthew’s gospel. Only to the lost sheep of [music begins] Israel. "Go nowhere amongst the Gentiles," says Jesus. [music becomes louder; speech ends 1:39:39]
What we were basically arguing in the previous session was that we have three gospels that are like ancient biographies and we have one that's like an ancient historical monograph in two volumes: Luke and Acts. One of the issues that the so-called synoptic gospels raise, and I'm assuming you know what the word "synoptic" means. "Optic" means "eye", "syn" means with, "with one eye". Matthew, Mark and Luke are the synoptic gospels because basically they look at Jesus from a similar point of view, whereas John is something else. Okay. That's why they are called the synoptic gospels.

But when we are talking about commonalities in the way that Jesus is portrayed in these gospels, there are two phrases that are regularly on Jesus's lips. Jesus's own lips. Not everybody else's lips, Jesus's lips. And those phrases are "Son of Man", and "Kingdom of God". The two most frequent phrases on the lips of the synoptic Jesus, whether we're talking about Matthew, Mark or Luke, is "Son of Man" and "Kingdom of God".

Now, we also have some of that in the gospel of John, but a good deal less. There are about seven or eight places in the Gospel of John where the phrase Son of Man is used by Jesus of Himself. There is even one place where Jesus asks a person to confess him as the Son of Man. That's the man born blind in John 9. The phrase Kingdom of God does not come up that often in the Gospel of John. We do see it in the Nicodemus story in John 3.

There are a couple of other places in the dialogue with Pilate. "Are you a king? If you're a king you have a kingdom." "My kingdom is not of this world," says, Jesus. So there is some discussion of kingdom, some discussion of Son of Man in the fourth gospel, but considerably less than in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Now the reason it's important for us to get a good fix on these phrases and what they actually mean is because they are the most familiar, important and repeated phrases on the lips of Jesus, and they reveal something important about how viewed Himself. Jesus's own Christology. And they reveal something crucial about how he views His ministry, the Kingdom of God, so it follows from that. But if we can get our mental calipers around the phrase Son of Man and around the phrase Kingdom of God we will have kind of done what Luke is trying to do, which is to get a fix on the historical Jesus and what He was trying to reveal about Himself, and what he was trying to reveal about His ministry of bringing in the reign of God or the divine saving activity of God.

Well, let's talk about these two phrases as a prelude to being able to look more seriously at Luke's gospel. One of the important questions to ask, since these are the two phrases most regularly on Jesus's lips, is: Is there anywhere in the Old Testament where you find both of these phrases - Son of Man and Kingdom of God. Well the phrase Son of Man is very rare. It occurs in some generic places like Psalm 8. "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" or The Son of Man that thou should fear, and that kind of context that means no more than a progeny of a human being. You know, a human offspring. That's all it means, right?

But there is one text - one text - where we have both the phrase Son of Man and the concept of the Kingdom of God, and that would be Daniel 7. The only place in the Old Testament that these two phrases
have a harmonic convergence is there. It follows from that that it might be useful if we looked at the Old Testament background to these two phrases and maybe learn something about why Jesus used them. I think we do learn a great deal about why Jesus uses them.

I'm turning to Daniel, Chapter 7 and I'm going to begin reading to you at the 13th verse, but first let me give you the backdrop in the context. Daniel has been describing a series of beastly empires. These earlier chapters in Daniel might be headed "The Empire Strikes Out". You have one beastly empire after another, and then those things are superceded by a human and humane empire.

These earlier empires - both the empire and the head of the empire - are described as beasts. In other words, they're what? They're subhuman. You get the picture? Why would an emperor or a king be described as a beast? Well, anybody in antiquity would say "Well, it's a subhuman creature." Of course. So in the modern sense of the word these are beastly empires. These are beastly rulers. They're not ruling in a human and humane way, and they are superceded according to Daniel and his visions, by a human figure - one like a Son of Man and a humane empire that's going to last forever. So that's the context, and here's the text beginning with the 13th verse of Daniel 7.

"And as I watched in my night visions I saw Bar[inaudible 06:45] kevar [inaudible 06:46] - " This is, by the way, in Aramaic. This is one of the portions of the Old Testament that's not in Hebrew. This is one of those portions of the Old Testament that's actually in Aramaic. And this is it. He says, "I saw one like a 'Son of Man'.' One like a human being. So it's an analogy. "Coming down with the clouds of Heaven, and he came to the Ancient of days - " aka, the really old dude - "and was presented before him, and to Him was given a kingdom. To Him was given dominion, and glory and kingship, That all people's in nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will never pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed."

Now this text is very interesting because it comes after the story about empires that are superceded by other empires. The Babylonians are superceded by - the Assyrians were superceded by the Babylonians who were superceded by the Persians who were superceded by Alexander the Great's empire, who were superceded by the Romans. One human empire after another, and each one eventually strikes out. Which by the way, one of the things you should think about is, "How long is the American empire going to last?"

It's a human creation. It's not the Kingdom of God. The "Kingdom of God" is contrasted with all merely human empires in this text. Then we have this image of one "like a human being" and yet apparently more than a human being. Because where is he coming from? He's coming down from Heaven. He's coming on the clouds. He's not going up in smoke he's coming down on a cloud. And any time in Biblical or Jewish literature when somebody's coming on a cloud they're some kind of supernatural being. Its either God coming on the clouds or an angel, or some other kind of supernatural being coming on the clouds.

This one like a "Son of Man" coming with the clouds of Heaven to earth. And what is he coming for? Well, he's coming for Judgment Day. And who's going to assign him the task of judging the world? Well, that would be the ancient of deities which is aka Yahweh, aka the Heavenly Father, the Ruler of the Universe. The Ruler of the Universe has turned over the judging of the world to this Son of Man figure. That's what happened. He came to the ancient of days and was presented before Him and to Him was given dominion and glory and kingship so that all peoples, nations and languages should worship Him.

Now you can translate the Aramaic here to either "worship Him" or "serve Him". Either way they are recognizing that he is a more than merely human person. So, here is where I tell you, friends, that
paradoxically as it may seem, the phrase Son of Man refers to a human and yet more than human being. Whereas the phrase Son of God in Jesus’s context could easily be taken to mean a very special human being. In fact, almost all ancient near eastern kings were called a son of some deity. In fact, the day that they were called a son of some deity was the day of their coronation.

"You are my beloved son," goes the royal kinging ritual. "Today I have begotten you." Does that sound a little familiar? This is the ritual of coronation of a king. The king becomes God’s special son on the day he assumes the office of king. And in the ancient near east the king is sacrosanct. You’re not supposed to touch him. Now remember when Israel lusted after having kings like the world has kings? Like the Babylonians and the Assyrians and the Hittites and the Peresites and the Jebusites and the urbanites all had kings? Remember them? Okay.

And what was the problem with that? It amounted to a renouncing of God as their unique king. They wanted a human king like the other nations. And so God says, "Alright. I’ll give you a king in spades." First up to bat: Saul. How’d that turn out? Not so good. Are you with me now?

But you see, the Israelites - they wanted a human kingdom just like everybody else. They didn’t just want a Holy Land, they wanted a human kingdom like everybody else. And when Saul became king all of that whole theology of divine kingship was then applied to Saul. So Saul becomes sacrosanct.

Remember this whole business about David not wanting to mess with Saul because he’s the Lord’s appointed? Right? Now he’s sacrosanct. Don’t be touching the king. Don’t be messing with the king. Don’t be killing the king because that’s an attack on God. This is God’s son.

That whole theology of kingship is part of the essence of what was wrong with Israel. They wanted to be like a nation like other nations, and God had to work with that. If we turn for a minute to first Samuel, Chapter 7, we’re going to see something that stands in stark contrast to Daniel 7. So remember your sevens. In this case second Samuel 7, compared to Daniel 7.

Now listen to what God says to David. Listen carefully. Second Samuel 7. Here’s God’s covenant with David. God says to David, beginning with verse 12, "When your days, David, are fulfilled, and you lie down with your ancestors, you are gathered to your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body and I will establish this kingdom. He shall build a house for my name. And I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be a son to me."

You hear that language? The king becomes God’s son.

"I will be a father to him. He shall be a son to me, and when he commits iniquity I’m surely going to punish him with a rod of iron such as mortals use with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take away my "chased", my steadfast love for him as I took it away from Saul whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made "Alam Alam Alam". Now and forever and forever before me, your throne shall be established forever in accordance with all these words and with all this vision", Nathan spoke these words to David.

Okay. Now lets think about Second Samuel 7 as opposed to Daniel 7. In Second Samuel 7 we are talking about a succession of kings. David is followed by whom? Shaloman. Peace man. Salomon. His name means "person of peace". Right? David is followed by Salomon. Salomon is followed by a descendant of Saloman, etc., etc., etc. But what went wrong? Were these kings faithful to the covenant that God had made with David? Not so much.
Indeed very soon the country would be divided into two parts. And in fact, neither the Israelite nor the Judean kings would be faithful to God. And God’s promises are conditional. They are forever conditionally. That is, if we keep going in this trajectory we’re good. If we don’t - not so much. This is one of the things that you need to understand about the promises of God. Lots of God’s promises are conditional.

"If my people who are called by my name will repent, then I will bless them,” says the scriptures. That’s a conditional promise. What happens if they don’t repent? All bets are off. So when you get to Daniel 7, finally you actually get to a forever kingdom. And the reason you have a forever kingdom is because you have a forever person as king. Let me say this one more time. David could not be a forever king. He needed a succession of kings. David, Salomon, his grandchild, his great-grandchild, and so on. But Daniel 7 is not about a succession of kings. It’s about a human and yet more than human figure who descends from Heaven and rules on earth forever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! And the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his son, who is called a Son of Man here.

Now this is important, because in early Jewish literature when they talked about Messiah they would use the term Messiah, and they would use the term Son of God. They would use the term "God’s anointed", "God’s chosen one", "God’s beloved", but a phrase that they didn’t really use about a Messianic figure was Son of Man. This is Jesus’s choice of terms. When He wanted to talk about who He was. He spoke of Himself as Son of Man and he was hoping, I presume, that people knew Daniel 7. The place this becomes most evident is that at the trial of Jesus. Caiaphas thinks he’s judging Jesus. He’s not getting anywhere because the testimonies aren’t agreeing. Right?

So finally he decides to force the issue. Are you the Christ, the son of the beloved? Are you the Christ, the son of the blessed one? Jesus says, "I am. But you know what really matters? Is that you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds to judge you, to a theatre near you."

Caiaphas thinks he’s judging Jesus. Jesus says I’ll be back after a while to judge you. And he is directly quoting Daniel 7 in Mark 14. Directly quoting Daniel 7 in Mark 14 to explain who He is. He is the one who came first for salvation and second for judging the world. The Son of Man is the one who did that. Now, here’s something that’s really odd about Jesus’s choice of this phrase Son of Man. The phrase Son of Man is in the third person. I mean what kind of person goes around talking about himself in the third person? I mean, that’d be kind of like me saying, you know, “And now Ben is going to teach you about the Gospel of Luke because Ben really is feeling strongly you need to know more about the Gospel of Luke.” If I went on like that after a while you’d be calling the psychologist. You know?

Audience: (laughter)

I don’t go around talking about myself in the third person. This is what Jesus did. Birds have nests, foxes has holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Who is He talking about? Not some other person. He’s talking about Himself. He said, “Humans were not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for human beings. And by the way, the Son of Man is the Lord on the Sabbath.” Who is that?

That would be Jesus. Are you getting the picture now? He talks about Himself in the third person. Now we find this very strange. And the reason is, because of the social aspect of their culture that we did not talk about last night that we must talk about. And that has to do with dyadic personality.

We need to talk about dyadic personality. We live in a world of individual personality. This may be the biggest difference between our culture and all of these ancient Biblical cultures. Two ways to spell it. It’s either “dyadic” with a “d” or dyatic with a “t” in the middle. “D-Y-A-D-I-C.” Dyadic personality.
What it means is group-oriented based personality, rather than individual personality. That is, the primary thing in every ancient person's life is not who they are in isolation, but who they are in relationships. Let me say that again: The primary thing in regard to all ancient persons was not who they were in isolation from everybody else, and the state from everybody else, but who they were in relationship. Have you ever noticed that all the Christological titles are relational? He is "son" in relationship to God. He is "son" in relationship to humankind. He is "the anointed one of God". He's the Lord of his people. These are all relational terms. They don't tell you who Jesus is in isolation. They tell you who He is in relationship, and that's the nature of that culture. It's a dyadic culture.

Well, what do I mean by that? Have you noticed that the Galilean phone book must have been confusing. Nobody had any last names. Nobody had last names. Jesus was distinguished from other Jesuses by his geographical tag. He's Jesus of Nazareth. Sometimes he was actually called Jesus the son of Joseph, by mistake.

You know, the way that you identified a person and distinguished them from other persons is either tell their geographical origins, or name their father. There's a patronymic. So, for example, Simon, i.e., Peter, is Simon bar Jonah. This means Simon, son of John. Jesus, however, gave him a nickname which was Caiaphas - Rocky. So his real name was Rocky Johnson, right?

He didn't have a last name. A patronymic is not a last name. He is "the son of Jonah". He is "Simon, the son of Jonah". You get the picture? Not a last name. Another way to distinguish people was by epithets that described something about their character. For example, Simon the zealot. "I'm a little intense!" Alright? That's as opposed to "Simon the laid back".

Audience: (laughing)

Sometimes they would use hype. You know, there's Eleazor the short.

I once had a student who had a really good sense of humor. I said to her, "I'll see you shortly." We were going to get back together for a meeting. I said, "I'll see you shortly," and she - she was about 5-foot-1, she said, "You know, Dr. Ben, that's the only way you'll see me, because I'm vertically challenged."

Audience: (laughter)

I liked that. I thought that was good.

Audience: (laughter)

People in Jesus's world weren't distinguished from other people, not in the way we distinguish everybody. In our world, the last name is everything. That's what distinguishes us from other people. I mean, many people could be Ben or John or Cathy, or whoever, right? It's the last names that distinguish us from other people. They didn't have any last names. The phone book must have been really confusing in Galilee.

And the reason is, that they were not all about individual identity. They were not all about individual personality. This is a modern, late Western preoccupation. It's not a Biblical one. It's not in the Bible. I've gone to some churches where they have this banner hovering in the narthex that said, "Accent on the Individual" and I'm going, "No!" We don't need any more accent on the individual. We need accent on the group.

The reason the Protestant movement is a many-splintered thing is we don't do group well. We don't do collective entity well. We don't do body of Christ well. We do radical individualism well. That's what we
do well and it's putting the emphasis on the wrong syllable as far as the Bible is concerned. The Bible does not ever put the emphasis on the individual. That is entirely secondary.

What's primary is the group. Always! Always primary - the group you're a part of. When Paul wants to describe the church he doesn't talk about the vineyard versus the Methodist versus the Baptist. When he wants to describe the church he says, "If anyone is 'what?'" In Christ. Your location is in the body of Christ. That's who you are. Period. You're not some individual group. You're in the Lord, and by the way, He's omnipresent. So He's not a little bit over here and a little bit over there. It's, you know, everywhere at once.

We have to rewind our mind and rethread our head on this one. Because individualism is not necessarily a good thing as far as the Bible is concerned. And you know, it affects everything. It affects the way you look at marriage. It affects the way you look at family. It affects the way you look at church, etc. Not good. But when Jesus goes to Caesarea Philippi and he says, "Who do people say that I am?" He's not taking a Gallup poll. He's acting like an ancient person with dyadic personality. The way a person learned who they were was by asking the group what their identity was. "What does the group say about me? Because that's my identify."

You see, it's not about radical individualism. It never was. But when Jesus wants to identify Himself, He uses a relational phrase and says, "You know, I'm most comfortable calling myself son of man. Because I'm one of you, but I'm like that son of man that came down on the clouds from Heaven in Daniel 7. I'm also one with Him. There was no phrase in the Old Testament that more felicitously combined the divinity and the humanity of our savior than son of man. Rightly understood in light of Daniel 7.

Now look what Daniel says about this man. It says that He is to be worshipped by every tribe and tongue and people in the nation. And how long is this kingdom going to last? Forever and ever and ever and ever. And the reason it's going to last forever is because, not because He's got descendants. Jesus did not marry Mary Magdalene and does not have offspring. Yea, verily. Okay?

Audience: (chuckling)

No, His kingdom's going to last forever because He's forever. And He's going to rule forever, and He's not going to cede his rule to us. In fact, Paul says in First Corinthians 15, "When Jesus returns He's going to finish the job of putting all of his enemies under his feet. He's going to finish the job of spreading the kingdom of God throughout the earth, and at that point, He's not handing the kingdom over to us and say "Run with the ball." He's handing the kingdom back to the father is what it says in First Corinthians 15.

We are simply His agents. I get really tired of ministers who say, "You know, 40,000 people have been converted through my ministry." Word up - first of all, it's not your ministry, and secondly, you didn't convert anybody. Okay? That would be like Shakespeare's quill pen saying "I wrote 15 plays."

Audience: (chuckling)

Not so much. It was the hand of the bard that wrote the plays. You were just the instrument. That's it! So one of the things that we have to deconstruct is:

A: Late Western individualism; and

B: Ego - when it comes to the ministry
Ego. I like the man who said "A big ego is like a big balloon that has been pricked with a pin. It has to continually be blown back up, because it's always losing air." I think that is really true. That is really true. When you've got ego deficiency disease you have to have somebody continually pumping you up. That's the way it works.

Have you noticed that the New Testament figures are not running around struggling with their self-image? Or feelings of low self-worth? In fact, quite the opposite - people like Paul running around boasting all the time. This is not somebody who suffering from ego deficiency.

I mean, I love it. You know, when he - when he's provoked he really goes on a tear. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Hebrews [inaudible 0:29:14]? Me, too. Pharisees? Me, too. In regard to keeping the law - I was blameless. Hello? You were blameless? You didn't break any of these laws? What?

You know, Paul knows how to brag with the best of them.

Audience: (chuckling)

He is not a late Western individualist.

Audience member: (coughing)

He's a person who's part of a corporate culture, a dyadic personality culture and you know - bragging ain't bragging if it's the truth as far as Paul's concerned. You see the truth of the matter is that he's not advocating either false humility or false pride. Somewhere between those two things is the truth and so when Jesus comes, he's not offering up false humility by saying, "I'm just a little old son of man. Poor little old humble me. That's me."

Listen to what Paul does to that story. Listen to what he does to the Daniel 7 story. This is Philippians 2. This is just so powerful. I don't need it. I can just recite it.

"Have this mind in your self that was also in Christ Jesus, who being the very nature of God did not consider the having of the quality with God something to be taken advantage of. So instead, He stripped Himself. He emptied himself, and taking on human form, He took on the form of a servant amongst all human beings. And He was obedient to the Father even unto death on the cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that's above all names, so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Now, this is a Christological hymn. The next time we get together we're going talk about Christological hymns and we're going to get into Paul really good. Next time.

But here he is describing the divine trajectory of the Son of Man who came down from Heaven, was fully human, did not renounce His divinity but He did renounce his divine frequent flyer perks.

Audience: (chuckling)

He stripped Himself of the need to push the God button. He didn't push the God button. And here's the interesting thing. Paul says, "Have this mind in you self." It was also in Christ Jesus. Christ is the model of stepping down. "He humbled Himself," says Paul.

Now if Christ is the model of humility, I put it to you this way brothers and sisters, humility can't have anything to do with feelings of low self-worth. If Christ is the model of humility, if Christ is the exemplar of humility that we are supposed to follow, it has nothing to do with feelings of low self-worth. It has
nothing to do with ego deficiency. If there was one person who ever walked the earth, who was confident of who he was, and didn’t have an identity crisis, it’s Jesus. Come on, now.

You know - you don’t see Him with angst, wringing his hands, wandering Galilee, “I’m not so sure who I am. You know, I was worried about this. Yesterday I felt better about this, but not so much today. I don’t know what ministry I’m called to. It’s hard.”

We don’t see Jesus doing this. Nor is He guilty of false humility. "Poor little old me, I - you know I’m a quart low on the Holy Spirit this week. I can’t do that many miracles. Ask me later!"

We don’t have "poor-mouthing" as we’d call it in North Carolina. Jesus doesn’t run around poor-mouthing. He does not do that. He is the example of humility. Humility - hear me now - is the posture of a strong person stepping down and serving others. Let me say that one more time. Humility is the posture of a strong person who can do self-sacrifice without losing sense of self. Humility is the strong person stepping down and serving others and that’s what Jesus did. Jesus didn’t lose his identity when He died on the cross. His identity became clearer on the cross. He was human as if He had never been God and He was God as if He had never been human and the cross revealed that perfect intersection of both His divinity and humanity.

Twas much that we were made like God long before, but that God should be made like us. Much more, said John Donne, the great poet. The son of man was a very interesting way for Jesus to place Himself in the Messianic discussion of His day because it wasn’t a tried and true phrase that all early Jews who believed the Messiah was coming would use. He got to fill it with His own concept. His own ideas, because people weren’t running around Galilee saying, "The son of man is coming!" No, they were saying the Messiah is coming. They were maybe saying the son of God is coming, but for sure they weren’t running around saying the son of man is coming.

This explains something else. You remember when John the Baptist was in prison and he sent two of his disciples to talk to Jesus? What was the question on their lips? Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another? This is John the Baptist, his cousin. Right? What do you think had "confused" John the Baptist? Jesus wasn’t acting like the stereotypical, prefabricated understanding that early Jews had about Messiah. He wasn’t acting that way. I mean, John comes and reads everybody the riot act and says, "Here comes the judge. Here comes the judge. Here comes the judge."

You know, if you want to win friends and influence people, don’t call them snake sperm. Okay? Don’t go there. It’s not a good thing. Right? "You brood of vipers," he says. You know? "Who told you to repent? Go away."

You see, John thought that what was going to follow him was the yom Yaweh. The day of the Lord which would be a judgement on Israel. Ka-Boom. And of course, he was right. That’s eventually what happened in 70 A.D. What confused him was Jesus, when He begins His ministry, when John is locked away in prison, goes into Galilee saying, "Repent! Good news! The kingdom of God is at hand." Everybody’s going, "Oh, my goodness."

John said that meant judgment. Jesus is saying that means salvation. This is because lots of early Jews, like we do, had separated judgment from salvation as if these were two different things. Whereas the Old Testament talks about redemptive judgment. The Old Testament talks about judgment begins where? With the household of God and after you have gone through the judgment, then what happens? The salvation comes thereafter.
After you go through the repentance, then the salvation comes, thereafter. After you go through the turning around and becoming a new creature, then salvation is with you. It’s a redemptive judgment. It’s a merciful judgment.

John was confused. For one thing, Jesus wasn’t running around calling Himself Son of God. For another thing, He wasn’t going around and condemning everybody. He was healing people, you know? Jesus was like, “Peace, love and happiness, dude.” You know? And John’s going, “What is up with that? The judgment of God is coming on Israel and you’re going around healing people? What has this got to do with it?” He was not expecting this. A good sermon.

Jesus didn’t come to meet our expectations. He came to meet our needs. He didn’t even come to meet John the Baptist’s expectations. He came to meet their needs. That’s what was going on.

Now let’s talk about this other phrase that keeps showing up on Jesus’s lips, because we have a lot of problems with that. On the way here, I passed a certain kingdom. It had rides, ferris wheels, you’ve undoubtedly been to this kingdom, or you’ve seen it on the highway as you went by. See, when we think of kingdom, we think of a place. Here’s the problem: The Aramaic word behind this word is “malkuth”. When Jesus spoke about this He talked about the malkuth Yahweh. Malkuth. The Hebrew word for king is "Melekh". The word for what He’s talking about is malkuth.

He’s not talking in the first instance about a place. When we think of the Magic Kingdom or the United Kingdom, we think of a place. Right? This is not the primary sense of what Jesus is talking about in the present tense. When he says, "If I, by the spirit of God, cast out demons you will know that the malkuth of God has broken into your midst.”

He’s not talking about “there’s a new piece of geography” here in Jerusalem. He’s not talking about a place. He’s talking about the divine saving activity breaking into human history. He’s not even talking about just the reign of God in general. I mean, all Jews believed that God was omnipresent and omnipotent, and that he reigned. You know, this is not what this means. This is not about the abstract idea that God rules the universe. This is not about that. This is about God’s divine saving activity breaking into human history and changing things.

If I, by the spirit of God, cast out demons, then you know that God’s reign has broken into that person’s life and set him free from bondage. It’s the divine eschatological saving activity. What Jesus is proclaiming is the end time saving activity of God. The final chance for the world. This is why it has such urgency. “It’s at hand,” says Jesus. "It’s breaking in right now. You need to accept it."

So He’s not talking about a place. He’s not talking about the abstract concept that God is sovereign and reigns. He’s talking about the divine in breaking, saving activity that’s changing the world, starting now. That’s what He’s talking about.

So, I would prefer the word that’s used in my translation of Daniel 7: Dominion. Not kingdom. Dominion. And why do I prefer that English word? Because the word dominion in English can be either a noun or a verb. You can have dominion over somebody. That's a verb. You can also enter a dominion. That’s a place.

What I’m going to say to you is, that Jesus, and then Paul after him, uses this word that we call kingdom - malkuth in the Aramaic, basileia in the Greek. He uses it in two senses. In the present he’s talking about the divine saving activity. Okay? When he talks about future, he is talking about a place. (musically) “There’s a place for us, somewhere a place for us.”
When He talks about it in the future, He talks about entering it. He talks about obtaining it. He talks about inheriting it. Now He is talking about a place. If you’re entering it it’s a place. There’s a door into it. There’s a gate. It’s a narrow way. Here’s the thing: right now He’s talking about the divine saving activity of God. In the future He’s talking about a place where that is fully manifest on earth as it is in Heaven.

So, the word dominion, I think, in English does a better job of conveying both the verbal sense of this Hebrew and Aramaic word and the noun sense. It’s referring to not just kingdom but kingship. It’s referring not to saving activity but a saved place, a holy land. But that’s in the future.

Now what’s interesting to me is that when Paul uses the kingdom language, which he does at least seven times in his letters, he uses it with the same degree of specificity as Jesus does. When Paul talks about the kingdom in the present, if you want to put it that way, he’s talking about changed lives. For example, he says to his Roman converts, “The kingdom of God does not consist in eating and drinking, but in love and joy and peace in the Holy Ghost,” he says.

Now, he’s not talking about a place. He’s talking about a condition. God’s reign in your life. God’s saving activity in your life, which produces the fruit of the spirit. Are you with me now? You get the picture? It’s a divine saving activity in my life. It’s not about a place. Okay?

But when Paul talks about the kingdom in the future, he says things like, “Brothers and sisters, flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of God.” Ahh - there’s that language of inherit. What three words did I say that used - that signal that he’s talking about a kingdom in the future? Obtain, enter or inherit.

Now he’s talking about a place. Now he’s talking about the kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in Heaven. Now he’s talking about the new Heaven and the new earth. Which, by the way, is our final destination. If you really want to avoid putting the emphasis on the wrong syllable, stop talking to people about dying and going to Heaven.

The New Testament spends about two percent of its time talking about that, and 98 percent of the time talking about resurrection. That you’re going to be raised like Jesus was raised when he comes back. And when you’re raised, their kingdom is going to come on earth, as it was in Heaven. Our final destination is not (musically) “Somewhere out there.”

Our final destination is to rule with Christ upon the earth and the new Heaven and new earth. The finish line at the end of the Book of Revelations is not somewhere out there, it's down here. There’s a corporate merger of Heaven and earth and right here, on terra firma, is where you’re going to finally land. This is our final destination, no "Beam me up Scotty" theology. Okay?

This is our final dwelling place. God will come down and dwell with us forever and ever. Hallelujah. And the future is going to be so bright we’re going to need really good, dark glasses. There will be no more need of sun and God will dwell in our midst and it will be really bright, to say the least. You get the picture? Okay.

So, kingdom can describe a place but not now; in the future. When the kingdom language shows up in the present it’s talking about the reign of God in the life of human beings here and now. The saving activity of God in the life of human beings here and now.

That's kingdom; that's malkuth; that's basileia. More about realm in the future, it's more about reign in the present. It’s more like - about dominion as a place in the future. It’s more about having dominion over us in the present. I mean, an exorcism is a perfect example of this. What happens? When you’re possessed,
something wicked this way comes and has possession of you, has dominion over you - has Lordship in your life.

What happens with an exorcism? That landlord is sent packing. You are no longer under the Lordship of a malevolent force. You’ve got a new sheriff in town. You’ve got the spirit of God in your life. That brings me to another little point. It’s not a minor point, though. If Jesus was Lord of your life He’s Lord of all your life. There is no room for two Lordships in the same life at one time. So none of this nonsense about Christians being possessed. I mean, this is just an un-Biblical idea.

If Christ is Lord of your life I think He’s powerful enough to account for Himself. The holy spirit is ruling in your life. I think He’s powerful enough to account for Himself. You can be bewitched, bothered and bewildered from the outside by powers of darkness as a Christian, and of course, we are. We’re tempted. We’re tried, etc. But it’s not within you. What’s in you is Christ in you, the hope of glory. What’s in you is the holy spirit ruling in your life. You are not - if you are a Christian, if anyone’s in Christ they’re a new creature and what dwells in their lives is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And that’s got Lordship over their lives.

There’s a lot of loose talk, especially in Deliverance ministries about - you know, I was suffering from a demon of this and a demon of that and it really isn’t Biblical. Not what the New Testament says.

The people who are suffering from this are people who are pre-Christian. Non-Christian. We need to name and claim the victory we have in Christ and not mis-theologically label what our condition is. We are Christians who are still under construction, but we have that strong Lord in our life.

The contrast in the tension in the Christian life is not between old persons and new persons, it’s between outer and inner. Outwardly we are wasting away in Old Margarettville. Inwardly we are being renewed day by day says Paul, by the grace of God. Tension in the Christian life is that we are new persons in old bodies. Can I get an “amen” to that?

Audience: Amen.

That body keeps talking to me about that, you know?

Audience member: (chuckling)

The weak chink in the Christian’s armor is that while our minds and our hearts and our spirits and our emotions and our wills are being renewed inwardly by the work of God’s grace. Outwardly we are wasting away. The weak chink in our armor is our bodies. That’s it. And they’re terminal. Unless Jesus comes back before you die or resurrections happens before you die.

One of the things we need to get straight is that within our inner being of who we are dwells the Lord of the universe. This is such a hard concept to get hold of. Christ in you. In you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you. And you know - and this is not about I feel like that’s the way it is, because you know, our feelings are notoriously bad gods to what the truth is.

Have you noticed how deceptive feelings are? Our culture is all about feelings, and feelings are a horrible guide to relationships and everything else, too. You know? People say, “I can not deny my feelings.” Well, yes you can. Yes you can. You do admit that you have them. That’s honesty, but then what you do with them is a whole ’nother matter. What are you supposed to do with them? Just, you know, glorify them because they’re feelings? They’re, (musically) “Feelings, nothing more than feelings.”
No. Have you noticed that in the New Testament that love is commanded? Have you ever tried to command your feelings? I'M GOING TO BE INTERMINABLY JOFUL FOR THE NEXT FIVE POINT THREE MINUTES. (pause) Whoo-hoo! (high-pitched voice) I'm feeling good boys and girls. (low voice) Hello, everybody. It's your old pal Grover and I am joyful now.

No, it doesn’t work that way. You can not command your feelings. You can not do it. Feelings take you for a ride. They come and go. You may get to a worship service expecting for a good buzz, but that'll be a by-product. It's not the product. You can’t control it. It happens. Feelings happen, you know? And they are subject to so many vicissitudes. The state of your health - how rested are you? I mean, I could list you 20 things that affect your feelings. Right?

When the New Testament says love your neighbor as yourself, it does not mean have warm, mushy feelings about your neighbor daily. When it says love your enemies, it doesn't even mean you need to like them very much. The fact that love can be commanded and feelings can’t ought to tell us He’s not talking about feelings. He’s not. These two phrases are keys into the heart of Jesus and how He viewed Himself and how He viewed His ministry.

It's crucial that we get hold of those if we really want to understand Jesus. Now with that, we're ready to look at Luke. So, lets talk about Luke.

He's the historian and he's deliberately writing as a historian. If I were to take the time I could show you prefaces to other ancient historical works. For instance, there's the famous Greek historian named Polybius. There's another famous Greek historian named Thucydides. There's a famous Jewish historian whose name you probably do know: Josephus. Right?

When you look at other ancient historical works look at the preambles to their historical works. This preface to Luke's gospel is like that. He's stating that he's a serious historian and he's going to write using sources, consulting eyewitnesses. He's going to follow the very best tradition of Greek historiography, consulting the eyewitnesses, getting to the straight bottom truth about these things and writing an orderly account. That's what he says he's doing.

But who is he writing for? He's writing for Theophilus, probably a particular individual. Can you imagine being a particular young, neophyte Christian who's literate, the first one who got hold of this gospel, and here were 24 chapters about Jesus. Of course, he didn't know it was 24 chapters 'cause there were no chapters in verses. But it was one honkin' long scroll, right? Written in scriptum continuum about Jesus.

Not only that, shortly thereafter comes part two, the sequel. The Book of Acts, 28 chapters now. Luke’s either very long-winded or there are a lot of important things to say. One or the other. Probably Theophilus was a Gentile, but equally probably he was a God feeder.

Why do I say that? Because Luke frequently quotes the Greek Old Testament, which was the Bible of Jews in the Diaspora. He frequently quotes the Greek Old Testament. He doesn't know Aramaic or Hebrew. Now, how do we know that? In the passages that Luke uses from Mark where Mark uses an Aramaic phrase, like when Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus and says Talitha Koum, Luke just leaves that right on out. You know, it's like a student writing a term paper reading the source that has German in it and doesn't know German, and they just like sort of like missed that bit out. Move on to the English here.

Luke uses the Greek Old Testament. He uses the LXX, the Greek Old Testament, the translation of the Old Testament throughout both of his volumes - in the gospel and in the Book of Acts. This man is not only
literate, he’s eloquent. He tells stories powerfully. When you get to the parables of Jesus in Luke, he has expanded them so that many of them are powerful short stories.

I mean - think about it. Where is the parable of the prodigal son? It’s only in Luke’s gospel. Where is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector? The IRS man. That’s only in Luke. Where is the parable of the Good Samaritan? I mean, the parables that really have shown up as more of a narrative, not just a brief analogy? They’re in Luke. Luke is a gifted writer. He’s a powerful writer and he’s eloquent. The way he tells a story is just remarkably powerful. (music)

Luke has been called the historian of salvation history. And what he does in his first two chapters in the Gospel of Luke is really remarkable. He writes it in the style of the history writing in the Old Testament. It’s clear that he’s deeply saturated in the stories of the Old Testament about the coming of kings. So, he deliberately has echoes from the story of Hannah in Luke 1 and 2.

Now you know the story of Hannah. Who was she the mother of? Samuel. And at what point in her life did she have this child? (pause) She was old. That’s right. She had her AARP card already. There is a deliberate casting of the story such that we will think of previous examples of remarkable stories of birth, and then when you have the "Ode to Joy" of Elizabeth it echoes Hannah’s song in Samuel as well.

The saying that the child would be dedicated to God is the same between Samuel and John the Baptist, and so what Luke is doing is he’s showing that on the one hand the story that he’s narrating is a continuation of salvation history. As God had done it before, he does it similarly now. There are things to be learned from the Old Testament sacred texts from those stories about kings and kingdoms and remarkable births, and important prophets and Messianic figures.

But Luke is doing much more than that as well. He’s taking the time to begin the stories slowly so that we will see ourselves in the narrative. We’ll have a sense of the plight of God’s people and the need for deliverance and salvation. Of course, this film - which is a very fine film, called "The Nativity" - really gives you the sense of the context, that it was a difficult time. It was a threatening time. It was not a good time for a Messiah to show up because Jews didn’t have control even over their own land. But God doesn’t come at convenient times. He comes when the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

So this story is told carefully and elegantly and even the Greek has been called here like Jewish Greek. You know, it would be like us going around "yea verily" and speaking King James 8.

The Greek in this part of the gospel is different from the Greek later in the gospel because he’s trying to get this feel that it’s a continuation of the Old Testament story. The way Luke looks at that becomes clear later. He, in essence is going to say that John the Baptist is the watershed figure. He’s the last Old Testament prophet. He’s the end of the line of the story of the old covenant. He’s the watershed that has one foot in the old and one foot in the new and looking towards the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is going to praise John the Baptist as the greatest of all men born of women, but he’s then going to say that even the least in the kingdom of God is greater than him.

So, it’s a story of continuation, but it’s also a story of new beginnings, too. There’s an overlap between the old and the new in the persons of Zechariah and Elizabeth, but not only in the persons of Zechariah and Elizabeth, in the life of Mary. In the life of Joseph and the people that they meet. They go up to Jerusalem and they meet people like Simeon and Anna, who definitely represent the old order and the Old Testament prophecy scene.
No question - there's this beautifully melded overlap so that when you get to the actual point of telling
the story of John the Baptist, you have the context. You know, one of the problems we have in dealing
with the birth stories, is of course, we've melded them together in our mental cuisinarts.

There are no wise men in Luke 1 and 2. There are no shepherds in Matthew 1 and 2. These are different
stories and they're told from different points of view. Some have said Luke 1 and 2 is told more from a
woman's point of view - Elizabeth and Mary - where Matthew 1 and 2 is told more from a man's point of
view - especially Joseph. Indeed.

Well, I think there's some truth to that. These stories are not competing stories. They supplement one
another in various ways. The places that they have overlap are interesting. Both of these birth narratives
insist on a very unusual impregnation, a virginal conception. I don't say virgin birth because the miracle
doesn't happen at birth so far as we can tell. The miracle happens at the point of conception, so the
miracle is the miracle of the virginal conception.

This is a crucial issue. It's so important that both of these very different tellings of the beginnings mention
this idea. They also mention that Jesus is from Nazareth. They also mention that Jesus is born in
Bethlehem, not in Nazareth. Both of these accounts agree on those three things but in other regards they
are completely different accounts. Not discordant, just different. Different points of view. Different
perspectives pursuing different angles of the story, and of course, what this film is trying to do is meld
them together. How do you get the stories together?

You know, our image of Christmas is concocted not only from blending the gospels together but from
later Christian traditions. Let me read to you from the Gospel of Luke just for a minute verses you will
have heard over Christmas, I suspect. But listen to what the text actually says. I'll be reading to you from
Luke 2, so listen closely. I'm already skipping to verse five. We're skipping on the names.

"So Joseph went to be registered with Mary to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child and
while they were there" - nothing's said about it happening immediately when they arrive. First of all the
Greek is clear, it just says "while they were there" - sooner or later. "While they were there, the time came
for her to deliver her child and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and
laid him in a manger because there was no room in the guest room."

If your translation says "there was no room in the inn" - not a very good translation. Here's the word
"kataluma". If you do a word study on this Greek word, it is used elsewhere in Luke's gospel. It refers to
the room in which the Passover was celebrated by Jesus and his disciples. The guest room. It does not say
there was no room in the inn.

Now lets talk about Bethlehem for a minute. Bethlehem was not even a one stop sign town, never mind a
one stoplight town. Bethlehem, so far we can tell, had no inn. It was not big enough to have even a
Holiday Inn Express. It was not on any major road. When Luke wants to talk about an inn, he uses a very
different Greek word. It's pandokheion. This is the word used in the parable of the Good Samaritan.
Where did the Good Samaritan leave the wounded man? At the inn in Jericho. This word, not that word.
Are you with me now?

Luke has a perfectly good word for "inn" and he doesn't use it in the birth story. So, what are we talking
about here? This totally reconfigures the Christmas story, so I'm messing with you now. Are you ready?
He was born in a place where there was a manger because there was no room in the guest room. So
what's happened? The holy family has arrived at the ancestral home in Bethlehem - Joseph's ancestral
home - and other relatives have gotten there first, so what happened? The guest room is booked up. So
where do they put Mary and Joseph? They don’t send them off to the Holiday Inn Express. They put them in the back of the house. The back of the house is where you kept your most precious beast of burden.

Hence, there was a manger there. Hence, there was a food crib, or trough, there. Alright? So let me draw you a picture of what we’re talking about here. Here’s the house. (marker squeaking) A typical rectangular Jewish home with an opening.

Basically they had regions in the house. You saw this some in the way they depicted it, which they did a nice job of. There’s this sort of living area for the family and this is both living and cooking area near the front door so the smoke goes that way because they didn’t have chimneys. Over here would be a guest room, if they could afford it and the house was big enough. And then there would be a partition in the house, and behind the partition is where you keep the animals, so there would be a corn crib here. You put your beast of burden in the back of the house. There’s the back door where they can come in, if you want to go somewhere that’s not smelly and stinky. There’s a stairway on the outside of the house, and where do you go? Up on the roof is where you go. Okay?

Now, this is a normal first century house, whether it’s mud brick, or made out of stones, this is a normal first century house and what we’re being told in Luke 2 is that the holy family ended up in the back part of the ancestral home where they would normally keep the ox, because they didn’t want it stolen at night. But in this case, they simply put Mary and Joseph and the baby there, and the baby was laid in the corn crib, right there.

So, no more sermons about there was no room in the inn and the world cast Jesus out. No more sermons like that, thank you very much.

Audience: (chuckling)

And also, no more "Bethlehem was inhospitable." No, they just didn’t get there in time to book up the guest room. And of course, they couldn’t send an email message in advance to tell people on top of which, they probably couldn’t afford to send a courier with a message that had been written out by a scribe. So when they showed up, they showed up and they said, "Well, more of our relatives." The way they were, "Where do we put them now?" And the head of the household says "Put ’em in the back of the house." So that’s where they need to go, friend.

Audience member: (clears throat) I have a question about the census that it talks about.

Yes.

Audience member: That Caesar decreed. I didn’t realize that the Romans were interested in going to the families’ homeland, or the - Joseph’s homeland.

Mm-hmm.

Audience member: Or city.

Well, we found this practice in other Roman provinces. In Egypt the Egyptians were asked for the census to go to their ancestral towns, so we know it’s a known Roman practice. It would just be applying to Judea where they’d already done for the taxation of Egypt, and probably other provinces as well. And they did depict this correctly, that there’s two taxes, of course. There’s money for Caesar but there’s also money for the temple. The so-called temple tax, as well. Which, if you noticed, is less. It’s the Tyrian half shekel, rather than the full Tyrian shekel. Caesar wants a bigger cut than the temple gets, okay? So - yes, that did happen.
New Testament Introduction. Dr. Ben Witherington

Now if you're wondering where the nice little Jesus was born in a barn thing comes from, it's not in Matthew, it's not in Luke. It comes from St. Francis of Assisi. He's the first one who put the shepherds and the wise men and the holy family together in a barn. And he's the first one that suggested that's how we should celebrate the birth of Jesus. But if you're wondering where that whole scenario comes from and where we started going on the Christmas pageants, it was St. Francis of Assisi. You can blame him. He's the one.

Now - if you read the story in Matthew 1 and 2 and you read Luke's story in Luke 1 and 2, it's perfectly clear that the shepherds come at the time of Jesus's birth. The wise men come later. In fact, the Matthean text says, "And when they were at home," (chuckles) "when they were at home" - that is, in the ancestral home - "they were visited by the wise men." Okay? Some other things, if you read the details of - do the exegesis of Luke 1 and 2 and Matthew 1 and 2 - we don't know the names of the wise men and while we're at it, they're not kings.

So, no more (musically) "We three kings of orient are." Not so much - no, they are astrologers. They are called "Magus Magi", from which we get the word "magi". Okay? They are astrologers. They are court counselors to kings. They are the ones who consult the stars and have wisdom, not only about the future from the stars but they have other kinds of wisdom, so they are - if you will - the advisors to a king. But they aren't kings. They aren't kings.

Nor do we know that there are three of them. There were three gifts, but three gifts could be given by ten people. We don't know how many there were. There could have been two, there could have been three, there could have been ten. We do not know. We just don't know.

So much of this story - and the reason I'm doing this is encrusted with later Christian mythology, that what you have to do, is you have to - when you strip it down to the bare beautiful story of Luke or Matthew, it's a wonderfully beautiful story but it's just not the story we usually tell at Christmas.

And here's the problem with that: When you blend the Biblical story with later legend and myth, and people find out that there's later legend and myth, the same thing happens to the Christian story that happens to Santa Claus. They throw literally the baby out with the bath water. The important thing about the Christmas story is to be honest about the story, and tell us what it does say and what it doesn't say.

Lets talk about those two visitors - sets of visitors: The shepherds versus the wise men - just for a minute.

Luke is emphasizing that the least, the last and the lost will become the first, the most and the found because the savior of the world has arrived, and so instead of being visited by the high and mighty, he's being visited by the most plebian person imaginable. In fact, in Judaism, shepherds were not only considered stinky and dirty like their sheep, they were generally considered unclean. So the story of the shepherd getting in on the birth of Jesus is a remarkable story, and it would have been unexpected by the Pharisees. What? The Messiah shows up and who shows up? Not the Pharisees and the clean Levites? The shepherds show up? I'm thinking not, say the Pharisees. You know, this is not what they expected.

I like what one ancient preacher said about this story. He said, "We were looking for a king to slay our foes and lift us how - high; thou cam'st a little baby thing that made a woman cry." One of the earliest Christian hymns from the Middle Ages says, "The Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, unless he's born in you, your heart is still forlorn."
This story doesn't meet expectations. It's a surprising story, all the way around. It has one surprise after another after another and part of the surprise is the shepherds. You know? I don't know if you spent time with shepherds and sheep. I have. I've been to Bethlehem.

Audience: (murmuring)

I've seen the Bedouins. I've seen the stinky sheep. I've smelled the stinky sheep. These folks might not normally be on anybody's guest list, but they were there, sang Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to human beings of God's favor. And it shows that Luke wants to make clear that this is a savior, not only for the first, the most and the found, not only for the socially elite like Ezechias, the tax collector, but also for the least, the last and the lost.

I like it when Peter Marshall once said, "Jesus was born in a corn crib to show that no human being was beneath his dignity." He lifts us up from below. Not from on high. (music) And he is honored from below by the shepherds. It's powerful.
Chapter 5

Luke and John

We were talking about Luke writing for Gentiles, and he had to audience his material in a way that this audience would understand. His methodology, however, is very definitely the methodology of a historian.

What's interesting about that is that while Matthew arranges the teaching material topically - okay? Luke arranges material like a student writing a term paper. He Source A, then he goes to Source B. Then he goes to Source A, then he goes to Source B. Then he goes to Source A, then he goes to Source B, which is how ancient historians wrote their documents.

So if you were to look at the structure of the Gospel of Luke, what you have interestingly enough is a block of Markan material followed by a block of non-Markan material, followed by a block of Markan material, followed by a block of non-Markan material, etc., etc., et ad nauseam. That's how he arranges his material, and when he does that he's following the practices of ancient historians who were writing first century and even earlier Greek history.

The other interesting thing he does, is he's trying to arrange his material geographically, as well. You can see this better in Acts than you can in the gospel, but basically his gospel has a "to Jerusalem" orientation, and Acts is from Jerusalem to a world, including and finishing in Rome. Are you with me now? You get the picture?

So the geographical funnel in the gospel is to Jerusalem, going up from Galilee to Jerusalem. In the middle of Luke's gospel we hear he's set his face like a flint to go up to Jerusalem. The gospel has this to Jerusalem orientation. So strong is that to Jerusalem orientation in this gospel, that in fact, he leaves out all the appearances of Jesus in Galilee. Have you noticed that?

All of the appearance stories that show up in Luke's gospel are in or around Jerusalem. The one that's the furthermost astray is on the road to Emmaus.

The resurrection Easter appearance stories don't include any of the appearances of Jesus in Galilee. Why? Well, this is a schematization. He's providing a to Jerusalem orientation in his gospel and a from Jerusalem to the world, including to the heart of the empire in Rome in the Book of Acts.

So, he's arranged his material geographically like an ancient historian and geographer would do in various ways. That affects the way he presents the material, and where he houses certain kinds of material here, there and yonder. That sort of portion of Luke's gospel that are after the birth narratives and before the Passion narrative - he's arranging that very clearly according to historiographical precedence of how you arrange your material. Okay? That's what he's doing as an historian.

Now here's the interesting - Then I have this up here, of the Gospel of Mark, Luke uses only 55 percent of the Markan material we have in Mark's gospel. Okay? What percentage did I tell that you of Mark's material that we find in Matthew?

Audience member: 95 percent.
95 percent. A huge difference. And the reason Luke is doing less is because he's got a lot more unique material. There is a lot more "Special L" material; uniquely Lukan material in Luke that than there is "Special M" material in the Gospel of Matthew.

In order to make room for things like the parable of the Good Samaritan and the parable of the Prodigal Son and the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus and the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee and all kinds of other uniquely Lukan stories - the way he makes room for that is he's uses less of Mark. That's -

Because why? Because he has a limit to the size of the document. Right? It's not because he doesn't like Mark. It's because he really wants to include this unique material. Here's the other thing: Luke is writing, knowing that there are other gospels out there, so he doesn’t feel it absolutely incumbent upon him to simply repeat everything that was in previous gospels.

It's clear to me he knew Mark. It's possible that he knew Matthew. I'm not clear about that. It's possible he knew Matthew, but most certainly he knew Mark.

Here's the other interesting thing: Of the Markan material that he takes over, it's not only 55 percent of Mark that he takes over in the Markan material, he repeats it 55 percent verbatim. Which is a bit more than Matthew does. In terms of the actual verbiage, the vocabulary, etc.

He's very faithful to his Markan source when he's repeating Mark. Okay? Very little stylistic variation here, there and yonder. So, he's presenting himself as a careful historian, even to those who may have read Mark's gospel. You know, they might say, "Oh, I've read Mark. Now I'm reading Luke. Why the heck did Luke say this, but Mark said this?"

You know, he's careful when he's dealing with that Markan material. Here's the other thing about Luke that I really would want to stress to you as a historian. He's trying to avoid anachronism. Now remember what I mean by anachronism. The reading back into the past of something that wasn't a part of the past. Okay?

Let me give you an example of how he avoids anachronism while still addressing a Christian audience. Turn with me, if you will, to Luke, Chapter 7. (pause)

We're going to deal with the story about the widow of Nain's son. A uniquely Lukan story, one of many. Okay? This is verse 11 of chapter 7 of Luke.

"Now soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain." Which by the way, is just a stone's throw from Nazareth. "And his disciples in a large crowd went with him and as he approached the gates of the town a man who had died was being carried out. A young man. He was his mother's only son, and she was now a widow. With her was a large crowd from the town."

Notice this next verse. "And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep'."

Now, what I want you to notice is the use of the term "Kurios" here. Lord, okay? For us this is no big deal. Well, of course Jesus is Lord. But, in fact, Jesus was not called Lord with a capital "L" before Easter. So what Luke does is very interesting. No where in Luke's gospel is Jesus addressed as Lord with a capital "L" in the dialogue. Okay? Are you with me now?

In the sayings of Jesus and in the dialogues with Jesus nobody calls him Lord with a capital "L". We do have this word, and there is a difference. We have a vocative that is Kyrie. This is what we'd call the Lord
with a little "l" like lords and ladies. It's a term of respect meaning good sir. Right? It would be the ancient equivalent of "sir". You know?

So, for example, Jesus says, "No one who says 'Kyrie, Kyrie' is necessarily going to get into the kingdom of God. He's not talking about "calling me Lord, calling me Lord". He's talking about no one simply says "respected sir, respected sir" has automatically got a free ticket into the kingdom of God.

Audience member: (coughing)

So the word "Lord" is not used in its post-Easter sense in the dialogue in Luke's gospel, but in the framework of Luke's gospel. In the narrative framework, where it's Luke addressing the audience, like this verse, he's going to call him Lord because of course, He is Luke's Lord, and He is the Theophilus's Lord. You see what I'm getting at?

He's very careful not to read back into the ministry of Jesus language that would be post-Easter language. He's very careful about that. Well, that's a historical concern, of trying to avoid an anachronism and this is a good example of this. Okay?

Call Jesus "Lord" in the narrative that you're narrating to somebody, but you wouldn't want to have the characters who are, after all, all Jews talking like post-Pentecost Christians, because they didn't. Right? So, that's the issue. That's a historical issue that's the important one.

Now there's several other things to say about the Gospel of Luke that I would like you to understand. One of the things is, is that it does seem clear to me that Luke is concerned with apologetics because of who he's written this gospel to, namely Theophilus. But a Gentile, maybe his patron, maybe a god-fearer, in any case a new Christian.

One of the things he is concerned about is to make clear to Theophilus that Christianity first of all is a legitimate religion, secondly Christianity is not simply Judaism, Part II, the sequel, and thirdly, Christianity is no threat to the Roman Empire.

Now this is very important to Luke. You can see this more in the Book of Acts than you see it in the gospel, but you definitely see it in the trial scenes in the gospel. What does Pilate in Luke's gospel say over and over about Jesus? Is he guilty or innocent?

Pilate, in Luke's gospel repeats over and over again, "I can find no fault in this man." Now what's the point of that? The point is, that the Roman judicial process does not think he's guilty of treason.

Why is this so important to a brand new religion? Any religion that didn't have the official endorsement of the Roman Empire was considered a superstition and illegal.

Are you with me now? Judaism was a licit, or legal, religion. Luke is arguing Christianity should just as much be a legal religion as Judaism is. That's part of what he's arguing for here and the way he presents the inner changes between Roman authorities and either Jesus or his successors.

So, for example, fast forward to the story about Paul in the pokey in Philippi. Remember this story? What happens in this story? Well, he's incarcerated for preaching away and doing this that and the other in Philippi and you know, being some kind of public nuisance and all of that. And, there's this earthquake. You know the whole story, right?
But what happens at the end of the story is crucial. Paul refuses to leave jail. Why? He refuses to leave jail until he gets a public apology for being wrongly incarcerated, especially since, as a Roman citizen, no Roman citizen should have ever been jailed without benefit of a fair trial first.

This did not happen. He’s a victim of malpractice of jurisprudence. He says, “I’m going to stay right here until you apologize.” You know? And you can actually hear the Philippian official, which was a Roman colony city, in other words it was a city run on the model of Rome with Rome’s law. Philippi had been a Greek city. It was not a Greek city any more. It was a Roman colony city and it’s law was Roman law. Okay?

Paul says, “Not to mention I’m a Roman citizen.” And now the guy’s really swallowing hard. (swallowing sound) “What? You’re a Roman citizen? Oh, dear.”

Slip out the back, Jack. Make a new plan, Stan. Drop off the key, Lee. Set yourself free. I don’t want this trouble any more. Okay? Get out of town!

He suddenly realized that he has shamed a Roman citizen and not given him due process. Well you see, Luke is concerned to make clear that Christianity is not inherently a threat to Roman jurisprudence. It’s not a new revolution. It’s not a slave revolt. It’s not a militaristic movement, even though it talks about kings and kingdoms. Okay?

Well, that’s a hard message to get across, because anytime you start talking about kingdoms you’re talking about a king. In the ancient world you don’t have kings that don’t have weapons. You know? You don’t have kings that lead rebellions against the Roman Empire.

So, the way that Luke couches the presentation of the gospel in both his gospel in Acts is he’s trying to show apologetically to Theophilus, and whoever else will listen, that Christianity should be seen as a genuine, legitimate option in the pluralistic options of religions in the Roman Empire, and you don’t need to worry that it’s subversive. I mean, that’s the bottom line. You don’t need to worry that it’s subversive.

And, of course, then that makes sense all of this huge portion of Acts devoted to the trial of Paul, which goes on ad infinitum, ad nauseam to the end of the book. He gets a free ride to Rome on a grain freighter with a Roman centurion. Why? Because he’s appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen. Right?

So, he’s vindicated in Jerusalem. Phæstus and Felix can’t convict him of anything, and when there’s any danger of malfeasance, he simply says, ”I appeal to Caesar.” And he’s off to Rome.

At the end of the book, what happens? He’s preaching freely in Rome while under house arrest and probably busily converting all these nice little Roman soldiers that are chained to his wrist. Talk about having a captive audience.

Audience: (coughing)

“You know Publius, I’m glad you’re here for today. There’s a lot you’re going to hear. Some of my disciples will be visiting me in this house, and then some synagogue officials, and while we’re here it would be good if you would listen as well.”

And, of course, Paul brags about this in Philippians. He talks about how he converted various members of the Praetorian guard who had come to guard him. In Luke Acts there is an apologetic bent to the document to make clear that Christianity is user friendly for the Roman Empire.
Now, I think that's very clear and that it is not subversive. I think that shapes the way he does his two volumes as historian. He’s doing an apologia, which doesn’t mean he’s going around saying, “I’m ever so sorry for Christianity. I just apologized,” when apologia means a defense of the faith and that’s what he’s doing.

Audience member: What were the time frames for the writing of Luke and Acts?
Well, I think it, of course it comes after Mark, and I think it probably comes after Matthew. So, it’s probably in the ’80s.

Audience member: Both of them?
Yes. I think it’s one and then the other. You know, one after the other.

Now here’s another little footnote that you would not get unless you were reading some detailed commentary on Luke Acts. What’s interesting to me is that Acts looks like it went through a process of refinement and editing more than the gospel did. Okay?

It looks to me like Luke began working backwards, producing a smoother version of Acts because the gospel actually after the first two really beautiful chapters has more grammatical, iffy bits and sentence structured question marks. It looks like Acts got a second edition. The version of Acts that we have looks like it had a second - got a second edition whereas the Gospel of Luke looks like it’s still the first draft, from a grammatical, syntactical and vocabulary point of view.

Nevertheless, Luke Acts together has some of the best Greek in all of the New Testament, and rightly so. Alright, we’re going to move on.

We’re now going to move on to the fourth gospel, and as I said, this is a whole different ball of wax. Yes, Cathy?
Cathy: ...Can I ask a question?
Please.
Cathy: ...way earlier?
Yes, sure.
Cathy: [inaudible 0:17:52] question about the son of man conversation.
Yes.
Cathy: Your books were really [inaudible 0:17:56] talks to him about [inaudible 0:17:58] misuse...
Mm-hmm.
Cathy: ...translation
Yes.
Cathy: When you were reading from Daniel 7 you said, "Humans [crosstalk 0:18:05]
Yes.
Cathy: How can we [inaudible 0:18:07] of those things when we do translations [crosstalk 0:18:11]...
Cathy: [inaudible 0:18:11 to 0:18:13] completely different in Daniel [inaudible 0:18:14] no way he would [inaudible 08:16]

Here’s what I think. I think that you don’t mess with technical phrases that are dependent in their very wording on some earlier portion of scripture that gives you a context for understanding. If you just call Jesus a son of humanity, it just means He’s a human being and you completely miss the Daniel context.

The reason for sticking with son of man is not just because Jesus is a male, although that’s true. The reason for sticking with this is that what is being said here is that that figure back there in Daniel 7 is the particular son of man he’s talking about. He’s not just talking about, for example, the son of man referred to in Psalm 8. Which is just - where it just means human being, right?

See, there’s another whole side to this which makes this important. That is, that you may notice that there are no son of man phrases in Paul’s letters anywhere. He does not ever call Jesus the son of man. In fact, the phrase son of man applied to Jesus doesn’t occur anywhere out of the gospels in Acts. It never happens, except in the Book of Revelation. But in the Book of Revelation it’s simply a quoting of Daniel. It’s not a quoting of a saying of Jesus. It’s the quoting of Daniel, and that’s a whole different ballgame. Right?

Here’s what I think is happening here. Instead of son of man, Paul has a different word. He wants to call Christ the last Adam. Now this is a theologically loaded phrase. You could actually call him the eschatological Adam. The eschatos Adam. The last Adam. Okay?

What Paul may have deduced from the use of Jesus’s use of son of man is that Jesus’s claiming to be the founder of the race of human beings all over again. He’s Adam gone right. Whereas the first Adam was Adam gone wrong. And so we have two passages in Paul’s letters Romans 5:12-21 and I Corinthians 15:45 and following where we hear about the last Adam as opposed to the first Adam. Okay? You with me now?

Well, that image to a Jew is this person is the last founder of the human race. This is the last chance the human race has to start over again and it started over with Jesus. Right?

It may be that this is Paul’s way of using the concept of son of man to convey that idea to Gentiles who would not know the Old Testament. I mean, calling Jesus the son of man would not set off any royal, regal or messianic bells for a Gentile unless they knew the Old Testament. Even then they would have to know a specific portion of the Old Testament. They’d have to know Daniel for it to have anything - mean anything other than a mere human being. Right?

When you’re dealing with a technical phrase like son of man, it seems to have a theologically charged sense and context. That’s when I say to the translator, “Don’t mess with this.” The reason not to is that what you will do is you will dumb down the phrase to a level that nobody will hear the echo of Daniel here. Nobody will understand that this is a loaded term. It’s not just claiming Jesus is truly human. It’s claiming far more than that. So, it’s always tricky how you’re going to translate Christological terms like this. Okay?

Ordinary human terms like, you know, Peter is addressing an audience of both men and women. In the Greek it simply says men, it may even say males, andres, you know. But he means men and women. I have no problems with a translation that’s inclus - gender inclusive because it’s clear that the audience is both men and women. Okay?

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That's just a reflex of a patriarchal culture. That's all. There's not a theological issue here. I don't have a problem with a translation that wants to - which Paul says brothers in Christ and it's clear from the letter he's addressing people like Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians, and he means brothers and sisters in Christ. I don't have a problem with the translation that instead of just saying brothers "x" he's going to translate this "brothers and sisters" because the context makes clear he's addressing men and women. Okay?

If he's addressing only a male audience, that's a different ballgame. It's fine just to say brothers there. So - I mean, first of all, inclusive language is an issue at the anthropological level, and I don't there are problems with that. The places where you get into sticky water is when you start talking about inclusive language applied to Christological language or even straight forward theological language.

So lets talk just a minute - since this is such an important theological issue lets talk about this. Premise number one is that as Jesus Himself says, "God is spirit. God in the divine nature is neither male nor female." Okay?

Sorry Mormons, you're wrong. That's just bad theology. God is spirit. The Son of God, however, has a human nature which is male, but it's His human nature that is male. It's not the divine nature that is male.

Now here's where it really gets interesting. I argued this at some length in my little tiny book called "Shadow of the Almighty". What's interesting to me is how seldom father language comes up in the Old Testament for God. For example, have you noticed that nowhere in the Old Testament is God addressed in prayer as "Father"? There's not a single example of that in the Old Testament.

That's a shocker. When you turn to the New Testament and in John's gospel alone God is called "Father" 145 times. Wow! What a contrast from the Old Testament. You know?

One of the typical arguments of radical feminists is that calling God "Father" is just a reflex of patriarchal culture. Off with his head. We don't like this language any more. it conjures up images of bad human fathers. Lets not go there. Right?

This is problematic for several reasons. First of all, Jesus taught us to pray to God as "Father". So you're going to do theology quite specifically against the recommendation of the second person of the Trinity. That's a problem, you know? That's a theological problem right there.

But the other point that they think they have made they have not made. God is rarely called "Father" in the Old Testament and it actually has nothing whatsoever to do when He is called that, with Him being a great white male in the sky.

What it has to do with is that God is the generator. He's the Creator. He's the creator of Creation, He's the creator of his own people. When He's called Father it has to do with the role that He plays, not His identity but His role that He plays as a father in relationship to His people. Okay?

But even then, God is not addressed in prayer as "Father" in the Old Testament. So when you get to this plethora of references to God as "Father" in all the gospels and the rest of the New Testament, it's not because they are repristinizing a patriarchal culture and calling it good. That's not what's happening here.

The reason God is called "Father" in the New Testament is because in the first instance He is the father of Jesus Christ. Let's be very clear about this. Jesus is the only begotten son of the Father. We are adopted sons and daughters of God. He's the only begotten son of the Father.
I was teaching Sunday school in Durham, England when I was doing my doctoral work and this sweet little eight-year-old British girl who was just bright as a button came up to me at Christmas and said, (with British accent) "Let me see if I’ve got this right. If - if God is Jesus’s father - " You could just hear the wheels turning, " - and Mary is Jesus's mother, were God and Mary married? And if not -." Wheels turning, "- was Jesus illegitimate?"

Audience: (chuckling)

Now this is a better question than I get from some seminary students. You know? This is a very good question. Why does Jesus call God “Abba”? It’s because He is His Abba. He is His father. That’s the facts, Jack. That’s it. It’s a theological thing. He’s the only begotten son of the Father.

God from God, light from light, etc., etc., etc. That’s who He is. And here’s the thing - we get in on the deal. We get to call God Abba when we become the adopted sons and daughters of God through Christ who is the only begotten son.

So this language of God as Abba doesn’t come to us through the patriarchal culture but through the unique relationship of Jesus with God. That’s where it comes from, and that’s a theological principal, not a cultural principal. And therefore, I’m saying lets not mess with the theological language for God.

Now - I’m all for using all the Biblical images for God that we have in the Bible, and some of the images of God are female. God, like a mother nurtured his people. God like a mother nursed his children. Okay? You have images like this. Use them. It’s okay. It’s in the Bible. Right?

It reminds us that God is neither male nor female in the divine nature. Use all of the Biblical images. Don’t limit the images of God that you use to just a few narrow ones that might convey to somebody that God is either a male or a female, or both. You know? That’s a problem. Use all of the Biblical images for God.

But when God is named, God is never called a "she" in the Bible, and there was a specific reason for that as well. Because the only "she" goddesses out there were fertility goddesses and that’s the last thing that the Biblical God should have been called. God is not a god of the crop cycle. God is not a god of fertility, like Ba’al, the storm and fertility deity, you know.

At the end of the day when I’m dealing with translators, I’m going to tell them, "You be very careful how you handle the God language because you’re going to offend all kinds of people for theological reasons. Not incidental reasons, theological reasons you’re going to upset them, if you mess with the God language.

I think the same is true with son of man. Lets not mess with that because it will dumb it down in such that nobody will get the theological overtones. Lets not mess with that. After all, He was a man. Jesus was not a girl. I’m sorry. He wasn’t. So it’s okay to call him son of man anyhow. That’s how I would deal with that.

At the anthropological level, be inclusive. Call them brothers and sisters if it’s brothers and sisters that are addressed. Call them men and women if they’re both addressed, you know. Don’t translate the word "anthrópos” as mankind. Translate it as humankind if you’re talking about an inclusive group. Okay? That’s fine. Call them humankind. That’s fine. That’s what I would say about inclusive language.

Alright. We need to get on with the Gospel of John. An hour of Sturm und Drang and the Gospel of John, you cannot go wrong. This is powerful stuff.
One of my favorite quotes from Ernst Kasemann and his famous commentary on the Gospel of John is he saith, "Wheresoever I look in the Gospel of John, Jesus bestrides the stage of history like a deity."

It's very clear in the Gospel of John that the divinity of Christ is more clearly portrayed, more openly portrayed, more vividly portrayed than in the synoptics. I mean, I think that's very fair to say. It's only in the Gospel of John that Jesus starts saying things like, "Before Abraham was, I am." Hello? You know? Okay.

It's only in the Gospel of John that we start with "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God." That's only in the Gospel of John. So, yes, there is no messianic seeker in the Gospel of John. It's right out there in the open.

I think there's a reason for that. I think the three synoptic gospels were written to Christians, for Christians to use for discipling purposes. Okay? I think the Gospel of John has a different purpose. He tells us what the purpose is in John 20. What does he say? "These things have been written in order that might begin to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Okay?

John 20, Purpose Statement: These things are written in order that you might begin to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. In other words, the Gospel of John is intended as a tool for evangelism. Matthew, Mark and Luke intended as a tool for discipleship.

What's the difference? A huge difference, and what you need to be clear about in evangelism is both the divinity and the humanity of Christ. You've got to be clear in evangelism about that.

So, I think this was intended as a tool, not to be handed out as a tract, but to be used for evangelism purposes. These stories are framed deliberately, beautifully framed as tools for evangelism. So what we going to see is a whole stream of different kind of people coming to Jesus that need to be evangelized: A Nicodemus, a Samaritan woman, the Greeks, Jewish authorities, the high and mighty, the low, slaves, centurions.

You've got everybody coming to Jesus and here's another interesting thing about all of that. In the Gospel of John, people seem to be attracted to Jesus by some kind of spiritual gravity. I mean, have you noticed that there is no going and calling disciples by the Sea of Galilee? You don't have the calling of James and John the fisherman by the Sea of Galilee. You don't have that story in the Gospel of John at all.

People are seeking Jesus. "We would see Jesus," say the Greeks. This was the seeker gospel. This was the vineyard gospel. Are you with me now? Are you getting the picture? This is the seeker friendly gospel. Use it. It's important. It's the evangelist's gospel and I think that's part of the nodal instinctual understanding of translators.

This is why they began with the Gospel of John. They'd like us to believe in Jesus. Start there, it's a good place to start.

Another thing that's been said about the Gospel of John that is so true and so powerful is that John's gospel is deep enough for an elephant to drown in, but shallow enough for a baby to wade in it. Just depends on what level you plug into this gospel. It can be profound in its theological depth. I mean, you knew that from the very beginning.

When I'm reading John, Chapter 1 the prologue, the Word of God prologue, I'm hearing Wagner's Die Walküre in the background. (musically) Dun-dun, ta-de dun dun, dun -
In the beginning was the word. It's like the beginning of Star Trek, you know? "Long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away." I mean, we're having this huge run-up from all eternity that all of a sudden Jesus comes on the stage of human history. It's a huge run-up to get to the story of John the Baptist and Jesus at the beginning of this gospel.

This gospel goes from eternity to eternity, you know? (chuckles) To eternity and beyond is this gospel's thing, you know? And so, you know from the very first 14 verses you're in deep theological waters. Right?

And our author is going to focus on the theological significance of Jesus in a way into a depth that the other gospels do not. It is not an accident that it was this gospel that got debated at the Council of Nicea. It was this gospel that got debated at the Council of Chalcedon, and was the basis of the Nicene Creed, and the basis of the Chalcedonian creed.

This was the gospel that helped to firm up what our Christology should be if we are orthodox. It is a theologically profound gospel. Now, here's another thing you need to understand. This gospel is full of irony. What is irony?

Irony is when you say one thing but may mean more than you realized you said, or you say one thing and you really mean another. This gospel is loaded with irony. For example, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, Caiaphas says, "I know how to solve this problem. Let's kill him."

Oh, that's going to work. He's just raised the dead, so let's kill him. Hmmmm. If it can happen once, it can happen twice, you know. But then Caiaphas says this, "Didn't you know it was necessary for one man to die for the nation so that the nation doesn't have to perish?" Now there's irony.

Oh, he's said a lot more than he realized. That's right, but not in the way you mean it, Caiaphas. Not in the way you mean it.

This gospel is loaded with irony. It's also got two levels of discourse. There is the mundane, ordinary level and then there's the deeper level. Jesus's disciples are always hearing him at the mundane level, whereas he's actually talking about something much deeper.

Remember the Samaritan woman's story? They offer him food. They've gone to Hardee's for takeout, right? And they've come back after this dialogue that Jesus has had at the Samaritans, you know? And then they've come back from the village with their little bag lunches. They're offering Jesus some food and Jesus says "I have food that you know not of."

They're going, "Was there another drive-thru that we missed?"

Audience: (chuckling)

No, I'm thinking not! You see? See, they're thinking on a very mundane level and he's talking about something that's feeding his soul. Namely the conversion of the Samaritan woman. He's talking about a different kind of food, and a different kind of eating, altogether.

So, there are two levels of discourse going on. These are complex narratives, and you can see that Jesus says, "Nicodemus you must be born again," and Nicodemus thinks he's talking about physical rebirth.

Not so much. He's talking about a different and deeper kind of being born, you see. This gospel is complex. It has depth and character to it. And it is a very specifically schematized gospel.
This is probably the last gospel to be written but it is based on the testimony of an eyewitness. The eyewitness is the beloved son. We will say more about that in a minute.

I think he’s a Judean disciple. I think that the best probability is that it’s Lazarus. And that brings in a whole other equation here because, dear friends, being raised from the dead is a heady thing. That will change your world view. If Jesus has raised you from the dead that will definitely change your world view. That will rewind your mind and rethread your head about what is reality and what is not. Right?

I do think that this gospel is looking at Jesus through the eyes of resurrection, from the beginning to the end. I think that’s pretty clear. That’s one of the reasons this gospel of looks so different than the synoptics, but it’s by no means the other only reason.

Let me go ahead now and just tell you why I think the beloved disciple is:

A. A Judean disciple; and

B. Likely to be Lazarus

Okay. Here are some fast facts. None of the unique Galilean stories about the sons of Zebedee are found in John’s gospel. That is, the calling of the Zebedee’s - not mentioned. That time when the Zebedee’s were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration - not mentioned. That time that James, John and Peter went in and saw him raise Jairus’s daughter - nowhere mentioned in this gospel.

I could keep going. All of the special or unique stor - You know, when James and John say, ”Jesus, when you come into your kingdom, we want a favor. We want the box seats on your right and your left.”

This story is so not in the gospel of John. Alright. None of the unique sons of Zebedee stories are in John. In fact, the word Zebedee occurs like once in the Gospel of John and it’s in the appendix, John 21. Okay?

So, there is no focus on the Zebedee boys in this gospel. They have bit parts. They were mentioned in passing, and none of the special stories that they would have had insider knowledge on is even related in this gospel.

Now, if John’s son of Zebedee was the author of this gospel what would you expect? There is an emphasis on eyewitness testimony. I’m thinking they’re going to tell the story of their own calling by Jesus. I’m thinking they’re going to tell the stories especially where they had unique insight into Jesus and the other disciples didn’t get to participate. Okay?

We don’t have any of that. None of that in this gospel. Alright? No, instead we have a very different perspective.

Let’s go to the other end of the gospel. In John 21 in the appendix we hear about Peter and the beloved disciple. Now we’ve heard about Peter and the beloved disciple before running to the tomb. Okay? The author is very careful to not name the beloved disciple, nor does he mention John’s son of Zebedee, aka the beloved disciple, at all.

In John, Chapter 11 we have the very first use of the phrase ”the one whom Jesus loved”. The Greek is very clear. This is what it says: ”Now a certain man was ill. Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha -"

Mary was that one who had anointed Jesus with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was ill, so the sister sent a message to Jesus: ”Lord, the disciple whom you love is ill.” Now this is
the only named disciple in this whole she-bang called the Gospel of John that is called the one whom Jesus loves. It's the only one.

If you’re hearing the Gospel of John seriatim, the first time you hear the phrase "the one whom Jesus loved" is here. Not in the first ten chapters of John; nowhere. It's right here in the Greek. Is it any accident that thereafter in John 12 and John 13 we hear about the beloved disciple who reclines with Jesus at table? No.


Now just a little bit about food protocol. The normal practice at a reclining dinner, a formal dinner in Jesus’s world, was that the chief guest reclines on the same couch as the host. So who's the host of this meal? The beloved disciple is the host of the meal. Where does this meal take place in John 13? Survey says -

Audience member: Lazarus's house.

Yes. It takes place in Judea and more specifically in the larger environs of Jerusalem. That's where this meal takes place.

I'm reading John 11. I'm reading John 12. I'm reading John 13. If I'm hearing this with fresh ears for the first time, it's a no-brainer. I know who the beloved disciple is because I already heard John 11 - it's Lazarus. It's the only thing that makes sense, and boy this makes sense of so much else that follows from this.

In the synoptics we are told that not one of the Twelve gets near the cross when Jesus is crucified.

Audience: (muttering)

Dr. Witherington: But the beloved disciple wasn’t one of the Twelve. He wasn’t one of the Galilean dirty dozen. He was a Judean disciple, on top of which he was a Judean disciple that was a prominent person. When he dies, in John 11, who comes to the funeral? The Jewish officials from Jerusalem. That's who the Jews are in John 11. I mean, everybody there is a Jew. Why are some of them singled out as "the Jews who are present at Lazarus’s - ?

It's because the phrase means the Jewish officials there. The Jewish officials are present at the grieving and mourning time for Lazarus and they are there to see the raising of Lazarus. So what do they do? They go and tattletale to Caiaphas.

"You won't believe what just happened. We were out there mourning Lazarus and four days after he was dead, who knew? He was raised from the dead."

"I know how to solve this," says Caiaphas, "lets kill them both."

Hmmm. What's wrong with this picture?

But here's the other thing. Caiaphas lives in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. The beloved disciple knows where his house is. Not only does he know where his house is, he has an all access pass into Caiaphas's house. He's the only one who gets beyond the guards.
Remember when Jesus was taken to Annas's and Caiaphas's house in John, Chapter 18? What happens? The beloved disciple gets in and then brings Peter in. How did that happen? Well guess what - the people in Caiaphas's house already knew who the beloved disciple was. They're chums.

This is not some Galilean disciple leaping the wall into Caiaphas's house. It's a Judean disciple named Lazarus whom they already knew. A high-status Jew whom they knew. That's how it happened.

Look at the cross. What happens at the cross? Who's there? According to the Gospel of John there's Mary, Mary, Mary and Mary. Got enough Marys there at the cross? There was Mary, Mary, Mary and Mary and two of those Marys were sisters. And, by the way, yes they did that in antiquity. Imagine if you had three daughters all named Mary. This is Big Mary, this is Little Mary and this is Mary who sings. Okay?

Audience: (chuckling)

Alright. You know, their lexicon was narrow. Well, what's interesting is that the only male who was there at the cross is the beloved disciple, and it's not one of the Twelve. It's the Judean disciple.

That means that the synoptics don't contradict John. What the synoptics say is the Twelve did what? They denied, they betrayed and they deserted Jesus. They were not there at the crucifixion.

The female disciples were there. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, others - they were there. Jesus's mother showed up. Jesus's mother's sister showed up. Mary Magdalene showed up and was right there at the cross, but the only male who was there was the beloved disciple and that would be probably Lazarus.

I mean, I could keep going.

Have you noticed you need to compare what happens in John 12 and Mark 12? It's the same story. An annoying anointing that upsets Judas Iscariot. Remember this? Who's doing the anointing? It's Mary of Bethany doing the anointing, but in Mark she's anonymous. In John we have specificity. We know exactly who does the anointing. It's Mary of Bethany. Okay? It's clearly the same story, happens in a house in Bethany.

Mark says it happened in the house of Simon the Leper. Now, lets really put on our Sherlock Holmes hat. (musically) Ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum. Okay?

Let's connect the dots. Are you with me now? Watch the bouncing ball.

The first story about anybody in that house having a meeting with Jesus is when Jesus visits Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. You know the story.

Martha's trying to be the hostess with the mostest, Mary's saying, "Not so much. I'm listening to Disciple 101 here. Don't bother me. We'll get the food later."

Jesus says, "You know, Mary has chosen the better portion. Martha, cool it."

Right? You remember the story, right? Here's what's odd about this story.

A. Jesus is alone. The disciples are not with him. These are grown women. Why aren't they married? Then there's Lazarus. Where does he live? He lives in the same house.

Why isn't he married? I'll tell you why. You know who their daddy was? Simon the Leper. How did early Jews feel about leprosy? Did it make a person unclean? Out of bounds? Outcast? Oh, yes. You are so not
marrying somebody who’s father died of leprosy, for fear of contracting the disease from the son or the daughter.

Now this is very interesting. Lazarus died prematurely. What did he die of? It could well have been Hansen’s disease. We know that Hansen’s disease - we now know, because we’ve found evidence of it on a corpse, in bone marrow in Judea. He could well have died of Hansen’s disease, which indeed it is contagious. Okay?

Jesus had a special love for this family, and here’ something about Jesus. Jesus was not afraid of anybody’s uncleanliness. He never shied away with contact from somebody because they were unclean, or ill, or demon possessed or an outcast. He never shied away from contact on the basis of any of the normal Jewish rules about these kinds of people. He’s probably the only houseguest they had.

But when Lazarus was raised from the dead, the first task is to show him to the priest. The priest declares him clean, the house is declared clean - good things happen. Others can come to the party.

The first time the disciples show up at Lazarus’s house is when? Not until after Lazarus is raised from the dead and we’ve got - the HAZMAT people have declared we’re good now. Right?

It’s a powerful story. It’s the story about two women and a man who were never married, and loved Jesus. They were Judean disciples. Now - this explains so much about this gospel. Think of the stories you love the most that are in this gospel. Okay?


Samaria - Jews avoided Samaria altogether as an unclean land. Here are two famous Rabbinic sayings about Samaria.

“To what shall we compare a Samaritan woman? They are like menstruants from the cradle. They are perpetually unclean.”

Don’t go there. Don’t talk to them, don’t touch them and certainly don’t ask for a drink of water from them because you’ll get their cooties.

That’s only in the Gospel of John.

You think the author of the Gospel of John might have been a little sensitive about the issue of uncleanness and how Jesus superceded that? Yes. I think so.

Audience: (chuckling)

Yes, I think so.

Where is the only place we here about the story of the man born blind? John 9, only there. Where is the only place we here about the raising of Lazarus? That would be John 11. In fact, if you list the miracles in the Gospel of John, all of them are unique to the Gospel of John except the feeding of the 5,000 and walking on water which is counted as a single burst of miracle.

And then there’s this. You know something I think about Hebrew numerology. What was the number of perfection in Judaism? (pause)
So we have seven "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John. We have seven sign miracle narratives in the Gospel of John. We have seven discourses by Jesus tagged to the "I am" sayings. This gospel is highly theologically schematized. Somebody put on their thinking cap when they wrote this gospel.

And that brings us to John 21. Listen to the end of the Gospel of John. Listen to it closely.

"The light will go on. I promise. The light is about to go on."

Now Peter turned on that verse 20 of the last chapter. Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. By the way, that phrase there in that verse is identical to the phrase in John 11:2. The disciple whom Jesus loved. It's identical - John 11:2.

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. He was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and said, "Lord, who is it that's going to betray you?"

Here's a little footnote. The reason for the identification here is because originally these stories were told separately, and whoever compiled this gospel left in the little reminder tips when these stories were told separately.

When I read to you the bit about Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus, - remember at the beginning of - before that story is told in John 12, in John 11, when Mary is identified, we have a parenthesis that says, "Now this is the Mary who anointed Jesus in Bethany." But he hasn't even told that story yet.

But it's a reminder. Why? Because these stories were all told individually, separately, and they have simply been collected and edited together into a gospel, the same as here. He's not assuming that the audience has Alzheimers. It's that these were separate traditions before they were ever bound together in a gospel.

Peter saw him and he said, "Lord, what about that man?"

And Jesus said to him, "Well, if it's my will that he remains until I come back, what is that to you? Follow me."

Now listen to verse 23. Listen carefully.

So the rumor spread in that community that this disciple would not die.

Yet Jesus didn't say that he would not die, he just said, "If it's my will" - conditional statement - "that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Now, why...why do we have this story? Why would anybody think that the beloved disciple was not going to die? I'll tell you why. Jesus raised him from the dead.

I mean - you know? You're not expecting to die twice if Jesus has raised you once. Why did the community think he wasn't going to die? Because Jesus had already taken care of that problem in his life.

So now, why do we have this story? We have this story because he has, in fact, died. He's now dead, so we have to have the disclaimer. Jesus didn't say he wasn't going to die. You get the picture here?

This is an etiological story, told for apologetical purposes. Listen to the very end.

"This is the disciple who testified to these things and wrote them down and we know his testimony is true."
Who is the "we"? (pause) Oh, dear friends, who is the "we"? (pause) That his testimony is spoken of as in the third person? Who is the "we"?

The "we" is the Christian community. The "we" is the community after the beloved disciple's death who gathered his famous stories that he had written down and edited them together into a single collection called the Gospel of John. That's who the "we" is.

And by the way, there was a lot more that didn't get included because we're told that in John 20. In John 20 we are told, "You know, if we wrote down everything Jesus said and did, there are not enough books in the world."

This is an edited edition of the stories of the beloved disciple about Jesus put together after his death by his community. Very powerful.

Audience member: I'm sorry, I [inaudible 0:58:30]

Hm.

Audience member: Why is it called the John?

Dr. Witherington: We're going to get there.

Audience member: Okay.

I promise you.

Audience: (laughing)

Hang in there. We're going to get there, and there's a good reason why. Okay?

Audience: (chuckling)

The beloved disciple, according to Christian tradition, went to Ephesus and started churches. Okay? That's what those letters of John are all about. Okay?

And then there was a man named John of Patmos. He was in that same community. He tells us what churches he's involved with and what's the very first one he mentions? In John - In Revelations Chapter 2 he says, "I'm writing to the church in Ephesus."

And then he's going to write to the six other churches that are on the same Roman road, ending in Laodicea. Okay? Are you with me now?

So here's the deal: There are two important leader figures in this community. One is the beloved disciple, the other is John of Patmos.

The beloved disciple dies. Who's the second most literate person in this community? That would be John of Patmos.

Now here's what happened. John of Patmos returns from exile when demission goes down for the count because any time an emperor sends somebody into exile, that is null and void upon the death of the emperor.

So, where does he go back to? He goes back to Ephesus. And what is he busily going to do? He's collecting the memoirs of the beloved disciple, editing them, putting them together and presenting this to the world.
Now this is not his own testimony. It's the testimony of the beloved disciple. However, there arose the tradition that Papias knows about.

And here's what Papias says. He says in regard to the gospel that is called John's, the John that was involved was not John Zebedee, but John the old man. John, the older John, the really ancient John. And this John, says Papias, "I've personally met and talked to."

Now here we've got a connection between the first generation and the beginning of the second century. Papias actually met John of Patmos. He actually met John, the prophet, and so what Papias says, is, "John, the old man, had something to do with the production of this gospel." He did. He put it together. He edited it, and church tradition in the second century taking off from Papias said what? "This gospel is Kata Ioannes"; according to John.

Well, it is in the sense that he put it together, if not in the sense that it's all about him. So - there is a good historical reason why it's called Kata Ioannes. It's not because the beloved disciple is either John the First or John the Second here. It's because we wouldn't have this gospel without this John. And thanks be to God that he put it together. So, that's the reason.

Now, here's some other little tidbits that help us make sense of this whole deal that I hope will be helpful.

Audience member: (coughing)

Dr. Witherington: Think about some of the other stories. Mary Magdalene is at the tomb. The tomb is empty. She goes and reports to whom? Well she just walks down the road to Bethany, knocks on the door. Who's in there? Well this is Lazarus's house. So who is going to come and check on this? It's Peter and Lazarus. By the way, his proper Old Testament name is Eleazar. Lazarus is a later Anglicizing for the name, so his proper name is actually Eleazar. Okay? We have some of those in the Old Testament. That's his proper name. Eleazar, the beloved disciple, and Peter run to the tomb. Who gets there first?

Audience member: [inaudible 1:02:34]

Mm-mm. Who gets there first and looks inside but doesn't go inside. That's the beloved disciple. You know, he didn't need MapQuest or a GPS device. He was the Judean disciple that knew perfectly well where this tomb was because he knew members of the Sanhedrin and who did know? Nicodemus. Remember "Nick at Night"? And Joseph of Arimathea. These were two of his friends. He knew where Joseph of Arimathea's tomb was. Peter did not. So Peter is trailing along behind. Even the little details make sense when you realize the beloved disciple is a Judean disciple.

Yes, Cathy?

Cathy: You mentioned [inaudible 1:03:24] How could he have been prominent if he was [inaudible 01:03:31]

Well, here's the thing. Once his father died, you would have a ritual of purification. Okay? And so, officially they are clean. Right? This doesn't prevent people from fearing the stigma. What happens in a case like that - Remember again, they got engaged when they were teenagers.
The gossip in Bethany would have been clear. Okay? The priest says they’re clean. We don’t know. The priest says they are clean. They are ritually pure. They may not be physically pure. They are ritually clean. Right? Okay.

So, officially they can go out in public. Officially they can visit their friends. Officially they can go to the synagogue, but are they still going to be shunned because of fear of this dread disease where there is no cure for this disease at all?

Yes. That’s just human nature. Do you remember the Ryan White story when AIDS started up? It’s that kind of story. It’s that kind of situation. Even though Ryan White couldn’t have given anybody AIDS. You know? Not by contact, by hand or whatever. Okay?

It’s that kind of contagion story. So, yes. But then Lazarus gets sick. So what are the grandmothers in Bethany saying? “See, we told you. Didn’t we tell you?”

Audience member: [chuckling]

Didn’t we tell you? [crosstalk] We told you. It’s a good thing that you didn’t marry that boy. It’s a good thing you didn’t. Not so much, you know. He didn’t drink enough soup.

Audience: [chuckling]

You know? Not so good. Ryan?

Ryan: I was just thinking about how is that going to be much different than, for example, mothers who have been purified after giving birth. The mother -

Right. The difference is ritual uncleanness and actual uncleanness. These two ideas are certainly connected in the mind of Jews but they are not identical. You can get rid of ritual uncleanness pretty quick. Physical uncleanness you need a healer. Right? It’s a difficult [inaudible 1:05:31]

I want us to deal with a couple of stories. This gospel is just too good to pass up and so we’re going to deal with a couple of stories. [music continues]

They say familiarity breeds contempt. If there is one story in the Gospel of John you probably know by heart and have memorized certain verses of it’s this one. I mean in my lifetime John 3:16 is the most overused and memorized verse on the planet.

But this story is important in a lot different ways. It’s part of the larger schema of showing the kind of people who were inquirers or seekers, trying to learn from Jesus and understand Him. So, as I said, this is the seeker gospel and this is one of the most first - most prominent seekers that are portrayed in this gospel. You notice that Nicodemus is not portrayed as an adversarial Jew. He’s just a Jew that lacks understanding of where Jesus is coming from.

So this it is not an adversarial conversation. This is a friendly conversation. It’s the type of discussion and debate the Jewish teachers had at night, but you know, in the Gospel of John, he has his own theological vocabulary and it’s different from the synoptics, light is the word for revelation. Darkness is the word for "lostness” and ignorance. Everlasting life - by the way, I really prefer the translation everlasting life, not eternal life, because the life that Jesus is giving us begins at a particular point in time and then continues forward into eternity.
The phrase eternal life should only really be applied to God. A life that always was, is and always will be. So it theologically would be a more appropriate to call this life that Jesus is offering Nicodemus and others everlasting life. Okay?

That's important because we're not God. We don't have eternal existence and everlasting life is a gift to us, which by the way, in the Greco-Roman world would have been a non sequitur. Because they believed that your soul was what? Inherently immortal.

The immortal soul has nothing to do with salvation in Greek thought. You were born that way and you were stuck with it and when you die you're sloughing off the prison house of the soul and you're immortal somewhere. You're everlasting, alright. You may not be saved. That's a different issue.

So, the Greek language about immortality is very different than the Jewish language about everlasting life and everlasting life that Jesus is talking about begins at a particular point in time and continues forward into eternity. Alright. That's what He's talking about.

Now here's the second thing and I've mentioned this in passing and I want to mention it again. Nicodemus is operating on perfectly good orthodox early Jewish principles, which was that they didn't really believe in what we today would be calling "having a born again experience". Okay?

Even when they used a word like convert, what they meant was changed religions. Okay? What's the process of joining Judaism? Well, you attend a synagogue and you become a God fearer. Right? You're on the fringe or penumbra of the sun. This is step number one.

Then if you want to get more serious about it, you become a proselyte. You start learning the Torah. You start learning the teachings. And this is a long process. Right? And then if you really want to get serious what's going to happen is you're going to become a Jew. And how that happens is not by you having a born again experience. How that happens is you get circumcised, if you're a male. And you start keeping 613 commandments religiously. Okay?

And then you're just a Jew. You're no longer a Gentile, you're a Jew. That's who you are. You're a convert to Judaism but it doesn't have to do with having a born again experience. That is the process of conversion to Judaism and that's the model that Nicodemus knows. And Jesus is not talking about that.

For sure He's not talking about circumcision and keeping 613 commandments. He's talking about a spiritual rebirth. Something we're all too familiar with. Okay?

Now here is one of those theological points that is so important about John there is a deliberate ambiguity here. The Greek word here is "anothen". Now this word has two meanings. It can mean "again" and it can also mean "above". This is why you'll find different translations of this story in John 3.

Is Jesus talking about a birth from above or a birth again? Well, we know how Nicodemus took it. He took Jesus to be referring to a second birth of some kind. Maybe a physical one, and as I said to you before, Nicodemus was, "Oy vey! I am so not crawling back into my mother's womb and calling for womb service. What the heck are you talking about, Jesus? How can these things be? I don't get it."

But it is deliberately ambiguous because Jesus is talking about a birth that is from above, not below. Yes, He's talking about a second kind of birth, but He's also talking about a spiritual rebirth. He's talking about a birth that comes from God.

This is why we bring the Holy Spirit into the conversation. And here is where it gets even more ambiguous. Okay?
Let's just "complexify" the story a little bit.

Now, let's talk about that word spirit for a minute. What is a pneumatic drill? You have a pneumatic drill - what have you got?

Audience member: Power one.

It is a power drill, but it's an air pressure drill. Are you with me? A pneumatic drill is an air drill. Alright? "Pneuma" is the Greek word which has three translations. It is identical to the Hebrew word "ruach". Let's try our Hebrew for a minute, okay? You've got to get the glottal stop going down here. "Ruach."

Audience members: [repeating "ruach"]

It's like you're hacking up a cough, right? Ruach. That's what it is. Ruach. Okay. This is "puh-numa; ruach." These words both mean - catch it - breath, wind or spirit. They have all three meanings. This is why you can play on this word.

Go back to the Genesis story. And the ruach of God was hovering over the waters. Should we translate that "breath", "wind" or "spirit"? It could be any of those. Take your pick.

Here, as well, Jesus is going to play on the meaning of this word. Jews love to do this. They love word play. If you read other early Jewish sources like the Talmuds and the mission, they are big on puns and wordplay. They just, you know? Anything they can do wordplay with they are happy.

Jesus says the wind blows, the ruach blows, where it will. The Holy Spirit is just like that he says. It's invisible. You can't see where it came from You can't see where it's going. But, you can recognize its effects.

Know the famous poem "Who Has Seen the Wind"? Great little poem you learned in elementary school. Absolutely. That's the way the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is not visible. (chuckles)

One of my favorite things of Martin Luther when he was dealing with the Schwenkfelders, which were kind anti-Baptist Mennonites before their time, is the Schwenkfelders were always saying "The Holy Spirit told me. The Holy Spirit told me." You've doubtless run into some people like this, right?

And Luther once said, "I won't believe that Schwenkfelder was inspired by the Holy Spirit even if I saw him swallowing the Holy Spirit, feathers and all."

Audience: [murmuring]

One of my favorite Luther quotes.

Audience: [murmuring]

The spirit is invisible. It's like the wind. You can't see where it came from. You can't actually see it, or where its going but you can see its effects. And what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is, "You can see the effects of the work of the spirit and you must be born from above. You must be born again. If you want to enter the kingdom, it's not enough to be a Jew."

So what is the implicit message?

"I am a good card carrying Jew. I keep the law. I'm even a teacher in Israel."

Is that enough to be saved?

Audience: [murmuring]
What's Jesus's view? Survey says: No. You must be born again through the aid of Jesus and the spirit.

Audience: [murmuring]

In fact, he says you must be born of water and spirit. Somebody's drumming downstairs.

Audience: [murmuring]

The thing is, about this, that you need to know the Greek. He's not talking about water baptism and spirit baptism. He's not having a debate with Nicodemus about baptism at all. They didn't debate such things in Judaism. And besides, Christian baptism didn't exist yet.

Here's where I tell you that the word water is a metaphor in early Judaism for physical birth. Here's what the Greek literally says. You must be born out of water - ekudatas - and by the spirit, these are two different births referred to.

Audience: [coughing]

In other words, what Jesus is saying here is, "You must be physically born and then spiritually reborn." That is, you need two births to get into the Kingdom of God. right? You have to be born and then you've got to be spiritually reborn. Are you with me now? Are you getting picture?

Where water refers to physical birth, and when Jews talked about physical birth they used the word "water" as a euphemism or a metaphor for the whole process. The word water was the word they used for semen. Here is a Jewish phrase: A man should only put his water into his personal cistern.

Audience member: [inaudible 01:17:31]

What's the water? That would be the semen. What's the cistern? That would be the wife, who was considered the well where you plant the water. Okay? This is the way Jews viewed it.

Then we have the process of birthing. And even we call it the "breaking of the" what?

Audience member: Water.

The water. You've got to be born out of water. If you've ever seen a physical birth this is a mess. The waters break, here comes the baby. You have to be born out of water. There were not hospitals in antiquity. Where did birthing take place? At home. If you've ever seen 'Gone With The Wind' there is a famous scene about this. Butterfly McQueen says, [in voice] "I don't know nothing about birthin' babies."

Here comes one. The waters have broken. Right.

Jesus says you've got to be born out of water. That's the physical birth, and by the spirit. That's the spiritual birth. He's talking about natural birth and spiritual rebirth. He's not talking about baptism. This text has nothing to do with baptism. It's not saying you get the Holy Spirit in baptism. It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with a Jewish conversation about physical birth and spiritual rebirth. [slapping sound]

Notice how He uses the kingdom language here. Until you get that spiritual rebirth are you entering the kingdom? That is so not happening. You're not entering the kingdom with just the credentials "I Am A Good Jew". You're not entering the kingdom with "I'm A Teacher in Judaism". You're not entering the kingdom with "I'm a Pious Jew".

What's got to happen? You have to be reborn in Jesus. Who's he telling this to? A leader in the Sanhedrin. Hello?
Now if he's going to tell that to the leaders in the Sanhedrin, what about everybody Jew? Uh-huh? Everybody has to be born again. This is a tremendously offensive message in antiquity to say to devout Jews and it is equally offensive today.

You go tell a Jew "You must be born again" they're going to say you must be crazy. I'm an observant Jewish person who loves my faith. I'm devout. I believe profoundly in God. Who are you to tell me I must be born again?"

And that point Christians just kind of back off, and they go, "Sorry. Didn't mean to offend you."

Jesus was offensive. Sorry, but he was. Nicodemus is puzzled.

"You are a great teacher in Israel and you don't understand this as Jesus."

"Well let me tell you something. How will you believe me if I tell you about heavenly things? About the son of man and going up into Heaven, and the only son of man who is going up into Heaven the way I'm talking about it is the son of man who came down from Heaven."

What text is He referring to? The story of the son of man coming down from Heaven where? Daniel 7. Second verse, same as the first.

Here we have an allusion to Daniel 7 and the Johanna in the gospel. This is very powerful there. One of the great problems we have in the Gospel of John is trying to figure out where the words of Jesus stop and where the commentator, the evangelist's words, begin.

The usual assumption is that you have gotten to the commentary of the evangelist when he goes into direct third person speech. So, for example, John 3:16. Is this the saying of Jesus?

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son so that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

If you noticed in the film, what did they do? They changed to the voice of the narrator when we got "there". And I think that's probably right. I think this is the commentary of the beloved disciple about what Jesus is meaning here.

He's finished quoting the dialogue. He's gone to commentary and you have that problem - you have it more in the Gospel of John because you have a lot more commentating and theological exposition in John that you've got in the synoptic. That I think is absolutely going on in this story.

So here is the commentary. The theology - Johanan theological point. The point is this: God loves the world. Now, the word for world here is "cosmos" from which we get the word - wait for it - cosmos. That's the word translated "world" here, but it has a very specific meaning in the Gospel of John.

Just as life is the word for salvation in John and light is the word for revelation, world is the word in the Gospel of John for the world of humanity that has fallen, and can't get up.

Let me tell you what the world does not mean. It does not mean God so loves the elect that He predestined from before the foundation of the world to be saved. It does not mean that.

When it says "God loves the world" it means God loves the world, and when it says He sent His only begotten son for the world's sake to die, He means that He sent His only begotten son to die for the sins of the world. Not just the sins of the elect. Okay?
So this is a favorite Wesleyan verse, okay? Those of us who are Armenian or Wesleyan in our theology, this is big because it says what Paul says elsewhere. Let me read you a verse from Paul. Lest you think this is a Johanan peculiarity, I can quote you Paul on the same point.

From First Timothy, Chapter 2, verse 3: “This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our savior who desires everyone to be saved.” Hello?

Everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth for there is one God and there is also one mediator between God and humankind - Christ Jesus Himself human who gave Himself as a ransom for all.”

And by all He means - wait for it - all. Not the elect. All. Who did Jesus die for? Everybody. He died for the sins of the world and world means world. It doesn’t mean the elect. Okay?

And God sent Him to do this. This was not a purpose that Jesus took on Himself and said, “You know, I know God, that you’ve sent me to die for the elect, and I’ve just come for your chosen and frozen ones.”

No. Jesus’s purpose is not different from God’s father. God the Father. The Father and the Son are in complete agreement about this. He came to save the world and He died for the world.

And that’s what both Paul and the Gospel of John says. That’s two good enough witnesses for me. Yes ma’am.

Audience member: So we’re not supposed to love the world.

We’re not supposed to love the ways of the world. That’s different. The world’s ways are not very lovable and He describes what the love of the world amounts to. The lust of the flesh, the pride of life. Remember these verses from First John. He tells us what the love of the world looks like. He’s not talking about not loving fallen persons. He’s talking about not loving the ways, their fallen behavior. We shouldn’t fall in love with that.

Audience member: [coughing]

That’s a whole different ballgame. Alright. Now - in addition to this, as I said to you before, there is very little kingdom language in this gospel. Really, when the kingdom comes up, it is almost exclusively referring to the future kingdom. One that you will enter later. One that you will inherit later. One that you will possess later. One that you will obtain later.

Very little kingdom language and he is mostly talking about a place. The other place the kingdom language comes up is in the dialogue in the Johanan gospel between Pilate and Jesus.

"My kingdom is not of this world." This does not mean my kingdom is not in this world. It means my kingdom is not a worldly kingdom. It is not a kingdom that is oriented like normal human kingdoms. It’s not like the beastly empires, in other words.

This is the kingdom that comes from God and from Heaven, but exists on earth in the lives of the saved. If you want to know where is the Kingdom of God today you are the ensigns of the kingdom. The question is, when people look at you do they see Jesus, the son of man and the kingdom? Do they see the reign of God in the life of humanity in you? Is that what they see?

Let me tell you a story. Dr. Fred Douglas Shepard was a medical missionary in Armenia in Turkey; overwhelmingly Muslim area. He set up a medical hospital.
One day he was dealing with a small Muslim man who was near death, who had been brought to him basically on a stretcher at death's door, and Dr. Shepard nursed him back to health. As he nursed him back to health he shared Esau with him, which is the Arabic name for Jesus. Okay?

This Muslim got fired up about Jesus. He went back to his village and he just wouldn't shut up about Jesus. The Imam got a little tired. The mullah was not happy. You know?

One day the mullah comes to this little Muslim man and says, "Jesus this and Jesus that. Jesus died 2000 years ago and you've never seen him."

And the little man summoned up his courage and he said, "I have seen Dr. Fred Douglas Shepard and Jesus lives in him."

When people look at you do they see Jesus and the kingdom reigning in your life? That's the kind of question this story is asking us.

So, we're going to have a series of stories, punctuated by seven fine miracles. The miracles are approached from an entirely different way in John than they are in the synoptics.

In the synoptics they are the miracles, the mighty works of the kingdom. And the word used of them is dunamis, from which we get the word "dy-no-mite". Hence the King James translation, "mighty works".

"And he could do no mighty works in Nazareth because there was no faith."

They are miracles of the kingdom. In John they are not called dunamis, they are called "semeions" - signs. Signs of the coming of the king.

In the synoptics they are mighty works of the kingdom. In John they are signs of the king. Seven miracles. Now, dear friends, I want you to get hold of this and tomorrow morning we will deal with it some more.

There is a crescendo of the miraculous in this gospel. A 'Can you top this?' We start with water turned not into Welch's grape juice, but wine. The joke about my denomination is Jesus turned the water into wine and ever since the Methodists have been trying to reverse the process.

We start with the cana miracle. That's the first sign. We finish with the raising of Lazarus, which is a picture of what is about to happen to Jesus. It's a foreshadowing of what is about to happen to Jesus. It's the last of the seven fine miracles, and there is a crescendo of the miracles leading up to this incredible story.

The next to the last miracle story is a sign narrative. The story is the healing of the man born blind. Now why is that such a shocker?

In the Old Testament there is no record of a blind person ever receiving their sight through any prophet, priest or king. There is a promise that that would happen in Isaiah.

Remember? The lame shall walk, the deaf shall hear, the blind shall receive their sight. It never happened in Old Testament times, and in fact, here's what Jews believed. They believed that if you were born blind - guess what - you were cursed by God.

It was because of your sin or your parents' sin. The disciples repeat this story in John 9.

"Master, who was it that sinned? This man, or his parents?"

It explains why he was born blind and Jesus's answer is "Neither one, but God's going to use it for his glory." Okay?
Now here's the thing. Jews believed, and there is a tradition that's very clear, that when someone is finally able to give sight to a man born blind, which is the most difficult of all cases, right? When somebody is able to give sight to a man born blind, then you will know Messiah has come.

What makes this such a stupendous miracle is:

A. It's never happened before from the point of view of Judaism, right? And
B. It's the sign that who has shown up? The king has come to town.

And it happens right in the shadow of the temple. And it causes no end of the row as we will see.

So we have a crescendo of the miraculous. The seven mighty signs. The last two which are man born blind and the raising of the dead of the man who was four days dead! Which, by the way, according to Judaism, was impossible because the spirit of the deceased departed after three days.

The reason you're next to the grave for three days is he might revive.

Audience member: [inaudible 01:32:29]

Which leaves me to tell you an Irish our story and then we're quitting for the day.

In the Middle Ages lots of people got lead poisoning from drinking their Irish whiskey from lead tumblers. They got lead poisoning and went comatose. This is why the Irish began having wakes. What they would do is they would lay out Uncle Ian on the dining room table, and if he woke, then they'd all celebrate and he was alive.

This is where the phrase "a wake" comes from. Okay? If he didn't, well, then you needed to have a funeral and you’d bury him. Unfortunately, and this sadly true, there were people who were buried alive, who had had so much lead poisoning that they were comatose for days.

They were buried alive and the way they found this out is that they had to move a famous Irish graveyard, I think in County Cork, and when some of the wooden caskets fell open they found fingernail scratches on the inside. Just yuck!

Now this lead to a remedy. What they would do is they would put - I'm not kidding you - they would tie a string to the finger of the person they were burying and they would link the string to a bell in the graveyard. Okay? Are you with me?

And if he twitched and the bell rang, they said, he was saved by the - wait for it - bell. It has nothing to do with boxing!

Audience members: [chuckling]

Nothing to do with boxing. But then there was this problem. What happens at nighttime? You know, three days after you’ve buried him, what happens? Well, they had to have somebody do the "grave yard shift" which is where we get the phrase "graveyard shift". It’s somebody watching in the graveyard to see if the bell rings.

This is where we get a lot of our idioms that we have no idea where they came from to begin with. So, the Irish term "wake", the "saved by the bell" and the "graveyard shift" - this is all coming from this Irish practice. And last but not least, if a person awoke and he was rescued, he was called a "dead ringer". A dead ringer.
From which we get the phrase dead ringer, which has nothing to do with looking like somebody. It has to do with being alive again. Okay?

Long story short. Don’t drink your whiskey tonight out of lead tumblers.
Chapter 6

Samaritans

This story you really will not get the pith of it unless you understand the historical context. So, what we’ve got to back up and do this morning is talk about who the Samaritans were, and why was there so much antipathy between Samaritans and Judean, or Galilean, Jews that the evangelist feels compelled at the beginning of the story to say, "The won’t even share a drink of water."

Now, you need to understand what a fundamental violation of ancient Near Eastern hospitality that is. In the ancient Near East you were supposed to show hospitality even to your enemies. Remember Psalm 23?

"Thou prepardest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

Hospitality was one of the most important ancient Near Eastern values that all of these cultures shared; a welcoming of strangers. The Greek word is "xenophilia" as opposed to "xenophobia". "Xenophilia" means the love of strangers. That is actually the word that is translated "hospitality" in the New Testament. Xenophilia - the love of strangers. That’s the word that over and over again is rendered as hospitality.

While I’m on this "-philia" thing, Philadelphia - this is not the City of Brotherly Love. That would be "Philadelphos". We need to know your Greek endings better. Philadelphia is considered the city of sisterly love.

Audience: [chuckling]

Not the city of brotherly love.

Xenophilia - our author says that Samaritans and Jews hate each other so much that they will not even share a basic cup of water with one another, and this is animosity times 10. This is like the animosity between the Edomites and the Israelis. You remember the Imprecatory Psalm that says, in the Psalm, "Blessed are those who dashed the heads of the Edomite infants on the rocks." Do you remember that? You know, that’s not a Psalm I urge you to pray every night before you go to bed.

This hatred between Samaritans and Jews was as visceral as Palestinians and Jews today; just as visceral, just as deadly, just as violent. It had a long history. As far as most Jews were concerned, they only good Samaritan was a dead Samaritan. Again, the phrase, good Samaritan would be an oxymoron in that culture; a contradiction in terms.

So we need to back up and learn our history as to why that is so. We’re going to go all the way back to the division of the northern and the southern kingdoms, which happened in the 900s B.C. It happened after the time of Solomon and it happened on the watch of the king of all Israel.

It’s a horrible story. The land was partitioned into two parts: Israel and Judea. But that’s not all because as you know, in 722 B.C., the Assyrians came calling in the northern part of the land. There was this Assyrian ruler named Ashurbanipal, who said I shall wash my swords in the Mediterranean. And he swept right across the ancient Near East, right across the northern part of the Holy Land right to the coast. Suddenly, what had become Israel, the northern tribes, was occupied territory by the Assyrians. This is 722 B.C..
Now the Judeans, far from coming to the rescue of the Israelites, all stood at the edge of the border and said, (musically) "Na-na-na-na, na-na-na-na, hey he-ye, goodbye," as they marched off into exile.

What actually happened in 722 B.C.? Well occupation and deportation. Not deportation of everybody, just the elite. Just the rulers and the wealthy. I mean, the usual kind of pillaging and plundering went on. Right?

Now what was believed to have happened in the north was what we would call synchrotism. Namely, intermarrying between Assyrians and northern Jews. Okay?

As far as the historical evidence goes, and the archeological evidence goes, there really isn’t much evidence of religious synchrotism. There may have been some intermarrying, there inevitably is when you have an occupying power, but the evidence that somehow the religion of Jews in the north had been amalgamated with Assyrian religion is really lacking. We don’t really have any strong evidence of that.

There was more evidence that some of the royals in the north were mingling Judaism with Ba’al worship. You know about that; remember Queen Jezebel? Well, that was before the Assyrians. Anyway - okay?

So, what happened? Northern folks carted off into exile; the southern folks thought they were bullet proof. That is, until 595 B.C. when the Babylonians came calling. There was a certain rule whose name you ought to know. Nebuchadnezzar. His actual name was Nebuchadrezzar, but we got it wrong a long time ago in American education. Nebuchadrezzar.

Jews in Jerusalem believed they were bullet proof, that God would never let his holy city fall. Jeremiah deals with this. He keeps telling them, "No, you’re not bullet proof. Here comes the judge. And God will use a foreign power to discipline you,"

And by the way, friends, if God’s chosen people weren’t exempt from such things, why should we think we are? Just a thought.

So what happens in 595 B.C.? Well, leadership of the southern tribes are carted off into Babylonian exile. Instead of going to Ur they are going to Iraq. That sandbox known as Iraq. That’s where they went. It’s where the leadership of Jews were taken. And the southern exile lasted from 595 B.C. to about 525 B.C., so Daniel’s 70 years. Okay? You with me now?

So what happens when they come back? Well, when they come back, and we’re dealing with the story of Ezrah and Nemehiah, the Judean tribes petitioned their northern brethren, “Come help us rebuild Jerusalem.”

How eager do you think those northern folks would be to come help the southern folks rebuild Jerusalem after the southern folks from Jerusalem had simply waved goodbye when the northern tribes went off into exile? No so much.

So what you have, from about 5 - before 520 B.C. and continuing thereafter, so for a long time before Jesus, you have the growing up of an indigenous Jewish religion in the north that is not connected to Mount Zion, is not connected to Jerusalem, and in fact, is not interested in the Davidic monarchy.

The Samaritans believed that the Pentateuch was their Bible. They kept singing, [musically] "If it’s good enough for Moses, if it’s good enough for Moses," and that’s it. Their whole Bible was the Pentateuch.

Now, when your Bible is the Pentateuch that leaves out all those historical books. That leaves out the whole story of Saul and David and all of that, which northern Jews, called Samaritans, saw as a wrong
left turn. After all, isn’t that what those sources say? Exactly that? That the Israelites demand for a king was disloyalty to God. This is what First Samuel says. Right?

So if the Samaritans could say, "Look your sources even say, this was a left turn. We shouldn’t have gone there. Stick with Moses.”

Now this affected everything in Samaritan life. If your sacred text is simply the Pentateuch, I mean you don’t have the Psalms, you don’t have the prophets, you don’t have Job, you don’t have Ecclesiastes - your religion is based on the Pentateuch.

So, did they practice Leviticus? Yes they did. Did they practice the Feast of the Passover? Absolutely they did. To this day there are Samaritans living next to Mount Gerizim in Nablus who offer sacrifice on Mount Gerizim.

There are probably about 500 Samaritans left. They are still a living sect of Judaism in the Holy Land which you may have never run into. But they are still there. You can go see them. I’ve visited with them. They will show you the Samaritan Pentateuch.

They are very proud of it. If you want to actually see how ancient sacrifice was done, go watch them at Passover. They’re having a big time on Mount Gerizim.

These folks were Jews. So far as we can tell their whole religion came from the Pentateuch, not from Zoroastrian sources, Babylonian sources, Assyrian sources. Their whole religion was the Pentateuch.

When they thought of Messiah they thought of a chap they called the Taheb. What this means is the restorer. See, if your whole Messianic expectation is based on the Pentateuch, who is Messiah going to look like? He’s going to be the prophet like unto Moses. Remember? Because there’s not a lot of Messianic speculation in the Pentateuch.

There’s going to be a Star of Jacob. There’s going to be a prophet like unto Moses and that’s it. You know, none of this Davidic monarchy mess. It has nothing to do with being a messiah according to Samaritans. They’re sticking with the Pentateuch. They keep saying, "Give me that old time religion." You know? Sticking with Moses.

So, this interchange between this woman and Jesus, when He gets to theology is not an interchange like Jesus and Judean Jews. It’s not an interchange like Jesus would have with his Galileans at Caesarea Philippi. It’s a very different kind of interchange, and you hear what the woman says.

"Sir, I perceive you are a prophet."

Now, if you’re a Samaritan you know what that signals. Could this be the one who is greater than Jacob? Greater than the founder who dug his well here at Sychar? Could this be the restorer? Could this be the Taheb? Could this be the guy? The eschatological prophet like unto Moses?

This is why this woman got all excited, wet her pants and ran to town and told everybody. It’s - yikes! Samaritan theology comes to bear right now.

And you notice one of the things she does in dialoguing with Jesus is as soon as Jesus touches the sore point of her life - "You’ve had five husbands and the one you’re living with now is not your husband."

You know, as soon as Jesus starts raising sticky, ethical questions she changes the subject of theology. This is a very frequent tactic among “expleting” people.
"Sir, I perceive you are a prophet. Our ancestors said worship here was good. Praise worship in Jerusalem - not so much. What do you think?"

She changes the subject from her personal life to the theology of Jews and Samaritans. That's an interesting little thing.

Alan?

Alan: How many Samaritans - obviously a very small sect now. How prevalent then?

We think there were several thousand. You know there might have been 20,000 or 30,000 of them. The amount of land that we’re talking about squeezed between Judea and Galilee, I suppose, could have supported 100,000 people, counting all of the fertile valleys and the farms and what-not. But it doesn’t look like they were that thick on the ground.

So I would say 20,000 or 30,000 people. But they were vigorous; they were devout. I mean, this is another thing. You should never think of the Samaritans as not religious or not devout simply because they weren’t like Judean Jews or Galilean Jews. They were. They were profoundly devout. They believed the Pentateuch [inaudible 0:15:33]. Absolutely, they did. So this is some of the background.

Now, there's more to this background. More nearly towards the time of Jesus there had actually been fighting Samaritans and Judean Jews. There was an especial antagonism between Judean Jews and Samaritans because they were making rival claims about the nature of worship and which holy mountain was the holy mountain.

I mean, there was no holy mountain in Galilee where there was a temple. You see what I'm saying? Galilean Jews were seen as sort of Judean Jews with a funny accent.

They were Jews that were out of town Jews, right? The real debate was between Judean Jews and Samaritans over which was the holy mountain, what’s the true religion.

Now the other thing you need to understand is that the Old Testament Canon was not really closed by the time you get to the time of Jesus. It had not been officially declared "these books and no other". So there was a debate about what should be in the canon. Everybody agreed the Pentateuch - all the Judean and Galilean Jews agreed the prophet should be in there.

The debate was about what we would call the writings; the trunk end of the canon. There were several books especially debated, one of which is Esther. The reason Esther was just about left out is because it never mentions God; not directly. Okay?

The other book that was very controversial was actually Daniel. Very popular, but very controversial for a variety of reasons. It's interesting to me that Josephus, in telling the history of the Jews in his antiquities - what's most interesting to me is he says that Daniel predicts the rise of the Roman Empire.

In Josephus's view that fourth empire is the Roman Empire. The first empire would be the Assyrians and then the Babylonians and Medo-Persians and then Alexander’s empire and then Rome, and that’s the four empires of the Book of Daniel. What is so interesting to me is that when he's doing his exposition of Daniel the one section of the book he completely leaves out is Daniel 7. Because it's Messianic. Here's something you need to understand. Here are some of the sayings about Samaritans by Judean Jews.

"To what shall we compare the land of Samaria? It is like a perpetual graveyard."
Now what do you know about the uncleanness of a corpse. How many days do you become unclean if you touch a corpse according to Rabbinical Law? A week; seven days. This is, by the way, is why the priest in Levites passed by on the other side of the road, because if they touched the man and he's actually dead then they can't go to work next week. We'll talk about that in a minute.

So, for Jews, Orthodox zealous Jews, they were supposed to avoid going through Samaria. They were supposed to - if you're from Galilee you sort of cross the Jordan and go south on the other side of the Jordan, and re-cross the Jordan at Jericho and go up the Jericho Road to Jerusalem if you're going on pilgrimage to Passover Feast or Tabernacle Feast, or whatever feast you're going to. Feast of Pentecost. Whatever it is, do not go through Samaria.

So one of the first questions that I'm sure Jesus's disciples would have like to asked Jesus is: "What the heck are we doing in Samaria? Isn't this an unclean land? Why are we here?"

Here's another famous Samaritan saying: "To what shall we like in a Samaritan woman? She is a menstruant from the cradle." That is, she is perpetually unclean. You should never, ever discourse with, fraternize with, touch, never mind share a drinking cup with, a Samaritan woman. This is completely verboten. Bad Jew! Don't do it!

In other words, Jesus is violating all of these stigmas and this woman has got three strikes against her.

A: She's a Samaritan;

B. She's a foreign woman; and

C: She's an immoral woman

That's three strikes and you're out. You don't have conversations with such a person. I mean the basic Jewish rule was that men should only talk with women that they are related to or know. You know, women of the village, women you're related to, women you're married to. You are not supposed to be talking with women that are:

A. Foreign;

B. Samaritan; and

C. then found out to be from the red light district.

No, thank you. Not supposed to do that. This is why Simon, the Pharisee, is scandalized by Jesus’s behavior when the sinner women come and anoints Jesus's feet in Luke 7. This is a scandalous thing.

"If this man were a prophet," says Simon, "He'd know what kind of woman this is. He wouldn't have anything to do with her."

Thank you very much. This is the basic male-dominated, patriarchal attitude about women, especially foreign women. And Jesus is breaking all the stigmas. He's breaking all the rules. He's violating all the conventions for the sake of the redemption of the lost.

Male 01: I'm just having a little trouble understanding why the incredible antagonism. Was it just because of a complete religious schism? They believed this? They believed this? I mean it seems above and beyond distaste. I mean -
Well, they had been killing each other off. Not only did the Samaritans not help when they went off into exile, they refused to help rebuild Jerusalem when they came back. Indeed, they did the opposite of that. They put them on report.

[whispering] "They’re rebuilding the temple. You’d better check on them, oh governor from way East."

There was bloodshed. If a Roman governor wanted to really infuriate everybody in this discussion, here’s what he would do. He would mingle the blood of Galileans and Samaritans together as they offered sacrifices.

This is a powder keg situation. It’s just as volatile as the Palestinians and the Israelis. No question. They were busily killing each other off. There were border skirmishes. You name it. Devout Jews were simply saying, “We are staying out of Samaria.”

This is like going to Hebron, if you know anything about Israel today, and if you’re an Israeli Jew you are so not going to Hebron. Because what’s in Hebron? Well, this is the, if you will, the shrine of the ancestors built by Muslims, for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is a crucial Muslim center in the Holy Land and it’s chiefly populated by Muslims. There are few Jews hanging on there.

This is hostile territory. You don’t want to go there any more than you want to go to Nablus. It’s a volatile situation. Yup, Sam.

Sam: The woman who came to amongst Jesus [inaudible 0:23:24] you were talking about...

Mmm-hmmm.

Sam: How did they know that she was an immoral woman?

Yes, right. Well, there are two ways. First of all, this is small village life. Everybody knew everybody. I mean, everybody in this town in Samaria knew about this woman. You know?

"We no longer Jesus is the Messiah just because he told you all your whole life. We all know that. Okay, so what? That didn’t make us prophets. We believed because we’ve met Jesus and we believe, too."

Right? That’s what they say. First of all, we’re talking about small village life where everybody knew everybody else’s business. Right? But secondly, there is a clue in the text.

"She let down her hair in public."

Now the only women who let down their hair in public were prostitutes, so some would say she’s probably a prostitute or a former - now a repentant prostitute because you notice what she does with her hair. She wipes His feet - she’s so self-forgetful even in the house of a Pharisee, that she lets down her hair and she wipes Jesus’s feet with the hair because she used too much perfume. You know. She’s mopping up, using her hair.

Tells you exactly what kind of woman she is. Alright? Scandalous behavior. Who would let down their hair in public? This is not a Rapunzel kind of story. Okay? This is an ancient Near Eastern story where women do not show their hair because their hair is their - as Paul says, their hair is their glory. Don’t show it to anybody but your husband. But that’s the deal.

Okay. Now several other aspects of this that we need to get a handle on. How comfortable are the disciples with this interchange Jesus is having with the Samaritan woman that they get in on the very end of?
We have more parenthetical remarks in the Gospel of John than in any of those other gospels. There is more explaining, and there is a reason for that. The audience needs more explaining. It doesn't know the Christian tradition, it doesn't know the Jewish tradition.

As I said, this is a gospel meant for evangelism, so there is more explaining of things. Explaining of customs, for example, and we have this parenthetical remark: "The disciples didn't dare ask Jesus why He was talking to this woman."

I mean, from their point of view they are having apoplexy. They are going, "Oh, this is not good again. Here He goes again." You know? "This is not good. This is not what my momma told me to do."

You know, it's violating a lot of the basic Jewish social and cultural teaching that they had been raised with.

A. She's a woman;
B. She's a Samaritan woman; and
C. Now she's an immoral woman?

"Why are you talking to her? She should be shunned. She should be an outcast." And in fact, she is an outcast because what time of day is she at the well? Noon. You don't go to the well at noon unless you're trying to avoid attention.

The time that women in the ancient Near East went to the well was at dawn, the first thing in the morning. You go draw the water while it's still cool, among other things. You bring the water back to the house for the day.

Now let's look at the nature of the conversation. You remember I told you last night about the two levels of these conversations. Right?

Jesus is talking about spiritual water. She thinks he's talking about a creek because the phrase "living water" was the way you referred to a creek in that whole culture. Living water meant water that was moving. This is why in the Christian document the Didache, the author says, "Baptize them in living water." That is, running water, and then he says, "If you can't find living water use still water."

Living water means running water. So, this woman thinks that Jesus knows where there is a creek in town where she can get the H2O, and not have to come all the way out here to Jacob's well.

See that's what she assumes this conversation to be about. Right? What's the source of water? And of course, in a dry and weary land your source of water is your source of life. I mean, if you want to understand why water is an emblem of life you need to understand the ancient Near East.

Even the Holy Land, between May and October, there is zero rain. Zero. This is why all the battles are fought in the summer. You don't have a weather problem. You can just go. Zero rain.

So what do you have to do? You have to hoard water. You have to have cisterns. Some of the more interesting archaeological digs that have been done around Jerusalem in the past 20 years have dug up these enormous Olympic swimming pool sized cisterns, just to store water.

It's not just the Pool of Siloam or the Pool of Bethesda, which are cisterns. That's what they are. There was a huge Salominic pool which was dug up that was a mile long and about a hundred yards deep. Huge, enormous cistern to collect rainwater. Why? Because you're going to go three or four months of the year with no rain.
You have to understand the situation. Therefore, what do you do in the summer when you’re growing crops. You’ve got to what? Hand irrigate. It’s not like they have a sprinkler system. Right? You have to hand irrigate the plants. This is labor intensive, to say the least.

So, everybody is always excited if the good water is closer to the house instead of way out of town. Right? The Samaritan woman gets excited.

"You know where there’s a creek that I don’t know about? Where is this living water? Show me sir and I won’t have to come to the well any more. We’re good."

Two levels of discourse. She’s thinking plain old H2O and He’s thinking of a very different kind of living water. It’s powerful. This is a powerful thing. You see, she’s no more spiritually adept initially than the disciples who come back with their take-out from Hardee’s, you know, and Jesus says "I have food you know not of," and they are all going, "Somebody else bringing him lunch?"

What happened here? You see they are thinking on the mundane level and Jesus is talking at a deeper and more spiritual level.

So what’s going on in this story? It is a conversion story. It’s an illustration of what we studied last night from the Nicodemus story. Here is a person about to be born again, and how does it happen? It happens through dialogue with Jesus. It happens through having a little talk with Jesus. That’s how it happens here.

Now lets talk about the theological discussion they have for a minute. I’ve used this passage. I’ve got a new little book coming out on the nature of worship called "We Have Seen His Glory". This passage is a very important passage for getting at Jesus’s view of worship.

Jesus says, "The day is coming and now is that neither on Mount Gerizim nor on Mount Zion, but wherever in spirit and truth."

You know this discussion? He says that worship needs to comport with God's nature. What we know about God’s nature is He’s not confined to a building somewhere. Despite what ancient near Eastern people believed that Gods dwelled in temples. Okay?

"Not so much," says Jesus. "God is Spirit. He doesn't need a human house. And we should worship him in spirit and in truth wherever in spirit and in truth."

This is the nature of eschatological worship now that Jesus is here. You see, what Jesus is saying is that the ancient focus of Judaism on Torah, temple and territory is all going to change now.

You don't need a temple when His body is the temple. You don't need a Torah when He is the law. And you don't need the territory if the kingdom of God is co-extant with the world. You don't need a specific Holy Land. He's changing the nature of the discourse about worship.

Wherever, whenever, in spirit and truth, because God is spirit and is everywhere. It's a powerful discussion, however brief and tantalizing about the nature of worship.

Now, what’s the significance of this all happening at Jacob’s well? What do we know about Jacob? What happened at Bethel with Jacob? He wrestled with an angel and he had a name change. Remember?

In a sense we are supposed to see this story as a woman wrestling with the Divine One and extracting a blessing. In other words, we’re supposed to hear an echo of the Jacob story here. There’s an echo of the Jacob story here, and it’s an intentional echo of the Jacob story without question.
And it changes her life, just as wrestling with the angel changed Jacob's life. So this changes her life and then the story develops into irony.

Now, one of the things you notice about the fourth gospel is that the fourth gospel writer wants to tell stories at some length. He's not interested in giving sound bites. It's not like the synoptics.

In Matthew and Mark you kind of get sound bite stories. Hardly any descriptors, right? When you get to Luke you have a little bit more lengthy stories and more lengthy parables. And when you get to John the man say's, "You know, we're just going to forget about telling the parables. We're going to tell long narratives about Jesus."

And that's one of the really literary differences between the Gospel of John and looking at the synoptics. This story goes on for over 40 verses. He allows the story to be more fully told because he believes that through the narrative the character of Jesus is revealed, and it's powerful.

So, when you get to the end of the story, you're going to expect a surprise and there is a surprise. Jesus says, "You know, I have food that you know not of." And then he tells this little story that's like a parable about the sower and the reaper. And about the sower and the reaper rejoicing together. You caught bit? Right there at the end?

Okay - here's the question: Who had just been doing the sowing? Jesus had sowed it in the woman. Who had she sowed it in? The Samaritans.

Had the disciples the - the "duh-siples" - gone to town and sowed the seed in the Samaritans? Not so much. They were avoiding the Samaritans the best they could, even though they were in Samaria. Right? They were out of bounds, and they were trying to stay out of bounds.

You notice they didn't go to town and eat. They came back with their take-out, offering Jesus some. Okay? So Jesus tells a little story at the end to indicate that the ones who had been doing the sowing were in fact Jesus and the Samaritan woman. And that they should all rejoice because the reaping was a lot of Samaritans came to Christ.

So, say, "Hooray!"

And the disciples are going, "Great."

Jesus says, "Try again."

"Hooray!"

"Try again."

"Hoo-ray! Can we get out of town now?"

This is about reaching beyond the borders of what was considered Orthodox Judaism of that day and it's trying to teach the disciples the lesson that they should be open to dialoguing with the least, the last, and the lost, and even the foreigners. They should be open to this because God loves them to. God loves the world. Not just the disciples and not just Galilean and Judean Jews. He loves the world.

And so, at the end, this woman is portrayed as somebody who is a disciple planting the seed of the gospel in her own people. And of course, they very proudly go and say, "You know, initially we believe because of what you said, but now that we've met Jesus in person, it's all good. We believe on our own."
There's a little bit of snobbery in all of that. It's a little tainted to believe on the basis of an immoral woman, so, you know, let's get on with the real deal here.

It's a powerful story and it is meant to reveal something very important about the character of Jesus. Our author is telling stories that would have been tremendously offensive in their original setting.

And how does the story end? Does Jesus at the end of the story say, [musically] "On the road again"? No, He accepts the invitation of the Samaritans to stay several more days and the disciples are all going "Oy vey. Just when we thought we were going to get out of town and get back to Galilee."

Not so much. Not so much. He stays several more days with the Samaritans. Now this illuminates the parable of the Good Samaritan which it would never have been called in the first century A.D.

Let's think about this parable. Just as Jesus is out of bounds in John 4, the Samaritan is out of bounds in this parable. Where is he? He's on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. He's in enemy territory. He's in Judea and he certainly, as a Samaritan, would have felt no obligation to stop and help the man on the side of the road who was a Jew, not a Samaritan. If he had not been a Jew, Jesus would have had to say so in the parable. Okay?

So let's think about this story. There was a certain man who went down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell amongst thieves. Now, if you know this road, it descends over 2,500 feet in 20 miles. It's a very winding, precipitous, downward road to the lowest city on earth, which is Jericho. Okay?

And he fell amongst thieves. Well, if you've ever seen the original Jericho Road, which is winding through waddies and hills and all of this, you would know why it would be easy to fall among thieves. They beat him and they stripped him, they took whatever they wanted from him and they left him for dead.

Now here's where I tell you that when parables were told, and Jesus was by no means the originator of parable telling - we have some in the Old Testament. Remember this parable of Nathan, that Nathan told about the ewe lamb to David so that he could say to David, "You da man" at the end of the parable? Remember that one?

This parable of the Good Samaritan is illustrative of the spirit of Jesus in a lot of ways. Jesus was not the only parable teller and when ancients told parables, they tried to follow the Rule of Three. That is, you have no more than three main characters in a parable, that's number one. Okay? And normally the third main character is the one who is going to be the redeeming feature, or hero of the parable. Okay?

Now context is important, too. Before we look any further at the story. Who is it that asks Jesus the question, "And who precisely is my neighbor?"

Yes, it's a lawyer, and by which it's meant not Sam Waterston of "Law and Order". It's an expert in the Mosaic Law. And who did that person work for? He worked for the priests and the Levites.

His heroes in this story would be the priests and Levites. Right? That would be his heroes in this story. A certain man went down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell amongst thieves, was stripped, beaten and left for dead.

A priest, then, came down the road and saw the man lying on the side of the road, thought to himself, "He might be dead. He could be dead. If he's dead and I touch him, then what happens to me? I become unclean. I can't do my priestly duties next week. I can't feed my family." So he passes by on the other side of the road.
Just a little footnote. We know for a fact that there were lots of priests and Levites who lived in Jericho because they couldn't afford to live on Mount Zion. So they lived in the suburbs. They made a 20 mile walk back and forth to work once a week. They lived in Jericho; they worked on Mount Zion in the temple precincts.

This is the commuter road. Okay? This is the I-71 that people used. So, the priest passes by on the other side of the road, leaving the man in his misery.

The second figure in the story is the other person the lawyer worked with, the Levite. Who were the Levites opposed to the priests? Tell me what you know about your Old Testament. What's the difference between a priest and a Levite?

Female 01: They took care of the temple.

Sure. They were the assistants. They were, you know, they were like the vergers in an Anglican cathedral. They took care of the apparatus and the equipment in cleaning things and all of that. They were technically priests but basically they were helping staff is what they really were for the most part.

You need to understand that even if you're of the proper blood line, only some people got to be priests. They had to be chosen. The person who controlled the choosing of the high priest was in fact, the Roman governor. What we learned, and one of the things you should know is, that the family who controlled the high priesthood from the time of Jesus all the way to the time of the death of James, the brother of Jesus, in 62 A.D., was the same family.

It went Annas, Caiaphas, Caiaphas's son, Caiaphas's grandson, and it was Caiaphas's grandson who had James, the brother of Jesus, executed. So there was this animus between the Jesus family and the Caiaphas family during this whole period from 30 to 62 A.D. It was a long running family thing.

But it was the Roman governor who decided who the high priests were. Okay? Not everybody who had the bloodlines got to be priests, or even high priest. It was a very specific thing.

Well the Levite also passes by on the other side of the road. Now, in the Rule of Three, in a parable like this, in early Judaism, normally then what you have is "Joe Devout lay Jew" who comes along and does the job the priest and the Levite should have done, and so the leity shows up the clergy. Hoo-ray. Right?

Now that's the way a parable would have gone that was a little unexpected, a little surprising. So, undoubtedly the lawyer would have expected that the third person who comes along would be a devout, ordinary Jew. Right? Is that what happens?

Not so much. The third person who comes around is completely unexpected and out from left field. It's the Samaritan who is out of bounds and has no obligation to Jews. Indeed, Jews would object that he shouldn't even touch a Jew. He shouldn't touch a Jew, even if he's dead.

But in fact, he does. He goes over, he looks closely, he finds that the man is not yet dead. He takes out oil and he takes out wine. Oil to soothe the bruises and wine to sterilize the cuts. Because there's what in wine? Alcohol.

It's not non-alcoholic. The toastmaster at the Wedding Feast at Cana did not say, "You've saved the best grape juice for last." This so did not happen.
So he salves the man's wounds and his cuts. He binds him up. At that point he could have said, "I've done my good turn daily. I'm done." And he could have left, but he does not. Instead, he endangers his own journey by putting a wounded man on his pack animal and starts carting him further down this road.

And then, when he gets to the Holiday Inn Express in Jericho, he doesn't simply dump the man on the innkeeper and say, "Look - you're a Jew, he's a Jew, you take care of him." He says, "Look, he needs some convalescing, here is some money to help with the costs of the convalescing and if there is more, I'm a commuter, I'll be back this way. I'll pay again if need be."

Now this is a tremendously offensive story because it's breaking all of the stereotypes that that Judean Jewish lawyer would have had. And you see, he had asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

Have you ever noticed that Jesus hardly ever gave a direct answer? People would ask him a question and he'd say, "Let me tell you a story." He hardly ever gave a direct answer.

And he did not answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" directly. The question he answered was, "How should I be neighbor to everybody? How should I be neighbor to everybody, and should I be neighbor to everybody?"

Because, you see, what the lawyer was looking for was a legal limitation of the meaning of the word "neighbor". If he could be told "Who was my neighbor? then he knew "who was not my neighbor" and all of that stuff about love they neighbor as thyself, would not apply to the non-neighbor. You see?

The heart of the law. Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself. If you narrow the definition of neighbor enough, it's doable. Right? And this is what he wants. He wants a legal definition of non-neighbor, like Samaritans, for example.

So Jesus deliberately, in his face, throws up Samaritan as example of neighbor. That's what's going on and it is enormously offensive. This is not a nice little spiritual deity with no social implications. This is the social gospel. Jesus is dropping a hand grenade in the life of this lawyer and blowing up all his stereotypes. That's what's happening here.

This is as offensive as Martin Luther King, Jr., saying that God cares about the content of your character and he doesn't give a hill of beans about the color of your skin. This is offensive. Jesus believed His job was not merely to comfort the afflicted, but to afflict the comfortable, and that's exactly what He's doing here. He's afflicting the comfortable.

So, Jesus makes the lawyer answer the question. Now who do you think was more of a neighbor in this particular situation? And you can just hear the lawyer, you know, gritting his teeth and going, "Well, I reckon it was the Samaritan." [spitting sounds] "Samaritan!"

Audience: [chuckling]

And then Jesus sticks the knife all the way in and says, "Go be like him. Go be like him."

I mean, this is offensive. This is not only blowing up the stereotypes, it's shaming a man who thought he was a righteous Jew for using his orthodoxy as a tool to justify his prejudice.

And hear me now - that will not fly with Jesus. You don't use your orthodoxy as a tool to justify your prejudices against other kinds of people. It will not do.
Jesus is blowing up that kind of stereotype. He's blowing it up. Nor should you use your orthodoxy as an excuse to redefine the word neighbor, so that you don't have to deal with awkward, ugly and offensive people who may even hate your religion. It won't do. It's not Jesus.

The Gospel of John is full of these kinds of stories and they are just powerful in breaking down the stereotypes to reach everyone for the sake of salvation. It has been said that the Gospel of John is the most spiritual of the gospels, and it is true, but it's also the most socially challenging one because he's saying, "You need - you need to deal with not just lost Jews, you need to deal with Samaritans. And you need to deal with not just lost Samaritans you need to deal with Greeks. And you need to not just deal with Greeks - by which he meant the Asper Jews - you need to deal with Gentiles. Because Jesus is the savior of the world.

Alright, I'm going to stop for a minute and ask what questions did this whole Samaritan unit from the Gospel of John raise for you? What questions?

Female 02: Some people try to make this story especially of the woman at the well, more than just a social story and leave out the conversion aspect?

Yes.

Female 02: What are some good ways to talk about how those two are brought together?

Yes. What I would say is that you can't have the spiritual gospel without the social gospel, and vice versa. You know, these two things go together. All real conversions have social implications.

They change the nature of your relationships. That's a social implication. They should change your world view. They do change your world view.

They certainly changed Paul's world view. Paul was busy carting off Christians and having them executed. That's a change of world view, you know.

So, conversion is not just about you being saved. Conversion is about you becoming one who emulates the character of Christ. And that's completely social. If you're starting to imitate the behavior of Jesus, there is no spiritual gospel.

See, one of the problems we have in our post-modern [coughing] situation is, religion is assumed to do with interior feelings and experiences. It doesn't have to do with the facts, or history, or all of that. So what we've had in this era is the agnosticising of religion. Even the agnosticising of Christianity, making it a purely spiritual thing that has, you know, is so heavenly minded it's no earthly good. Right?

This is not the religion of Jesus and it was not the religion of the earliest Christians.

One of the reasons for the enormous appeal of the agnostic gospels in our day to non-believers or fringe believers, you know, is precisely because it allows them to have a spirituality without having a social conscience. It allows them to have a spirituality without having to live with the hard ethics of Jesus. It allows them to have a spirituality without any zeal about evangelism or mission. You know?

This is exactly what people want. A narcissistic religion that makes me feel good about myself.

Yes, Michelle?

Michelle: On that same line, what do you say the people who do have a mission but don't have the spirituality?
Yes. Well, my experience has been that most of those are people who have failed to continue to nourish their spirituality. What initially led them down this path was some kind of genuinely religious righteous indignation, or some concern for the poor. All of which has a spiritual root, you know? Some self-sacrificial good urge. But what happens in the process is spending your whole time opening cans of beans for the poor is, you cease to keep nurturing your spiritual life. You don't keep going to the well and drinking yourself, because you're so busy pouring out water.

What happens to these folks is that they get burned out. I see this over and over again. The other part of the problem is that they get frustrated with conservative Christians, because too few conservative Christians are actually committed to the social gospel.

Thank god that this church - I'm happy to be doing this in this church, which is committed to the social gospel, you know. I think that's the ultimate exterior implication of our gospel, is the social gospel. I think that's important and powerful.

Most of the folks like you're talking about are liberal protestants who once had a more evangelical faith, but they have been so off-put by the narcissistic behavior of evangelical Christians who don't care about the social gospel, that unfortunately they've thrown the Orthodox baby out with the bath water.

I mean, I have a lot of talks - I'm going at the end of February to have a long debate with Dom Crossan, an Irish Catholic former seminary professor in DePaul in Chicago, who has written all of these, you know, Jesus seminar books. Right?

Well, he still cares about the social gospel, but you know, the spiritual root of all that in a real profound love of Jesus is not really shining bright in his life any more. I can actually talk to him about that, but his gut level reaction is in fact, "Oh, you conservative protestants. First of all, you're naive and secondly, you're hypocrites. You talk about being like Jesus, but you're not prepared to actually go out and do it. And he has a case. He has a case, because too many of us are more interested in nurturing our little old pea-picking hearts and not going out and saving the lost. You know. I understand that. Here's what I say to him about that.

I say, "You need to judge a form of Christianity not at its worst, but at its best. Let me show you this person, who is living out the gospel and is doing the same kind of things you're concerned about doing for the poor and the lost and all of that, but he has evangelical vibrancy and a deep, profound prayer life, and is not casting aspersions on other people's theology."

See, he's angry with the church. There are lots of reasons to be angry with the church, of course. Yes, Dan?

Do you think in the lawyer's original answer that it was good to love God with all your heart -

[coughing] Yes. - might show strength, and then to love your neighbor that in that answer there was a connection between the two that loving your neighbor is worship of God. If that's at the center of your loving your neighbor and that continues to be fed and a Samaritan was actually serving the Jew out of love for God, and that continues to be invested in, then when that's done, it's not socially justifying the people who do it. It's social justice that's reflecting God. If it's done as a way of life, as worship to the Lord -

Right. - then God can sustain that and people can find Jesus in it because he's already there.

Yes, I think there's a lot of truth to that. What I'm actually arguing in my worship book is that all of life should be doxological. That is, you shouldn't do anything you can't do to the glory of God. All of life
should be doxological. However, that does not supplant. It merely supplements the call and need for us to enter into His house with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise and engaging corporate worship.

Jesus is not saying stop worshiping in the ways we've worshiped before. What He's saying is let's have a broader vision of God and not sort of tagging everything to some kind of physical center where you would go and worship God. You know?

What I mean to say is that worshiping God rather than worshiping the mission.

Oh, yes. And that is a real problem for some people who understand how important the mission is. I love the way that those two scriptures were together, and that the Samaritan, I believe, was worshiping God and loving God when he loved his neighbor. I think that's where the church finds God the most.

Well, see, here's the other thing that I get out of that, and also out of the Lord's Prayer. Remember in the Lord's Prayer where it says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are indebted to us"?

You see, the disconnect for Americans is the vertical and the horizontal are co-entailed and codependent. That is, you cannot fully or truly love God unless you are also loving your neighbor, and vice versa.

Similarly, you will put an impediment to receiving the forgiveness of God in your life, unless you are forgiving. There is something about our connection with God that also necessarily entails our connection with other human beings. There is a vertical and a horizontal dimension to it.

What post-modern religion is all about is severing the connection between the vertical and the horizontal; between the historical and the spiritual. So it's just purely the narcissistic vertical thing. It's just me and Jesus, me and Jesus, or me and God or me and Buddha or whoever it is. You know? It's my private spirituality.

Here's what I want to say to that. One of the things I absolutely would say to that is, religion is deeply personal, but Christian religion can never be private. There is a difference between it being personal and it being private. Christianity is never meant to be private. It's certainly deeply personal, but you see in our culture that's a disconnect. That's your private religion. That's your opinions, ya-da, ya-da, ya-da.

That would never do from Jesus's point of view. That would never do from Paul's point of view. They didn't die so we could have a personal, privatistic spirituality. That's not what they were all about.

So, for me, you know, it's about sharing the whole gospel with the whole world in all its full challenging implications. Of course, it challenges us as much as it would challenge the world because we're Christians under construction.

I was at the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, which, if you ever get the chance to go you ought to go. It's a great trip. It's a nice spiritual pilgrimage to see all the work that God did through Billy and Ruth for so many years.

You may know that she grew up in China, the child of missionaries. She has her own fabulous story to tell. Her gravestone is there. On her gravestone it says, "Thanks for your patience. Construction completed."

I like that. That's good. She knew she wasn't perfect. She knew God was still working on her.
Chapter 7

Healing of the Man Born Blind

We have a textual problem here and this is a good time to deal with you in regard to the issue of textual criticism. [coughing]

Our earliest and best manuscripts of the gospel of John do not include this beautiful story. John 7:53-8:11. It does not appear to have been an original part of this gospel.

That doesn’t mean it’s not a true story. It doesn’t mean it’s not a Johanan story. It simply means that it was not a part of this gospel when it was originally put together. We shouldn’t be surprised that there were a lot of extra such stories. The end of this gospel says, in John 20, "There are not enough books in the world to write down all the things that Jesus said and did." Remember?

So, how do you deal with such an issue as this? The basic principle that all scholars, whether they are conservative, moderate or liberal, when dealing with text criticism is that the earliest and original text is what we are trying to recover. That is, we’re trying to recover what the original inspired authors wrote, plus nothing.

Here is our problem: We don’t have any copies of the original manuscripts of any of these books. What is have is copies of copies of copies of copies. That’s what we have. Okay?

So what we have to do, is we have to sift the over 5,000 part or whole manuscripts that we have of the Greek New Testament according to certain key principles in order to get back to the original text of the Greek New Testament.

The Greek New Testament that we have today is based on that kind of sifting. It’s not identical with any one Greek manuscript of the New Testament. Okay?

It’s based on a critical sifting of all of the pieces, early or late, big or little, and not just in Greek but with other languages as well to try and get back to the original Greek.

Now I should tell you just a little bit about how that’s done. There are certain rules of text criticism. When I’m talking about text criticism, please understand that I’m not talking about criticizing the text. I’m talking about trying to discern the original form of the text. That’s called text criticism. Unfortunately, the word criticism has a negative connotation in our world.

Here are some of the principles that we go by.

Principle number one would be, the earliest reading that we have of a text is likely to be original. More likely to be original. [sound of writing on board] That’s one principal.

Another principal - the reading that is supported by our earliest and best witnesses is likely to be original. [writing on board]

The more difficult reading is likely to be original. The shorter reading - more likely to be original. And there are more, but these are probably the top four.

Man 1: Seems like three and four are contradictory.
No, the more difficult reading is a reading that is - would have been offensive to later Christian scribes. I can give you a good illustration of this. We have a textural problem in the middle of the beautiful story of Jesus, Mary and Martha at their house.

What, in fact, did Jesus say to Martha at the end of the story? The key saying at the end? Did he say, "Few things are necessary or perhaps only one?" That's one reading.

Did he say, "Only one thing is necessary"? Did he say, "Many things are often necessary, but one is more important"? There are several readings here. Okay?

And that particular text is usually decided upon on the basis of this last rule. What tends to happen with scribes is they go explanatory.

That is, if there is a short reading that seems too pungent, too pointed, too difficult, they tend to do what? They tend to put yeast in the dough. They tend to add or they try to clarify it a little bit. Okay?

And so we have texts that are like that. Now if you were to look at a Greek New Testament, in the Metzger New Testament, at the bottom of every single page there are variant readings, and they get ratings. A ratings - likely reading; B rating - not so much; C rating - really wishy-washy; D rating - probably not. Probably not original. Okay?

Well we need this because, of course, the goal is to get back to the original inspired text plus nothing. We don’t want doodlings from later scribes, do we? We want the original Bible plus nothing. That’s what we want. And that’s why text criticism is both good and a necessary and important thing.

Here is where I tell you that there were good scribes and there were bad scribes. There were careful scribes and there were sloppy scribes. Just like students, right? It’s really important that we understand that.

One of the ways that you might think we would judge this issue is majority rules. Okay? Let me show you what’s wrong with that.

Lets say we have two scribes. We’ll call one Publius [writing on board] and we’ll call the other Julius. Okay? Now we’ve got two Christian scribes, right?

Publis is not a detailed guy. He’s not really all that careful but he’s fast. He has this reputation for copying things fast. Alright? So Publius and Julius both start out with the same original. Lets say it’s the Gospel of John, and they have to hand copy it, right? The rule in the monastery is: We want as many copies as we can get. Go to work. Right?

So Publius is copying away, and copying away, and copying away, and copying away, and copying away, and he’s made five manuscript copies at the same time Julius has made one. You know?

In America, Julius’s job would be in danger. However, Julius is meticulously careful.

Now here’s what happens with Publius, the speed scribe. Alright? Well, the manuscripts that he has made are then copied by others, and of course you’re only as good as the source manuscript you’ve got. Right? Because you don’t have 10 others to compare it to. You’re only as good as the source manuscript you’ve got.

In the copying tree of Publius all of a sudden what’s happened is we’ve got like 20 second generation copies of the Publius manuscript - way more. And you know what’s happened with poor Julius? The next guy that got Julius’s text could only make two copies.
Now, why is this little esoteric demonstration important? I'll tell you why. It has everything to do with the King James version. One of the things you hear a lot in the debate about the King James version is that we should go with the majority text. That is, we should go with the text that is most represented by the most copies. The answer to that is no.

You have to critically read all the copies and figure out who was the most careful copier, what did the earliest manuscript say, and you go with the earliest and best readings. You've got to go with the earliest and best readings. Okay? So, the truth of the matter is that the King James English translation - they did the best they could.

Guess what. They didn't have any manuscripts earlier than medieval manuscripts. Most of the manuscripts from which it was translated were, in fact, Latin; very few Hebrew manuscripts; only a few more Greek manuscripts, and mostly they were trying to follow the tradition. They were very conservative translators. Very conservative.

Now, they did well with what they had, but you’re only as good as your source materials, right? Why is it not inadequate any more to simply read a King James Bible? Because of the text criticism.

We know better today, 300 - 400 years later, we know better today, what the original text of the Greek New Testament said than they did in 1611. Why? Because we have much earlier copies. We have much better copies. We've got many more copies. We've got over 5,000 part or whole manuscripts of the Greek New Testament.

This is why text criticism is so important. We are getting closer and closer to the original, and I think this is in the providence of God. The further we get away in time, from when the Greek New Testament was written, the closer we are actually getting to the text as a beneficence from God. And that's really good news.

Now, how does that affect this story? Well, here is what I say. I love this story to pieces. I think it's a true story. Certainly it reveals the character of Jesus, that wonderful balance between justice and mercy, and I would certainly not want to leave us with that but you could have gotten that from some of the other stories about Jesus that are not textually questionable. Okay.

So, what do I do with this story? I use it as a supplement. I'm not going to preach on it because I don't think it was originally in the Word of God. I'm going to use it as a supplement to illustrate the character of Jesus, which I could also demonstrate from other texts that are not textually questionable.

One of the reasons the scholars have come to the conclusion that this is clearly inserted into the text is this is a text looking for a home. In one manuscript, the story of the woman caught in adultery, comes early in the Gospel of John. In another manuscript it comes late in the Gospel of John.

In some manuscripts it comes right where we find it here, John 7:53-8:11. In one manuscript this story is in the Gospel of Luke. Now clearly this means that Christians loved this story, but they didn’t know where to put it, because it wasn’t an original part of the manuscript.

So what are you going to do? Put is somewhere. Put it in Luke if you need to. We need it. You know? And that's what happened to this story.
Undoubtedly there were a lot of other authentic, genuine, historical stories about Jesus that didn’t make the cut. This happens to be one that we know about that wasn’t in the original Gospel of John, but it certainly, I think, is a true story.

Yes?

Man 2: So using your hypothetical there on the board, Julius may have included that in his version, but Publius didn’t.

Oh, no - the other way around.

Man 2: The other way around.

Julius didn't have it in his original and because he was a careful copier, his version didn't have it in the copies.

Man 3: So where did it come from then?

Here’s the thing - there were circulating, isolated sayings of Jesus, isolated stories of Jesus. You see some of this in the Gospel of Thomas. There were all kinds of extra material. What are called agrapha out there floating around at the end of the first century, the beginning of the second century into the third and fourth century.

So, some scribes said, "You know - I really like this story. It sounds Johanan to me. Lets put it in here." You know.

I want you to understand that most of the scribes were very conservative and careful. Some of them were sloppy and a few of them were tendentious. What I mean by that is they tended to amplify and clarify things in a way that comported with their own theology.

Now, where this really comes into play, especially with the King James, is the Book of Acts. The so-called Western Text of Acts is 20 percent longer than the Alexandrian Text of Acts. There are all kinds of additions and changes, and it’s not just additions, there are changes.

Let me give you a good example. In the Western Text of Acts, there is the story about Priscilla, Aquilla and Apollos. Remember this story? Apollos comes to the synagogue. In Ephesus they discover that he’s a Christian, he knows the way of the Lord, he teaches it accurately; but the only baptism he knows about is John the Baptist’s baptism. Right?

So, according to our earliest Greek manuscripts, Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and taught him more accurately the way of the Lord. Now that’s what the earliest text says.

Guess what the Western text says. The Western text says, "And hearing him speak in this way, Aquila took him aside and taught him the way of the Lord more accurately."

Now, why? Well, because what we know about the medieval church. They wanted to eliminate evidence that women taught men. This is a good way to do it. You just sort of gerrymander the text a little bit.

There were dishonest scribes. [coughing] There were tendentious scribes, and one of their agendas was - Unfortunately there are several agendas. They had an antifeminist agenda. They didn't like women teaching and preaching.

They had an anti-Jewish agenda so they heightened elements in the text that might seem anti-Semitic. They thought this was a good thing. They had agendas. There were scribes with agendas.
What we want is the original text because I hope if you’ve learned anything from the story of the Good Samaritan, and from the story of the Samaritan woman, Jesus would be death and taxes on this sort of stuff. He was certainly not anti-woman. He was certainly not anti-Semitic. He wasn't anti-Samaritan. He was pro everybody.

We need text criticism to get away from later bad theology to start with, and later bad ethics as well. We need to be honest about our text criticism however dearly we might love a story like the woman caught in adultery. So I’m just being honest in saying I don’t think it was originally in the Gospel of John, but I do think it's a true story. So, I can learn from it, but I’m not going to preach on the basis of it and say, "Thus sayeth the Lord: Boom."

That's going to be reserved for what is the real text of the Bible. Okay?

Now, lets press on in the Gospel of John having that little side lesson on text criticism, and we want to go to another important story. [music crescendos] [music fades out]

Now we talked a little bit about this last night. This is the second, or penultimate to the last miracle in the Book of Signs. If we look at the structure of the Gospel of John, there are four parts to the structure. There is the prologue: "In the beginning was the word..."

There is the Book of Signs, which goes from John 1:19-12:50, climaxing with the raising of Lazarus - that whole story.

Then there is the Book of Glory, which is basically Jesus's discourses with his disciples, John 13 all the way through John 17, and the Passion narrative.

Then you have the appendix, John 21.

So there are just four parts to this gospel - a prologue and an epilogue, John 1 the prologue; John 21 the epilogue; and the Book of Signs. We’re in the middle of the Book of Signs.

The story that we have just looked at is penultimate. It's the sixth one of seven and you’ll remember what I said to you last night about this, that this miracle would have been seen as exceedingly remarkable since it's not recorded anywhere in the Old Testament.

You heard the man say, "Nobody has given sight to a person born blind since the beginning of creation."

Jews didn’t think that had ever happened, so this is a really singular and important miracle. It’s like there is this crescendo; the miraculous; the "can you top this?" finishing with the raising of Lazarus in Bethany. And, of course, that’s all the more appropriate since this is the gospel that goes back to Lazarus in Bethany. Of course, he’s telling his story as the last of the great sign narratives here.

Some unpacking of this story. One of the most important theological points that you need to get is that ancient peoples believed, as many modern people do, that there is a connection between sickness and sin.

If you’re sick, it’s because you sinned. If you’re deformed it’s because somebody sinned, so at the beginning of this story, the question that the disciples quite naturally ask is, "Is this man blind because he sinned, or his parents sinned?"

There is assumed a strong nexus of connection between sin and sickness. Now I’m not denying that sinning can lead to sickness. Look at all the sexually transmitted diseases.
I’m not denying that there are at times connections. I am saying that you can’t make that an invariable rule. There are plenty of robustly healthy non-holy people in the world, and on the other hand, some of the great saints of the church have been sickly and died prematurely.

So, you can not make a one-to-one correlation between sickness and sin. You just can not go there, and Jesus is trying to break that assumption here in John 9.

He also tries to break this assumption in Luke 13. In Luke 13 the disciples say, "Were those people on whom the Tower of Siloam fell worse sinners than everybody else?" I mean, is that why that happened to them? And Jesus says no. Then He says, "If you don’t repent something worse than that can happen to you."

So, one of the things he’s trying to do is sever the assumption of a hard connection between not only sickness and sin, but calamity and sin. Okay? That sin necessarily leads to materialistic calamity or it leads to sickness. No. That’s not true and Jesus does not affirm that that’s true.

In fact, what He’s doing is He’s building on a teaching that comes from Ezekiel, when Ezekiel begins to talk about individual responsibility for sin. It’s an important prophetic teaching and it’s a teaching that went against earlier teaching which said things like, “The parents ate the sour grapes and the children’s teeth were set on edge.” Remember this teaching, where it was assumed that the sin of the parents would be visited on the children and the grandchildren, etc., and not just the sin would be perpetuated, but the punishment would be perpetuated on the children and the grandchildren, and all of that.

Well, the later prophets began to say, "Well, that’s not quite right, nor is it fair." And Ezekiel was one of the first to talk about individual responsibility for sin.

Jesus is also a person who affirms that. The parents’ sin is the parents’ sin; it’s not the children’s sin, and so on.

Now when we deal with this particular story here, there is a connection between this story and the woman caught in adultery.

Here is what you need to know about the story about the woman caught in adultery. The elders of the community, the older ones, were responsible for the moral uprightness of the community. In early Judaism, if you caught someone in the act of adultery - first of all, you wouldn’t be catching just a single person, it takes two to tango. Right? The first question to be asked about that story is where is the man caught in adultery? Right? And we are told that they are not so interested in upholding the law. They are interested in trapping Jesus in His words. The story says that the point of this exercise was not to execute justice on this woman, but to trap Jesus in His words; to put him in an impossible place. Between a Mosaic rock and a hard place - that’s what they are trying to do here.

Moses says, "Stoning. What do you say?" You know, if He says stoning, then He agrees with Moses but He loses the Mr. Compassionate Award of the Year. You know, if he says no stoning, he’s perceived to have violated the law of Moses. You with me now?

So here’s what He does, and it’s exceedingly clever because He knows it’s the job of the elders to deal with the moral failures of the community, or potential moral failures of the community. Who He is actually blaming for this sin are the ones standing around holding the stones. And what His saying means is, let the person without guilt in this particular matter cast the first stone. The reason the elders are all
dropping the stones and walking away is not because just in general they are sinners. It's because they are responsible for the moral rectitude of their community and they have failed this woman. They have failed her because their first job was to interrupt the act of adultery to warn them.

You don't just stone them right off the block. The first thing you're supposed to do is warn them that what they are doing is a violation of the law and they must stop right now. That was the job of the elders of the community and they failed in that. They just snatched the woman and dragged her off to use as a toy, or a tool, to trap Jesus. That's what they are doing here.

So the issue here is they have failed in their moral responsibility and they understand the implications. The reason they dropped their stones and walked away is they know they are implicated in this sin. They know it! And they leave.

Now, how does He deal with her at the end? He says, "Is there anybody here still condemning you?" She says, "No, sir." He says, "Well then neither do I condemn you, but don't ever do that again. Go and sin no more."

Now here is the balance of compassion and justice. He's not calling her sin not a sin. He's not baptizing her sin and calling it good. He's saying, "From now on, better ethical rectitude out of you. But we're not condemning you this time."

Now, how does that relate to this story? Well this story of the man born blind is also a story about sin. And in this story, guess who gets accused of being a sinner. Jesus, Himself.

You know, human beings have an infinite capacity for self-justification. Human beings have an infinite capacity for self-rationalization. As for that fellow, we don't even know where he came from, but we know he's a sinner. [chuckles] We don't know much about him, but we know he's a sinner. Talk about premature judging of somebody.

Now one of the things you need to understand about the Gospel of John and this is a wonderful story of the man born blind is that in the Gospel of John, understanding who Jesus is requires that you understand where He came from - from God - and where He's going - back to God.

If you don't know where He came from, and you don't know where He's going, you don't know who He is. Unfortunately it's not just these antagonistic officials that don't know where Jesus is going. Read the Farewell Discourses in John 14-17.

"We don't know where you're going, Jesus" and "Why can't we come, too?"

Even the disciples don't understand who Jesus is because they don't know where He came from, and they don't know where he's going. He came from and returns to God. It's the key to understanding who He is.

And that disconnect is seen in this story. This story is a powerful story of ships passing in the night, because what happens to the man born blind is he gains sight and insight as the story crescendos and develops.

At the same time, the Jewish authorities are going, slipping into darkness further and further. Their hearts are getting harder and harder as the story goes on. So we have ships passing in the night.

The man born blind is going into the direction of light and insight, spiritual understanding and renewal and the authorities are becoming blinder and blinder and blinder.
Light, as I said to you before, is the Johanan word for revelation. Just as life is the word for salvation, light is the word - Johanan word - for revelation. So that man born blind is getting it. He's receiving the good news about Jesus, whereas the authorities are blinded by the light.

It's the same light; two different effects. It depends on whether your heart is receptive or not. So, that's part of what's going on with this story. And you can see how the man born blind becomes increasingly brave in what he's prepared to say about Jesus.

At first, to the authorities, even before he goes to the authorities he's talking to those men who were selling grapes in the story, and they say, "Where is this man who gave you His sight?" The man says, "I don't know."

That's always a negative signal in the story that this person doesn't yet fully understand Jesus. He's never even seen Jesus, yet. He was blind when Jesus touched him. Right? He's never seen Jesus yet, so he doesn't really know Jesus yet. But he's favorably disposed because he's been healed of his blindness.

Did you also notice at the beginning of the story that Jesus wants him to participate in his own healing? I mean, if you're wondering what is the this whole mud on the eyes go to the Pool of Siloam thing all about, there are three things you need to know about that from the culture.

Number one - ancient people believed that the saliva of a holy man had healing properties. So he spits into the mud and he puts the mud on the eyes, and this was a traditional technique used in healing. So this is not a mud pack. This is a traditional technique used by ancient healers to help people have a certain part of their body, whether it's the eyes or something else, be healed.

So Jesus spits in the mud and since he mocked to the Pool of Siloam. Could he just have restored the man's sight without all of that rigamarole? Of course he could have. He does it elsewhere in the gospels. Giving sight to the blind is found both in the synoptics and the Gospel of John. Okay? That's one of the kinds of miracles that we have in both the synoptics and the Gospel of John.

Absolutely Jesus could have done it that way. He does not for two reasons. Number one - He wants this man to participate in his own healing. [coughing] The second reason he does it that way is He's dealing with His disciples who are watching, and they know this technique of healing, of using saliva in mud to heal something.

So He is using a traditional technique that His disciples were already familiar with to indicate healing in progress. That's what this signals - healing in progress. Good outcome hoped for. Right?

And why would he do this? Because His disciples had already been ready to write this man off as a sinner, precisely because he was blind. Is this man blind because he sinned, or his parents? And Jesus said neither one, but God's going to use it for His glory.

So what is he doing? He's deconstructing the received cultural prejudices about a blind person, dealing with his disciples indirectly while healing this man directly. See, He's really got two audiences here that He's dealing with.

Alright. Then, when the blind man gets to the authorities we see the progression in motion as he's "getting" it.

"What do you say about this man?"

"He's a prophet. There can be no doubt."
"He can't be a prophet. He healed on the Sabbath."

Jesus did this with regularity. Have you ever wondered why? I mean, the man born blind had been blind all his life. He could have waited another 12 hours. Why does Jesus deliberately heal on Shabbat? This is the question you've got to ask about Jesus.

Why is He deliberately an agent provocateur? [chuckling] An agent of provocation. Why is He that way? The answer is because He believes Shabbat is the perfect day to heal somebody.

After all, what does Shabbat mean? It means to cease, or to rest. What better day to give somebody rest from something that ails them? What better day to give them the sense of Shabbat Shalom? The peace of the Sabbath, than by relieving them of what ails them? It's the perfect day to give them peace and rest. Who are you kidding?

See, Jesus doesn't interpret the Sabbath as chiefly about the absence of activity. He interprets the Sabbath as chiefly about the presence of the healing of God. It's about something positive, not something negative. So He has a very different interpretation of the function of Shabbat.

He's a prophet, there can be no doubt. You know, these Jewish authorities even make the mistake of saying, "Go back and read the scriptures and you will find that no such prophet comes out of Galilee."

You see, this is part of the Judean versus Galilean debate. The truth of the matter is about Judeans that those northern prophets, the Israelite prophets, the Elijah and Elisha - they had question marks about them in Judea.

Okay - if they were prophets, how come they didn't say "thus sayeth the Lord"? Have you ever noticed that you don't have any "thus sayeth the Lord" sayings from Elijah and Elisha? They are political prophets. They are miracle working prophets. They are always meddling in politics.

But they are not like the oracular prophets from the south. They're not like Jeremiah, they're not like Isaiah, they're not like Amos. They are a different kind of breed.

Now here is where I say to you that I think that Jesus - when he was in Galilee - presented Himself as a prophet like Elijah and Elisha. It's one of the reasons you have the same kind of miracles Jesus is doing in the north that Elisha and Elijah had already done. Okay?

There was a positive feeling about Elisha and Elijah in the northern tribes and in Galilee in Jesus's day. He's playing off of that. But when He gets to Judea, He not only teaches in a different way, without parables for the most part, He not only teaches in a different way, He does miracles in a different way. Because He has a different audience here.

He gives sight to this blind man. He says go to the pool that's called "Sent" - Siloam - and wash your face. The second thing that happens to this man when he's in front of the authorities is they keep asking him, "How did He cure you of your blindness?"

"I have already told you. Perhaps you, too, wish to become his disciple."

You have to have some chutzpah to do that. I mean, He's knowing the expulsion from the synagogue is coming, so He might as well get his nickel's worth in now. You know? "I'm going to get it in now. I'm going to muster up my courage. Here I go. You boys don't know what you're talking about. This guy has got to be somebody good. God doesn't honor a man. He doesn't honor a sinner with the great gift of
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giving sight to the blind. An unknown miracle otherwise. Without this man having come from God He could not do a thing."

You see, at that point you say "Yahtzee." He finally got it right. Nobody else in the narrative has gotten it right yet. He figured out He came from God.

What does the beginning of the Gospel of John say? "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and it came from God and took on flesh. He's the incarnation of the Word of God, and the blind man had this moment of illumination while he was arguing, and he said, "This man came from God."

That's the right answer. But you see, the story is still not over. Do you notice that Jesus never performs miracles in order to make Messianic hay out of them? All of his miracles are acts of compassion. There is never a single miracle that He performs where He does it for the sake of proving who He is.

Not once does He do a miracle simply to say, "Look, I'm going to demonstrate to you that I've got the Almighty power and I am the Grand Poobah, therefore I'm going to use this poor man as an illustration that I am a great guy."

He never does that. All of His miracles are acts of compassion. It's not His main task to perform miracles.

So what happens is, of course, this man is expelled. You notice his parents weren't quite ready to pass the buck. You did notice that, right?

"Ask him, he's old enough. You can ask him for himself. Oy vay! We'd like to keep going to the synagogue and being with our friends." Okay? [chuckling]

Yes, okay. This is the "Here I am, Lord. Take my son." You know? One of those deals.

After the fact, Jesus goes and finds this man. He doesn't find Jesus; Jesus finds him. Did you notice that? Jesus sought him out because He wanted to elevate his understanding of who Jesus was to a level that amounted to a confession of who He really was.

Here is the only time in the gospels or anywhere else in the New Testament where somebody asked the question, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" This is the only place it happens. The blind man is just as honest as the day is long.

"Sir, tell me who He isn't, that I may believe in him."

Jesus gives the same answer He gave to the Samaritan woman: "You're looking at Him."

"You're looking at Him." That would be "moi". Say moi - it's me. That's exactly what He says.

And the man born blind falls on his knees and gives a far more adequate confession of who Jesus is than has occurred previously in this gospel because we're heading not only for the crescendo of the miraculous work, heading for the crescendo of the confessions.

The greatest confession, of course, comes from Thomas, who falls on his knees like the blind man falls on his knees and confesses Jesus to be "my Lord and my God" and for the first time in this gospel, a human being has confessed what the prologue already told us. He's God.

So we have a crescendo not only to the miraculous, we have a crescendo of confessions. This confession of Jesus as Son of Man is well on the way to that great Christian confession that He is Lord and God.
What we have here is the Book of Signs. Seven striking miracles only one of which - these two really - that are combined in the synoptics are parallel to the synoptics, otherwise this one, this one, this one, this one, this one - not found in Matthew, Mark or Luke at all.

But that’s not the end of the story, is it? We have these long, internal discourses in John 13-17. We have the Farewell Discourses. We have the internal teachings of Jesus, called the Book of Glory. It goes from 13:1 to 20:30-31. Then you have the epilogue in chapter 21.

Now, what I’d like to deal with in that whole segment is just one aspect of it. I want to deal with the paracletos. I want to deal with what Jesus says these of verses about the Holy Spirit, because it’s important.

Just so you will know, what I think is going on in John 13-17 is that that first meal, where there is the foot washing, I don’t think that’s the last supper. I think it’s a meal earlier in the week, and that’s what the Greeks suggest. The Greeks suggest that this meal was taken several days before the Passover, so not Thursday [coughing] night.

So I think the foot-washing episode is one episode and it’s not a surprise that in John, in that story we don’t have “this is my body, this is my blood”, now do we? It’s not there in John 13. I think this is a meal earlier in the week at the house of Lazarus.

I think there is a last supper that takes place later and what our author has done, is he’s conflated the two stories, so the beginning of chapter 13 is about the meal that’s earlier in the week and then he throws in the Judas bit, so that we will know where the story is going to go at the end. It’s really a conflation of two of the meals that happen that week.

But the teaching that’s important in John 14 and following has got a lot of dimensions to it, but what we want to focus on is the paracletos. Turn with me to John 14.

Here is the Greek word: Paracletos. [writing on board] I once saw a church sign at a Bible church that said, “Holy Spirit - Paraclete or Parakeet?”

I thought, “No, that doesn’t really work.”

The spirit is called Paracletos. We’re looking at chapter 14, beginning with verse 25.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you, but the Paracletos, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

Now, lets deal with the translation of the word first. Paracletos - comforter is not a good translation. It’s the old translation that goes all the way back to Tindal, I think. But it’s not a good translation because this is a legal term.

Remember when I talked to you about the disciples being Jesus’s agent? Well, the Holy Spirit is Jesus’s secret agent. In fact, there is another way to put this. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented as the agent or apostle of the Father and the spirit is the agent or apostle of the Son.

Now remember what I said to you about agency. The one that you sinned doesn’t have independent authority, doesn’t have independent power. He has power and authority as that which has been given to him and he has a very specific commission.

Remember that? It seems like 20 days ago, but if you remember that, okay - well it’s good.
Well, the Holy Spirit is being presented here as Jesus's agent; as His Shaliach; as His apostle who comes and, if you will, continues to carry out the mission of Jesus. It is not the job of the Holy Spirit to generate entirely new revelations. It's the job of the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth about what Jesus has already said.

So, listen again to what it says here: "I have said these things to you while I am still with you, but the advocate" - best translation would be advocate; not counselor, not comforter - advocate. It's a legal term. A Paracletos is a legal advocate.

"But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything."

Notice this next verb, very crucial in the Greek: "He will remind you of all that I have said to you."

You see, the major job of his is to bring it to mind what you have already been taught.

"Beware of a person who comes up to you and says the Holy Spirit told me, when you know perfectly well that this is something Jesus would never tell you."

Beware. Beware of that. My first instinctive reaction to people that have done that to me is, "Okay, why didn't the Holy Spirit tell me?"

Since it was for me, and I have the Holy Spirit in my life, how come he isn't talking to me? That's the first question I'm going to ask.

"The Holy Spirit will come and remind you of the things that I've taught you."

Now, actually you can see this at work. Turn with me just for a second to John 2. [chuckles] This is so powerful at verse 21 of John 2, right after the story of Jesus cleansing the temple.

It says this: "Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body. the next verse says: "After He was raised from the dead His disciples remembered that He said this and they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken."

What brought it to mind? The internal workings of the Holy Spirit. They remembered. The Holy Spirit is your date reminder book, friends. It's the teaching of Jesus reminder. It's the internal GPS device. That's the Holy Spirit.

Okay - that's the first place He really talks about the advocate and if we turn over to the 15th chapter we're going to hear a little bit more about the advocate, so lets look at the very end of the 15th chapter, verse 26.

It says: "Now when the advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the spirit of truth who comes from the Father, He will testify on my behalf."

You see, the spirit is Jesus's agent. He's not testifying on his own behalf. On whose behalf is he testifying? He's testifying on behalf of the one who sent him. That would be Jesus.

Jesus and the spirit are tight. You know? You aren't going to get something out of the spirit that you wouldn't get from Jesus. If it's out of character for Jesus the spirit is so not saying it. You may have gotten it from some kind of spirit, but it wasn't the Holy Spirit.

These boys agree and it's like Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum. If Jesus says it, the Holy Spirit's just pronouncing the amen. That's the way it goes. The Holy Spirit may clarify, He may amplify, He may help
you understand the implications of it, but basically He's just reminding you and reaffirming for you what Jesus means; the significance of the Christ event. 

What He said; what he taught; what He did. He's the exegete of Jesus for you. He's the internal exegete of Jesus for you. That's the point here. 

But the advocate doesn't just have an internal role in your life. He has another role - a role that of course we see in the Book of Acts - the spirit's been poured out on us so that we may do what? Proclaim the Word of God; prophesize; see visions; dream dreams, and generally share the good news with the world. That's one of the chief functions in the spirit is to give us unction to function, so that we will be empowered to proclaim and teach and heal, and do all these good things.

Well listen to what it said in chapter 16, and this begins with verse seven.

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It's to your advantage that I go away for if I don't go away, the advocate will not come to you. But if I do go, I will send him to you."

You see - this is absolutely right. When agent goes on behalf of the person who sent him, it's because why? The sender is not going. You get the point? That's the way it works. When Jesus sends out the apostles, they are doing the job that Jesus would have done if He was wherever they are.

The Holy Spirit is Jesus's agent; his advocate here. So listen to what it said here at the end.

"If I had not done" - verse 26 - "When the advocate comes whom I will send to you from the Father the spirit of truth that comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf and you also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning."

So the person who gives us the ability to testify on behalf of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. By the way, the Holy Spirit is the second witness. This is why Christian missionaries don't need to go out in pairs, because they are testifying and while they are testifying if they do it truly who else is testifying? The Holy Spirit who is working behind enemy lines, working on them internally. So you have the testimony of two witnesses if you have the Holy Spirit. That would be you and the Holy Spirit.

Now, if we press on to chapter 16 and we look at verse four in following, it says: "I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you."

Why do we need the Holy Spirit? Because Jesus isn't with us any more. That's why we need the Holy Spirit.

"I did not tell you of these things about the advocate from the beginning because I was with you but now I'm going to Him who sent me, and yet none of you ask me 'Where are you going?' But because I've said these things to you sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It's to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the advocate will not come to you."

Jesus has to be gone before the spirit can come. That's what we're hearing.

"And I will send him to you, and when He comes - " Listen to what He's going to do - "He will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment."

About sin because the world does not believe in me and about righteousness because I'm going to the Father and you will see me no longer. About judgment because the ruler of this world is judged.
"And I will have many things to say to you, but you can't bear them just now. But when the spirit of truth comes He will guide you into all truth for He will not speak on His own behalf but He will speak whatever He hears from me."

Hello? Now, see, this is one of the real problems in the whole Pentecostal Tradition because they don’t take seriously this teaching. So, almost anything can pass for a Word of God, now inspired, a late Word from God, when in fact it needs to go through the sieve and the sifting and the testing of, "Does this word comport with Jesus? Does it comport with the teaching of Jesus? It is a natural extension of the teaching of Jesus. Is it in character with Jesus?"

I mean, those kinds of questions that you have to ask. Why do I say this? Because we have teachings like the following from Pentecostals. Unless you speak in tongues you’re not a Born Again Christian. You’re not a spirit-filled Christian.

Well, you know what? That’s absolutely false. It’s not a Biblical idea at all, and it didn’t come to them from the Holy Spirit, either because it’s not Jesus’s view. Paul is perfectly clear at the end of First Corinthians 12.

He says: "Not all prophesy do that." He’s addressing Christians. What’s the proper answer to this? "No, not all speak in tongues, do they?" What’s the proper answer to this rhetorical question? "No." And anybody who knows anything about rhetoric knows that when you have a Greek sentence that begins with the words "may not" and involves a double negative, the only possible answer to the question is "no".

Paul doesn’t believe that everybody has been given the gift of speaking in tongues. He doesn’t even necessarily believe that everybody ought to have the gift of speaking in tongues. It’s not the litmus test of whether you are a spirit-filled person or not. This is not a Biblical idea. It’s not a teaching of Jesus. Yes?

Man 3: Can you confirm that absolutely, because I was raised in the Pentecostal church. My mother, God bless her, is still Pentecostal, and she has never - I don’t - she never said it, but I don’t think she ever fully believes that I am saved because I have never spoken in tongues.

Right.

Man 3: And I have heard her speak in tongues. Yes. She’s wonderful. I’m not criticizing, but that is just part of her belief system.

Well, I understand, and my point is, that whenever you have an idea [coughing] - I’m using this as an example - whenever you have an idea that’s not kosher, that doesn’t comport with something Jesus Himself taught, or is a logical implication of what He said and did and who He was and what He taught - whenever you have an idea that sets up some kind of spiritual pecking order in the church so that "x" is more spiritual than "y" you should be profoundly suspicious of this because it’s not the way it works.

Paul says in First Corinthians 12: "By one spirit we were all baptized into one body and from that same one spirit we all are given to drink."

That is, everybody gets the Holy Spirit at conversion. You know? It’s a package deal. You get Jesus, you get the Spirit, you get the relationship with the Father - all in one fell swoop.

Now, you can have subsequent conversion, crisis experiences, other kinds of spiritual experiences, but in none of those experiences are you getting the Holy Spirit for the first time.
Here’s where I talk to you about the doctrine of the spirit for a minute. The Holy Spirit is a person. It’s not a quantity of water. It’s not electrical current. The Holy Spirit is a person. You can no more have a little bit of the Holy Spirit in your life than you can be a little big pregnant.

If the Holy Spirit is in your life, you have the Holy Spirit in your life. It’s just like having Jesus in your life. The spirit is a person. So, the language about being filled with the spirit in English should simply be translated and inspired by the spirit somebody sang or said or did, this, that and the other.

It has nothing to do with getting more of the spirit. It has nothing to do with, "Well, poor Dan. He’s got 30 percent of the spirit. He needs about 50 percent.” You know? Today he’s getting another 20 percent and he’ll feel ever so much better. You know, more healed, more illuminated, clearer in his teaching and preaching. This is grand.

Nothing like that in the scriptures. It has nothing to do with it. While we’re at it, the Greek phrase, "Baptism of the Holy Spirit” doesn’t exist in the New Testament. That noun phrase doesn’t exist in the New Testament.

The closest you get is first Corinthians 12, the verse I quoted. By one spirit we are all - all of us - baptized into the one body and every single one of us has been given the fount of living waters, the spirit from which we drink.

That’s true of every Christian. There is no such thing as a no-charismatic Christian. There is no such thing as a non-Holy Spirit Christian. There just isn’t such a person. Period. Exclamation point.

Now, you can have a second blessing, a third blessing, a fourth blessing, a tenth blessing after conversion and God bless you. You know when people - you know, in the Wesleyan tradition they believe in going on to perfection. They believe in an entire sanctification. People ask me, you know, "Have you received the second blessing? And did - no - Do you believe in the second blessing?” I say, "Sure. I believe in as many blessings as God wants to give me because He needs to keep working on me." You know?

I’m a work in progress, like Ruth Graham, you know? I’m a Christian under construction and I don’t think I’ve arrived, and you know what? Paul says that even he hadn’t arrived, writing one of his latest letters in Philippians, but I press on to the goal.

I have certainly experienced the perfect love of God in my life that casts out all fear. But experiencing the perfect love of God in my life doesn’t make me perfect. I’m just saying... I’ve still got room for improvement, you know?

So it’s one thing to say I have experienced, truly, the perfect love of God that has cast out all fear from my life. I mean, it’s one of the things that has allowed me to go all over the world to a lot of dangerous places and share the gospel, because the love of God is in my life and I’m okay. Right? It doesn’t make me a perfect person.

What I want to say based on this teaching about the Holy See, first of all, I believe in all the spiritual gifts. I, myself, have spoken in tongues. I’m good with that. I don’t have a problem with that. I’m not for bad theology about speaking in tongues. That’s my problem. My ordination in the United Methodist Church was delayed because they found out I was a charismatic Christian. [chuckling] And that scared them.

Yes, you know, the Holy Ghost can scare people. I was in Germany. I was in Germany in an old school Lutheran church. They were still using the old lectionary and the old liturgy book from the old Fraktur script in German. We got to the point of reciting the Apostles’ Creed and we were all standing up. There
was a site in the Apostles’ Creed and you know, I was saying, "I believe in der Vater, die Sohn, in die helig Spuk." [giggling]

"Spuk" is the German word for ghost. That's where we get the word spook from. Did you know that? I just cracked up. I've just affirmed, you know, my faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spook. Okay. [chuckling] That's goodbye me. You know? I always did believe in the Holy Spook. I'm alright with that.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. I don't believe the gifts of the spirit died with the apostles. I don't think that there is any basis for that theology whatsoever. But I do think that you need to view the work of the spirit in a Biblical way. That's what I would really want to stress to you.

You need both the wineskins and the wine. You need both the intellectual part of your faith that give form and shape and cognitive content to it, and you need the new wine of the work of the Spirit in your life.

Experience without understanding is like wine without wineskins. Understanding without experience is like wineskins without wine. It's dead orthodoxy. And that's not what God called us to; not either one of those things, for sure.

He wants head and heart to go hand in hand. He wants us to understand that the spirit is Christ’s secret agent operating behind enemy lines and within us. He’s the invisible one who reminds us of the teachings of Jesus, and through us, the spirit convicts, convinces and converts the world. The three Cs. Spirit convicts, convinces and converts the world. Convicts the world of sin.

You know, it’s hard doing that without condemning the world. Crossing the line between convicting and condemning is difficult. How do you convict somebody of sin without them feeling condemned?

This is what the text says. "When the Spirit of Christ comes He will guide you into all truth. He won't speak on His own. He will speak whatever He hears and He will declare to you the things that are to come." So the Spirit does speak about the future. There is no doubt about that. When that Spirit comes He's going to convict the world about sin because they don't believe in me about righteousness because I'm going to the Father. And about judgment because the ruler of this world has been condemned. Hear me dear friends, the good news is, the ruler of this world is already condemned. He's on a short leash.

"We stand,” as Oscar Cullman said, "between D-Day and VE-Day. The great D-Day invasion has already happened."

The forces of Jesus are already taking captive every thought for Christ. Don't give the devil too much credit. He's a man on the run.

When we get to the Book of Revelations you will see that there is a three-fold fall of Satan. He falls from heaven to earth; from earth to the pit; and from the pit to the lake of fire. He's on his way down. He's on his way out. And Christians should be the last people that give the devil too much credit.

Now I have already talked to you about demon possession. This is not something happens to somebody who has the Lord Jesus Christ in their life. You can be bothered, bewitched and bewildered by the powers of darkness from outside of your soul, but unless you willingly choose to be possessed, it's so not happening because Jesus is Lord of your life and He's bigger than any group of demons that can come on you.

He's more powerful than any powers of darkness that might threaten you. All you need to do, as Martin Luther said, is name the name of Jesus. One little word will fell him. That's it.
We don’t need deliverance ministries of people who are already Christians. What we especially don’t need to do is demonize all the things that go wrong in our life. That was demon of allergy. That was a demon of dust. This was a demon of bad driving.

I’ve actually heard Christians do this. I’ve had a student who was driving one of the other professor’s car and he wrecked. He said, “The devil made me do it!” He was like Flip Wilson, you know?

I said, "Okay, Sam. Who’s in control of your life? Do you believe in Jesus? Is the Holy Spirit in your life?"

"Uh-huh. Then I don’t think the devil made me do it."

I’m thinking you need to take ethical responsibility for your behavior because what the New Testament does over and over again with Christians is force Christians to take responsibility for their own actions and to live without excuses, because you have Jesus and the Father and the Spirit in your life and you’re supposed to live without excuses.

I mean, my goodness. Paul says, "No temptation has overcome you. That’s not common to humanity such with the temptation, you have an adequate means of escape."

Now, I grant you that when some preachers say flee sin we flee but leave a forwarding address. That does happen. I’ll tell you one more story about that.

Darlington, Maryland - two farms just on the edge of town, it’s summertime, children are playing in the woods next to these two farms. They come out of the woods holding little critters. One of the mothers is in the back yard. She sees this - a true story - and she thinks, "Well they found a litter of kittens. How neat."

The kids go in the front door of the house. They are going to play with them in the parlor. She goes in the back door. She’s looking through the kitchen door into the parlor. They are all sitting in a little circle. Each of the five kids have a little black and white wriggly thing. Until she realizes that there is a white stripe down the back of the black and white tiny, wriggly things.

Then she says, "Children! Skunks! Run!"

At which point each child picks up a skunk and runs. [chuckling]

Now, that’s very true about us. [chuckling] The preacher warns about sin so we pack up our bag of sin and take it with us to the next place we’re going. This is what we do. [coughing]

You know the old saying: Wherever you go there you are. You can’t escape yourself. That’s the truth. The Holy Spirit has a job of revealing to us progressively the areas in our life that need more sanctification.

I believe in progressive sanctification and it’s often an "uh-oh" moment when the Spirit says, "You know, Ben, this bit is 15 degrees shy of plum. We need to straighten that out. That’s a little squirrelly and not so good."

The Holy Spirit has that job. The Holy Spirit is what illuminates your conscience. The Holy Spirit is the one who says to you, "If you can’t do it in faith you shouldn’t be doing it."

Whatever is not faith is sin for you. Whatever you can’t do in good faith. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives you that insight. Yes?

Man 4: You use the word "possession" when speaking of Agamemnon.

Yes.
Man 4: I’m wondering if the New Testament has something that would be more of an influence, or under the influence, or something that’s manifestation we hear in evangelicalism.

Yes.

Man 4: Something that does not control. It’s something that comes up.

Yes. I like to say Christians can be bewitched, bothered and bewildered by the powers of darkness. They can be misled. Yes, that’s true. But that force is coming at them from outside of themselves.

And one of the things I would want to stress to you is, especially if you’re a counseling student, my goodness, you need to learn the difference between genuine mental illness and spiritual problems. There is a difference, you know. A bipolar person is not necessarily a demon-possessed person. A schizophrenic person is not necessarily somebody who has seven demons in their life, or whatever. One of the things I think that we have to be aware of doing is over-spiritualizing our discourse about some things that can simply be normal human problems.


So what we need to do is not judge our situation as if it were the same as the situation during the time of the life of Jesus before the spirit came; before Christ entered our hearts. We need to not make the mistake of taking the gospel situation, which was transitional, as the same as the church age because it’s not.

I would say that the role of Satan and the powers of darkness in the church age is different than it was during the time of Jesus because the cross has stripped them. Ephesians says Christ has led captivity captive. Colossians says that on the cross either He stripped himself - there are two ways to read Colossians here. He stripped himself of the powers of principalities or he stripped them of their authority. I think it’s B rather than A. I don’t think He’s busy shedding demons like flies. I think He’s talking about stripping them of their power and authority. So I think we’re in a different spiritual situation than Mary Magdalene was during the ministry of Jesus.

I think we need to take that into account. We need to take into account greater is He who is in us than these powers in the world. This is the main thing I would want us to take account of.

Therefore, what that means is that you need to not slough off your sins and mistakes on the devil. Take responsibility for your own actions as a Christian. This is what the New Testament universally would urge us to do. Not making excuses. Living without excuses. I think one of the things that has happened to evangelical discourse is we have over-demonized the discourse. I think that is not entirely helpful to help people deal with the real problems they have in life.

Am I saying that demons can’t pester Christians? No, I’m not saying that. I’m simply saying they have no authority to do so, and unless you give them permission, they are not going to have the power to bother you. You would have to be dancing with the devil. Now that does sometimes happen, but it’s not inherently a problem. Yes?

Man 5: Steve Robbins has done a lot of teaching where he’s talking about demonic attacks -

Yes.
Man 5: - upon us which I think is what you're saying -
Yes.
Man 5: - but that is possible -
Yes.
Man 5: - it is not the possession -
Right.
Man 5: - taking over, sort of thing, but I do agree with Steve and probably with you that spiritual warfare
does go on.
Yes, I think it does, but what I'd say is it's a rear guard action. The devil is on the way out the door. Were
the Nazis still dangerous in 1945? Yes, they were, but they were on the way down, and it was inevitable
that they were going down.

Listen for example to what First Peter 3 says. First Peter 3 is talking about Jesus visiting the spirits in
prison which are not human beings; these are fallen angels.

First Peter 3:18-20 says, "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all" - notice the word "all" there - "Christ
also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous in order to bring you to God. He was
put to death in the flesh and made alive by the Spirit in which also He went and made a proclamation to
the spirits in prison who in former times did not obey when God waited patiently in the day of Noah."

He's talking about Genesis 6:1-4. He's talking about when the sons of God came down and mated with
the daughters of human beings. He's talking about fallen angels, is what he's talking about. He's talking
about Christ going in proclaiming victory over them on His way to heaven.

And this is because they believed that the powers and principalities were up in the air, not down on the
ground. They were the powers of the heavens. They were the heavenly hosts, if you will, and Christ on
His way to heaven is proclaiming victory over them.

The same story comes up in second Peter and even in Jude, in second Peter, chapter 2 you're hearing
about the same thing, verse four of chapter 2 of second Peter, "For God did not spare the angels when
they sin, but cast them into Tartarus -" that's the spiritual prison or holding cell - "and committed them to
chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment.

Again, it's the same story, Genesis 6:1-4 is the background to that. Or, in Jude, which is way on down
yonder in the canon, right? Before Revelation. In Jude we hear again the exact, same story. Verse six of
Jude, which doesn't have chapters, "And the angels who did not keep their own position but left their
proper dwelling, He has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day."

We're being told that some of these powers of darkness are already in jail. That's the point of all of this.
Okay? They are not running around willy-nilly. Jesus has already proclaimed the victory over them.

The passage in First Peter 3 is Christus Victor. Christ is the victor over these spirits of darkness that are
now in Tartarus; in chains. In Tartarus, being held under wraps. That doesn't necessarily apply to all the
powers and principalities, but the point is, that in principle, Jesus already has the victory. That's the
principle, and that principle we need to apply.
Now, what you hear in Revelation 20 is that the same fate happens to Satan that happened to these naughty angels. In Revelation 20 we’re told that a big dog angel comes and throws Satan into this same prison, holding cell, and seals over the top so that during the millennium the world can not be deceived by Satan.

Well, we’re not there yet. Satan is still out there deceiving people. He’s still out there like a roaring lion, looking for somebody to prey upon. That’s absolutely true. We are in an already and not yet situation. The point is, not to over-emphasize the already or the not yet, either in terms of our salvation or in terms of our spiritual danger.

There is a balance between already and not yet and you need to get that right. The Gospel of John reassures us that we have the advocate. We have the Holy Spirit in our life who convicts and convinces and converts.

Michelle?

Michelle: The other “b” word: bondage.

Yes.

Michelle: What can you speak to -

Yes, I don’t think that happens to Christians, but you see I’m a person who believes in the possibility of apostasy. I believe Christians can commit apostasy, both moral and intellectual apostasy, and that person, I think, who is now outside of the will of God, could come under bondage. Could be possessed.

My own ministry has suggested that that’s a very rare and unusual circumstance, you know? Honestly I can’t say I’ve met a whole lot of people that committed apostasy. I think I know a few. I would say that as long as a person is a genuine Christian person, not a non-Christian, not someone who has rebelled against Christ and repudiated the gospel, but still loves Jesus and may be a troubled Christian who is struggling with some sin, but that’s - We’ve all been there, done that and have a tee shirt, right?

Then, those persons are not in bondage to Satan and can not be in bondage to Satan unless they invite all of that into their life, having committed apostasy. That would have to be after the Holy Spirit left the building.

Michelle: So you think the term probably has been used way too lightly and frequently?

Yes. I think we overuse the language of demonology and bondage and all of that in relation to Christian problems. I think we ought not to do that. I think it’s a dangerous thing to do. I do think, as I’ve said before, that we can be bothered, pestered, annoyed, misled by the powers of darkness that are still out there and still real. I’m not suggesting that the heavens have been evacuated of all powers of darkness. I’m not saying that at all.

I do think that the whole Frank Peretti thing and all of those things, this present darkness and all those novels go way too far in trying to describe our actual spiritual situation at this point in time. It’s not helpful or healthy.

See, we already live in a climate where fear, rather than faith, is ruling our judgments. What we don’t need to be doing is further ramping up the fear. Unfortunately, preachers are good at this, you know. I believe in faith factor, not fear factor.
One of the ways people most ramp up fear is when they start talking about you having a demon of this and you having a demon of that. That just scares the pants off of people. Then they start acting irrationally and not coherently. Then you have to do pastoral counseling with them to help them recover from the bad theology.

Ron?

Ron: Change of subject, just a little bit. If you were looking for justification that Jesus heals through the forgiveness of sins, would any of these seven, in the Book of John, fall in that category?

Jesus, yes, heals through the forgiveness of sins. Yes, I wouldn't say any of these stories are about that except the woman caught in adultery. I think that story is about that. But you see, her problem was not a sickness, it was a moral problem, which is not the same as a sickness.

Now we’ve looked at the four gospels. We’ve dealt with some of the important issues. We’ve struggled with the structure. We’ve asked the question of genre. We have dealt with the fact that we’ve got three ancient biographies and one historical monograph, Luke/Acts. What I want to do now, is one more time I might want to walk through and give you more particulars about the structure of the four gospels to help you get the big picture one more time. Okay?

So, first of all, we dealt with Mark and I told you that the first half of Mark was all about questions.

Mark 1: "What is this?" the crowd asks. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ask the scribes.

Mark 2: "Why does He have to eat with the sinners?" You can hear the scribes whining now. [mockingly] "Why does he have to eat with the sinners?" You know?

Mark 2:24: "Why are disciples doing what is not lawful?" The Pharisees. The real criticism is of Jesus, of course.

Mark 6:2: "Where did this man get his wisdom?" The hometown folks - they don’t get it.

Mark 7:5: "Why do your disciples not live by the tradition?"

Mark 7:37 could be a question: "Has He not done all things well? He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak," the crowd is speaking.

So, the first half of the Gospel of Mark, the who questions and the related, correlated questions are being asked, and then the who question is answered in Mark 8:27-30.

The Caesarea Philippi moment - we went over that in detail. Right? Okay.
Then, and only then, can Jesus reveal why He has to go to the cross. The mission statement doesn’t come in Mark 1. The mission statement “I am the man born to die” comes in Mark 8, 9 and 10. The chief reason He came was to die for sins; to be a ransom for men. So, in Mark 8:31 and 9:31 and 10:32-34 - it’s easy to remember those because they are almost in the parallel place in all three of these chapters - He says the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected and killed and on the third day rise.

Now here’s the interesting bit. In none of his Passion predictions does he say, “The Son of Man must be crucified.” Now this is just a personal thing, I think that it’s probably not until he gets to the Garden of Gethsemane that he realizes that the way He’s going to be killed is crucifixion, because what He would normally assume is that He would be stoned.

He almost was stoned a couple of times, you know. That was the punishment for blasphemy. That’s what he would probably have assumed as a prophetic figure, so when you get to the Garden of Gethsemane and He realizes that he’s going to be executed in a way that Jewish people will see as a curse of God on Him, He says, “Let this pass.”

He’s not quailing in the prospect of death in general. He just would prefer not to experience a form of death that will be evaluated as the most shameful way to die and a sign of God’s judgment on His life and His ministry. That’s the problem in the Garden Gethsemane, I think.

So the Passion predictions say “Kill and on the third day rise” and then of course there is a fourth prediction, right at the end of Mark 10:45. "The Son of Man didn't come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for the many."

Just a little exegesis of that one verse. It’s the one substituted for the many. So, that verse is not saying Jesus died for some but not all. The contrast is between the one and the many, not between the many and the all. See what I’m saying? The one died for the many.

Maybe you’ve never thought about this, but Jesus is the one person for whom Jesus did not need to die. That’s right. That’s how He could be the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was the unblemished one who didn’t give way to temptation. He was like us in every respect save without sin, so He could be the one who died for everyone else who is the many.

So here is the structure. Who and why questions answered at 8:27: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

That answer matches up with Mark 1:1 which says this is the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Son of God. Then the mission statement is given, 8:31, 9:31, 10:31, 10:45.

Then we have mission accomplished. The Passion narrative, a description of how He accomplished the chief reason He came to earth, which was to die for our sins. So that’s what we’ve got in Mark. We’ve gone over this.

Now, here we have Matthew and today I would say that I don’t think that there are just five discourses, I think there are six because I think Matthew 23 is a separate discourse from the apocalyptic one in 24 and 25. Okay?

So I’m saying today, in revision of this, that there are actually six discourses and we’ve talked about how Matthew gave us six discourses of Jesus in contrasting to only five books of Moses.

I talked to you about how Matthew groups things topically. This a topical grouping of the teachings of Jesus. We have the Sermon on the Mount which is kind of Jesus’s greatest hits. Then we have a discourse
largely about discipleship, then parables of the kingdom. We have a discourse largely about issues of
forgiveness and humility and then we are going to deal with woes and blessings and then finally on
eschatology, the apocalyptic discourse in 24 and 25.

So what Matthew has done is taken the Markan outline and integrated into it these blocks of teaching.
Okay? And as I said to you before, this is a theological schema. I mean, Jesus did not go one week simply
teaching and the next week simply healing. You know? The teachings have been grouped together for
pedagogical purposes.

So here is the overall structure. It goes like this: After the birth narratives you have narrative, then you
have teaching; you narrative, then you have teaching; you narrative, then you have teaching; you
narrative, then you have teaching; you narrative, then you have teaching. It just goes back and forth, back
and forth, back and forth. That’s the way Matthew’s gospel is actually structured.

The overall impression is way more teaching material than in Mark. Way more. Clearly this is a gospel
that’s meant to disciple people with.

Luke is a historian and he is operating according to the theories of ancient historiography in regard to
how to use sources. Alright? So I told you that when Luke structures Luke/Acts, he’s going to follow the
precedent that historians used.

And how did they work? They assembled their sources and they would go from one source to another, to
another, to another, to another, and that’s exactly what he does. After the birth narratives, again you have
a Markan block of teaching, then you have a non-Mark, then you have Mark, then you have non-Mark,
then you have Mark, then you have non-Mark, then you have Mark, and then you have the Passion
narrative.

He's going back and forth between his two main sources in regard to what happened during the ministry
of Jesus. That’s the way he structures his gospel.

Then, of course, there is the fourth gospel which we just finished looking at. There is a prologue. There is
an epilogue, and then there is the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory.

Now, I want us to finish with a bang, so we’re going to deal with my very favorite Johanan story here at
the - [music crescendoing] [music ends]

Nothing happens by accident in the fourth gospel; nothing at all. The only two places a charcoal fire is
mentioned in the Gospel of John is in the courtyard of the high priest Caiaphas where Peter warmed his
hands and denied Christ three times. And right here where he is restored three times by Jesus.

Those two stories were meant to be read together; the three-fold denial and the three-fold affirmation.
The story resonates with a lot of earlier stories. You know the famous story from Luke 5 where there is a
miraculous catch of fish and Peter suddenly realizes that in his midst is Jesus, somebody who is more
than an ordinary teacher and says, "Lord, get away from me. I am a sinner."

This story is kind of like that. He is re-commissioning Him to be a fisher of human beings again. He’s
starting over from scratch. You will notice that He doesn’t call him Caiaphas, He calls him by his proper
name, not his new nickname. He calls him Simon; Simon, son of John. Simon bar Jonah. He is starting
over from scratch with Peter.
Now scholars have debated what to make of verse 15, 16, 17, 18, 19. I don't think anything happens by accident. The question that Jesus asks Peter first is, "Simon, do you agapeo me more than these?" This is what the Greek literally says, okay?

I think there is a playing off of agapeo versus phileo here. I'll get to that in a minute.

Agapeo is God’s love; unconditional love; grace-filled love; more than merely human love. You with me now?

Phileo is brotherly love, or sisterly love. Okay?

Jesus asks Peter, "Do you agapeo me?" Peter replies, "I phileo you." I love you like a brother. That's not what Jesus asked. That's why He keeps asking.

The second thing to notice about verse fifteen is that Jesus is saying, "Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?" is ambiguous. What does "more than these" mean? Does it mean, "Do you love me more than these other disciples love me?" Does it mean, "Do you love me more than you love them?" Does it mean, "Do you love me more than you love these things, like fishing with your buddies?"

It could be any one of those three things. I think He is indeed asking him, "Do you love me more than you love them?" He's asking, "Do you love me more than you love your brothers?"

And Peter's answer is inadequate.

"Yes, Lord, you know I love you like a brother."

That won't do after Easter. That won't do. Yet, Jesus re-commissions him, starting small. He says to him, "Vos que ta arnia vous."

Vos que means what, you Greek scholars? "Feed my little lambs." Start small. Teach first grade Sunday school first. [coughing] Okay?

Jesus asks him a second time, Deuteron, Simon, Son of John, "Agapeo mei?" "Do you love me with the true, divine love?"

And again Peter says, "Lord, you know that I phileo you. " "You know that I love you like a brother. Why are you asking me?"

He's not getting the point.

Jesus says, "Poi mane ta pro bato mu." That is, "Tend my adult sheep." Okay? The second stage in the re-commissioning.

One last time Jesus asks him, now get this, because this is powerful, this will preach.

"Okay, Peter. I'm going to try one more time. Do you at least love me like a brother?"

And he breaks down. He says, "I do. And why are you asking, because you already know? You know my heart."

You see, Jesus condescended to the level of the love He was prepared to give. And that's powerful. He takes us where we are. He takes what we have to give. He multiplies our little old loaves of fishes.

It's hard to give a completely unselfish love to anybody; a completely selfless love to anybody. I reckon the only person who has ever done that perfectly was Jesus.
Yes, we have moments of self-sacrifice in our life. There are some of us who are less narcissistic than others as Christians, but as C.S. Lewis once said, "I can hardly crawl one inch outside my mortal shell. Like a Greek parrot talks of love, I can talk of love," says Lewis. "But I thank you," says Lewis, "that the bridge that I have been building to you is breaking so that you can build a bridge to me with your love."

This is not about a reciprocity exchange. I love you, therefore you need to love me back. This is about being so transfigured by the agapeo love of God that suddenly we become something we weren't before. Really self-sacrificing.

It's such a powerful story, and Peter doesn't get it all yet. You can tell that from the sequel. What about him? This is not about him. It's not about keeping up with the Joneses or the beloved disciples of this world.

"This is about you, and me," says Jesus. "And you're going to have the great honor of dying like I died," says Jesus to Peter.

It's such a powerful story. It's our story, because if there is one disciple with which we ought to be able to identify, who is most clearly portrayed and most fully portrayed in all of the gospels, it is Simon Peter. He is every man. He is us. He is me. I think that's why every time I see that story I cry. [sniffing] Because Jesus is asking me those questions. And when you really think of how many times you haven't given Him your best, how you have fallen short of the glory of God, how you compromised or have been selfish. How you thought that you were in the bless me club when really, Jesus was calling you to be a blessing to others. Not just a container of blessings.

It's easy to say, as Peter did that first time in the boat, "Get away from me. I'm a sinner and I am not worthy of your love. There but for the grace of God."

Here is the good news. It's a terrible thing to swear to God that you don't know the Son of God and Peter did that. He swore an oath to God that he didn't know Jesus. There could hardly be anything more horrible than that. Even Judas's betrayal wasn't that. [sighing] Yet Jesus forgave him. He not only forgave him, he re-commissioned him. He reinstalled him. He said, "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep."

A three-fold re-commissioning like the three-fold denial. He is saying to you today, "Do you really love me? [music begins] If you do, with every call comes the commission. Feed my sheep." (music crescendos)
Chapter 8

Apocryphal and Apocalyptic Literature

What we need to do now, having looked at the canonical gospels and some things to do with Acts, is we need to talk about the later apocryphal and pseudepigraphical gospels in relationship to the canonical ones. So that’s what we want to do now.

One of the reasons, of course, for doing is, we may thank Dan Brown for this, [chuckling] and Elaine Pagels and Sharon King and all of those - Alan Meier - and all those wonderful advocates of agnostic gospels. So we need to talk about the differences between the canonical gospels and the later gnostic ones. There are some really big differences.

Let’s talk about gnosticism. The first thing that you need to know is that there is not, properly speaking, a gnostic movement in Christianity in the first century A.D.

Gnosticism is something that arises in the second century as a sort of sectarian offshoot from the church. It’s kind of like the development of Mormonism or Jehovah’s Witness in our own era. It seems to be largely Gentile in origins and it tends to be quite Anti-Semitic in its character.

It’s not happy about the Old Testament. It’s not happy about the Old Testament God. And various forms of gnosticism are very ascetical. Matter is evil; spirit is good - all that sort of stuff.

So they’re not much happy about a creator god. In the full-blown gnostic system you have a god called the Demiurge who is responsible for making material stuff because it’s dirty and unclean. He’s not actually the great god who is the spirit one. He’s a lesser deity. It’s complex.

Gnosticism is like driving through pea soup. [chuckling] It’s esoteric. It’s cloudy. The gnostic view of salvation is complex. It comes from this Greek word gnosis, which is simply the Greek word for knowledge. That’s what gnosis means.

If I were to summarize the soteriology of gnosticism you’re not saved by who you know. You’re saved by what you know.

This is kind of salvation for eggheads, really. You know? It’s elitist. If you don’t have the intellectual wattage you can’t be saved. Because it’s what you know that saves you, not who you know.

The gnostic gospels as we have them, probably the earliest of these, is the Gospel of Thomas. This gospel probably did not originate until before the second century A.D., maybe even the latter part of the second century A.D. Most of the gnostic gospels are from the third and fourth centuries A.D.

This one may be from the late second century A.D., and there is actually a debate as to whether this one should be called a gnostic gospel. It’s really kind of a grab bag of all kinds of strange ideas, and also a recitation of some of the early synoptic sayings of Jesus. I mean, in the Gospel of Thomas, you have some very weird sayings like Jesus at one point says, “Cleave the wood and I am there.” “Hue the stone and you will find me.” It’s pantheism. There’s a little bit of Jesus in everything; very strange.

Another famous of the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas is the one where Peter complains to Jesus, "How can Mary Magdalene be saved since she’s a woman?"
Jesus says, "Don't worry; be happy. We will make the female into male and she can be saved."

This is not the Jesus of the canonical gospels. But on the other hand, there are quite a lot of sayings in the Gospel of Thomas that are nearly identical, or identical, with some of the synoptic sayings of Jesus as you find in Matthew, Mark and Luke. So it's kind of a grab bag.

There is a debate in the scholarly community as to whether you should simply call the Gospel of Thomas a gnostic gospel. But what you do have in the Gospel of Thomas, which sets the pattern for subsequent gnostic documents is basically Jesus the talking head.

What I mean by that is that what you have is a collection of Jesus's sayings. There is very little narrative tissue and there is absolutely no Passion narrative, whatsoever. There is no story about the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's Jesus's greatest hits, His best parables, or sayings, or aphorisms, or riddles, or whatever.

Precisely because of that, because there is little or no narrative tissue in these documents, I don't think they really should be called gospels, but they are called gospels and some of the later gnostic documents called themselves gospels when they are not.

Furthermore, there is another aspect to these documents, especially later gnostic like the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Truth. These later documents have a lot of philosophical speculation in them, which is certainly not what you find in the canonical gospels. You have a lot of Greek philosophical speculation in them.

If you've read Dan Brown or if you've seen the movies, if you know The DaVinci Code and Angels and Demons, you will know that in The DaVinci Code, especially, these gospels come to the fore. The Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Philip are set up as the "real" gospels, the inside trader knowledge about Jesus, as opposed to the canonical gospels which are the corrupted later Orthodox gospels.

Historically, this is false. We don't have any gnostic gospels from the middle or later part of the first century A.D. They are later developments. In addition to which, they don't really comport with the picture of Jesus we get in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. So I am apt too say Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - stick with them and you can't go wrong. Okay?

The later gospels don't really help us that much. They don't tell us anything new about Jesus that is historically credible, or about Mary Magdalene or Judas or any of these other disciples. And they were all written by non-eyewitnesses in the second through the fourth century A.D. that have a pseudonymous title. So, for example, the Gospel of Mary is not by Mary, the Gospel of Judas is not by Judas, the Gospel of Thomas is not by Thomas, the Gospel of Philip is not by Philip and the Gospel of Truth is not the truth.

For another thing, as I - I really want to stress this. These gnostic gospels are often profoundly anti-Semitic. They don't like the Jewishness of Jesus. They don't like the Jewish aspects of the earlier gospels. They are not at all big on a positive creation theology.

Now, see Dan Brown has a problem. Dan Brown's problem is he thinks he understands these matters when he doesn't; when he's out of his depth. One of the problems with the The DaVinci Code and Dan Brown, is that he seems to think that the gnostic gospels are likely to have suggested that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.

Now if you know anything about the gnostic themselves, these are ascetics. That is, having anything to do with women - not good and unspiritual. Okay? So the gnostics actually would have been the last
persons to suggest that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, not the first. They would have been the last to suggest this. In fact, they don’t.

There is the famous passage from the Gospel of Philip which says this. It says: "And Mary Magdalene who was" - dot, dot, dot - because the manuscript has literally got holes in it like Dan Brown’s theories. Okay? And Mary Magdalene, who was - dot, dot, dot - close to Jesus - dot, dot, dot - He kissed - dot, dot, dot - her - dot, dot, dot - on her - dot, dot, dot.

Now, here’s the thing about the gnostics. The gnostics had a belief that you could transfer this esoteric spiritual knowledge by holy kissing. It’s not talking about romance. It’s not talking about Jesus and Mary sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g. It’s talking about the transfer of data download. It’s talking about the spiritual knowledge of Jesus being conveyed to other disciples, like Mary Magdalene, by a holy kiss on the cheek, by the way.

I’ve got students who are praying fervently tonight that they can learn Greek simply by kissing their wire more fervently, before they go to bed, but it’s not happening. [chuckling] You know?

But the gnostics believed that you could transfer esoteric knowledge by a holy kiss. Okay? This is just something they believed. It was strange, but they believed it. Right?

This passage in the Gospel of Philip is about Mary Magdalene becoming more enlightened, not more loved by Jesus, but more enlightened, in any case. And it’s not about Mary Magdalene being Jesus’s wife.

What Mary Magdalene is called in the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Mary is His companion. Now, this word is koinonas. It’s not the word for wife. Mary Magdalene is called Jesus’s koinonas, but others are called this as well. It’s the word that’s related to the word koinonia. You’ve all heard the word koinonia before, which means participating in something in common, or sharing something in common. Sometimes loosely translated in fellowship, but that’s not what it means.

Koinonia is the activity sharing in common which results in fellowship. Koinonia is the participating with someone in something that they’re sharing together which results in fellowship, but it’s not fellowship.

Koinonas simply means a companion, somebody that you share something with, and it certainly doesn't mean spouse. But Mary Magdalene is called this in the Gospel of Philip.

If I were to summarize the character of the gnostic gospels they are syncretistic. They are very syncretistic. What do I mean by that? They’re an amalgam of Hellenistic philosophy, asceticism, anti-Judaism, anti-feminist attitudes mixed together with some gospel material.

I’ve shared the Gospel of Thomas’s famous saying, "Cleave the wood and I am there." Now that’s something that a monotheistic Jew would never say. Jews are not pantheists. They don't believe there is a little bit of God in everything. They believe here is the Creator and here is the creation. There is a distinction called the Creator/creation distinction and you should not ever violate that distinction between the Creator - being God, and the creation - being not God. Okay?

That's a fundamental Jewish distinction and it's a distinction that’s not maintained in the gnostic literature or in pantheism in general, not stoicism. A belief that there’s a little bit of God in everything.

Now here’s the difference between omnipresent and pantheism. A monotheist believes that God is everywhere at once. The reason is, that he believes God is so enormous that everything, all of material creation, is smaller than God and it's all present to God at once. [musically] 'He's the whole world, in His hands, He's got the big ol' universe, in His hands.'
The idea of God being omnipresent is not the idea that there’s a little bit of God in everything. It’s that everything is small enough that it can be present to God at once. Consider, for example, Psalm 8. "When I consider the sun, the moon and the stars, the works of your fingers", I say about myself, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou shouldst care, and yet you have made us but a little lower than the angels."

You know this wonderful Psalm, "Oh, God, our God." Powerful psalm. Creation psalm. What it’s saying is that the stars, the planets, are like Play Dough, that God threw into creation when he made them, because God is so enormous.

See, our problem is not that God is too - our God is too small. Our problem is, we have a huge God that we have too little faith in. So omnipresence is one thing; pantheism is another. The idea that there is a little bit of God in everything.

There is no God in this table. There is no God in this remote. There is not a little bit of God in this. It’s all present to God at once, because He’s omnipresent, but there’s not a little bit of God - a little dab’ll do you - in everything. That's pantheism.

Well, in gnosticism you do have pantheism, and the Gospel of Thomas bears witness to it. And as I was already suggesting to you, in gnosticism salvation looks very different from salvation in the earliest gospels.

In some ways gnosticism is one of the first human self-help programs. "You can save yourself by getting this insider trader knowledge." That's gnosticism. You're not saved by who you know but by what you know, and here's the problem. If you don't have the wattage to understand the esoteric system of gnosticism you can’t be saved.

I mean, if your brain is just not that great, if you don’t have a strong enough cerebral cortex, you can’t save yourself, because you don’t understand it, and if you don’t understand it, you can’t be saved. That's gnosticism.

It's salvation for eggheads; salvation for intellectually effete and elite people. It's what it is.

In the canonical gospels salvation is a matter of being saved from our sins by the atoning death of Jesus and his bodily resurrection. In the gnostic gospel, salvation becomes a self-help program for those in the know. You want to know the gnosis, the inside knowledge, the secrets of the universe. Right?

Male 1: Do you know if Scientology has any similarities or - It seems like the little I do know about it [cross talk] - similarities between that.

Yes, there some similarities, but Scientology actually is more of a spin-off from Christian Science, and Christian Science, in fact, is indebted to gnosticism so that the religious tree goes a little further back. But, yes, there is a connection in there. You’re right about that.

Just a reminder, Christian Science is really a mind over matter religion. That is, disease is just a cognitive distortion and the way you get rid of disease is just out-thinking it, in essence. Right? That's Christian Science. It's a mind over matter. You know, if you've got a mind, it doesn’t matter any more. You know? That kind of thing.

The earliest gospels, Mark, then Matthew, then Luke, then John, are all strongly emphasizing the last week of Jesus’s life; over a third of each of these gospels on the last week of Jesus’s life, and guess how much the gnostic gospels emphasize the last week of Jesus’s life? Almost zero percent.
Not important to their system because salvation is not about what Jesus did for me on the cross. Salvation is about what you know. And Jesus knew it first, and He's the great guru who conveys the knowledge.

I mean, this is very much - I mean, can you see how this appeals to America? We like self-help gurus. We like the Zig Zilgers of this world. We like these guys who give us the insider trader knowledge so we can improve ourselves. That's gnosticism. That's absolutely gnosticism.

The earliest gospels do not think you're saved by knowing this or that parable or teaching of Jesus. The earliest gospels think you're saved by the Son of Man dying on the cross for your sins.

In other words, the only gospels that provide us with reliable knowledge about the historical Jesus and His teaching and His followers are the earliest ones and they earliest ones are only the canonical ones.

Why are the canonical gospels true? They are in touch with the eyewitnesses who, by the way, were originally all Jews. Who affirmed the goodness of God's creation; the goodness of marriage; the goodness of reproduction; the goodness of having children. They were Jews. Their theology of creation was Jewish. It was not later gnostic asceticism.

Now I have to tell you - You know the church has done a really lousy job in dealing with the goodness of human creation and the goodness of our sexuality. I remember growing up in a youth group in the Methodist church, and the messages were tremendously mixed messages. I mean, here was the talk that we got as junior highs.

"Sex is dirty. Save it for the one you really love."

Now, that's what you call a mixed message, right? This is a mixed message. [chuckling] Okay? You're kind of going, on the one hand it's a no-no and it's not so good, and pollution, and on the other hand you're thinking, "Whoo-hoo!" You know? And so, it's confusing. It's confusing. The church has had an inadequate theology of the goodness of creation and the goodness of human relating, and the goodness of sexual relationships, and all of that.

I mean, we're still recovering from the medieval age of the church. Yes?

Male 2: Do you think part of that has to do with some of this gnostic teaching that has kind of been in the church to some extent with the separation between spiritual and what's good, and matter, which is the body?

Yes. Oh, sure. And see, I think that what - The further we get into post-modernity where you're going to separate the spiritual and material, the more prone post-modernity is to gnosticism and the way it infects and affects the church is that we begin to doubt the goodness of our Biblical creation theology in various different ways. You know?

I mean, let me give you a good example of this. One of the ways that gnosticism happens in conservative Christianity is they give up on Biblical ecology. They stop caring about the world. They stop caring about pollution. They stop caring about the environment. They stop caring about having clean water.

Who cares? This world is going to Hates in a hand basket. Beam me up, Scotty - I'm good. Now this is just gnosticism. It's, you know, they've become too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. It is a form of gnosticism. That's correct. And it is not Biblical religion. It's not what the Bible says.

Now, what I can tell you about the gnostics, whether we're talking about the gnosticism of Valentinus, not to be confused with Valentine - Valentinium gnosticism, is that these strong, heretical movements
generated in the second century A.D. really got up heads of steam towards the end of the second century A.D., so you have church fathers like Irenaeus who are busy swatting gnostics like flies and constantly combating gnostic heresy.

The important point is, that the mainstream church, the Orthodox Church, all recognized this as heresy. This was known as heresy in the second century A.D., long before we had a New Testament canon. I mean, the canon of the New Testament is not really closed until the fourth century.

Already in the second century A.D., Orthodox Christians were saying, “You know, this gnostic stuff is radical. This is not according to the earliest and best sources. It’s not according to apostolic religion.

So what we would say about the gnostic movement is we’re dealing with a split off from Orthodox Christianity involving lots of philosophical speculations that thrive in the middle second through the fourth century.

You know, it’s a credit to the church. The church listened to this teaching. They read the gnostic documents. They were even read in the monasteries. And finally, in the fourth century the church said, “You know, on further review, this is crap. We don’t believe this. It’s not in accord with apostolic teaching. We’ve listened to it. We’ve been patient. We’ve dialogued with you guys, and we’re done. That’s it.”

So in 368 A.M. Bishop Athanasius said, “I’ve had enough of this and I can’t take it no mo!” And he said, “You know, what I want right now, is all of my monasteries in Egypt, I want you to take the gnostic books out of the monastery and go bury them or burn them. We’re done with this. It’s heresy.”

And so what happened was, that at Saint Pachomius’s monastery there were quite a few copies of gnostic documents that were hastily taken out of the monastery and went and buried under a cliff. And this is the Nag Hammadi scrolls. That’s exactly what that remarkable archeological discovery in the deserts in Egypt were in 1948. They found the cast away books from a monastery in Egypt that were almost entirely gnostic documents.

And why? Because Bishop Athanasius said, “We’ve had enough of this. Thank you, but no thank you.”

And this happened not only in the church in the East, in Egypt, it happened in the church in the West. I mean, the interesting thing about the church was, that even though it was not united, even though it was not united, at the end of the fourth century the church in the West, the church in North Africa, the church in the East all said, “These 27 books and no others - These four gospels, only and no others. We are done with this other stuff.”

And that was the end of the fourth century in church history. Now, it’s not accidental that that happened right after Christianity became named as a legal religion in the Roman Empire. So, in fact, the church got the endorsement of the emperor, beginning with Constantine and subsequently.

Now what did not happen, which Dan Brown is all screwed up about, is that Constantine did not banish paganism by establishing that Christianity was a legitimate religion. Constantine was a pluralist. Constantine simply said that this is one more item on the smorgasbord that’s okay. That’s all he did. He just took it off the band list. Right?

I mean, to the end of his day, Constantine was sending money to pagan temples to build more pagan temples. The idea that Constantine was like a Born Again Christian is a myth. The idea that he would be party to some kind of Orthodox purge of paganism in the empire is a double myth. It didn’t happen historically. It’s not true.
What did happen is that Christianity [coughing] could no longer be legally persecuted simply because you're a Christian. That's what happened. That much is true.

Constantine was a smart man. He knew which horse to back. The religion that was on the rise and gaining converts rapidly in the fourth century A.D. was not Judaism and it was not paganism, it was Christianity. So he was a smart enough politician to back the right horse. That's what it boils down to.

Male 2: Did he have anything to do with Christians worshipping on Sunday? Because that was the day they worshipped the sun god.

Yes.

Male 2: [inaudible 0:26:34]

No, Easter has to do with that. Here's what happened to the church the less Jewish it became. And that's a gradual process, beginning towards the end of the first century A.D., continuing into the second century, into the third, into the fourth.

There are still Jewish Christians in the fourth and fifth and sixth century. But they have become a distinct minority. Okay?

Here's what happened. When you get to the early Middle Ages, an Old Testament hermeneutic has taken over the way of the church, in both the East and the West, is reading the New Testament.

And here is the reason why. Remember that whole period up to about 368 A.D., the New Testament canon was just forming. It didn't exist as a corpus of literature yet. There was still debate about various of the books. The sacred text that everybody already agreed on were what? The Old Testament. So this was the primary sacred text at the time. Right?

So, here's what happened. The church, in the early Middle Ages starts reading all of this New Testament discussion about church and leadership and all of that in light of the Old Testament. And here's what happens.

The Lord's day becomes the Sabbath. The Lord's Supper becomes a sacrifice. Ministers become priests. It keeps going like that. In other words, the church begins to look more and more like pagan religion. It begins to look more and more like temples, priests and sacrifices.

The essence of ancient religion was temples, priests and sacrifices. When Christianity becomes a legitimate religion, because they began to read their theology through the eyes of the Old Testament, they began to see Sunday as the Sabbath and the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, and ministers as priests and then you begin to have church buildings, which are even called temples. Okay?

Now the problem here is the hermeneutic. The problem is not so much heresy as trying to read all the New Testament institutions through the Old Testament grid of priests, temple and sacrifice.

And that's still a problem today. It's still a problem in the Roman Catholic Church, it's still a problem in the Orthodox Church. It's a problem. It's not a result of first century Christianity, or second century Christianity. It's a result of early medieval Christianity and we're still living with the consequences of that. And it's unfortunate. One of the unfortunate by-products, of course, is that if ministers have to be priests they certainly can't be women -in the Old Testament mold. That's part of the problem here, you see.

Well, if the Lord's Supper is the sacrifice which requires a priest to maintain it, then women can't have anything to do with that. You see? And it just goes downhill from there.
So, it has to do with the Old Testament hermeneutic. It doesn’t have so much to do with reaction to gnosticism. It has to do with an Old Testament hermeneutic that just sort of took over the church. And we’re still dealing with the fallout of that. It’s still a problem today.

When we study the issue of how we got the canon there were certain criteria of what could be included. Okay? And the basic most important criteria is we want the eyewitness stuff, we want the apostolic stuff. Right? So, if we can’t just go with eyewitness we want to go with those who were in contact with the eyewitnesses.

So the reason a gospel like Luke would be accepted is, he could consult the eyewitnesses. He was in touch, ad fontes, with the origins of the movement. He was in touch with the original apostles and eyewitnesses.

The ultimate criteria to decide what was to be in the New Testament and not, was it had to be all written by either eyewitnesses or apostles or the co-workers thereof. That’s it.

Now that means, that there is an inherent canonization in that principle. That is, after the first century A.D. nobody could write any New Testament documents. Why not? All the apostles and their co-workers were dead. This is why not. There is an inherent chronological time limitation on this process.

If you’re going to say, “They have to be the original apostolic documents” you have already put a time limit on what can be included in this corpus of literature. It took the church three centuries to figure this out.

Here’s the other part of this, which is important to understand. There was a lot of debate along the way and they wanted to be very careful. In the second century A.D. everybody agreed there is a collection of four gospels that are good - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - and there is a collection of Paul’s letters that are good. There is a lot of debate about Jude. There is a lot of debate about James. There is a lot of debate about the Johanan, Second John and third John. Everybody liked First John.

There is enormous debate about Revelation. It’s the trunk end of the canon about which there is debate. There is little debate about First Peter; a lot of debate about Second Peter, because it’s so different from First Peter in terms of grammar and style and syntax and all that sort of stuff.

So, you see, the church went through a careful, critical sifting process to get to the New Testament. And here’s something else that needs to be said. We never were at a point in church history anywhere in the church, so far as we can see, that some church included gnostic documents in their canon list and then later lopped them off.

There was never a point at which the church said, ”Yeh, these are Orthodox documents and we’re good with this.” That never happened. They were never on anybody’s canon list.

The extra books that were sometimes on the canon list were books like The Shepherd of Hermas, or The Didache, or even an Old Tes - you know, an early Jewish book like The Wisdom of Solomon.

No gnostic documents ever made any canon list in the second, third or fourth century A.D. Not a single one. They were never even considered for inclusion in a New Testament canon. It just never happened. So this whole myth of Dan Brown about ‘Oh, those mean old gnarly Orthodox Christians, these gospels were originally the original gospels and they were included in everybody’s fave raves, and then later they were banned.’
This is completely historical hooey. It's false. It did not happen. What did happen is that over the course of the second, third and fourth century certain documents were recognized to be Orthodox and apostolic. That's what happened. And when that happened, the church said, "Hail, well done good and faithful servant. This is good for us. This works for us." Mm-hmm.

Female 1: I grew up Catholic and so I have Catholic Bibles and I have some Bibles. Can you speak to the apocrypha?

Sure. And you're talking about the Old Testament apocrypha, not any New Testament pseudepigrapha apocrypha.

She's talking about books like First and Second Maccabees, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, those kinds of things. And of course, the Catholic Church calls them Deutero canonical. That is, they don't have the same canonical status as the Old and New Testament. They have a sort of secondary sacred text status.

I think they are tremendously [coughing] valuable books, but as a good Protestant, I agree with the Jews about this. These are Jewish books. They are not Christian books. They were not written by Christians.

What did the Jews say about these books? Do they say this is part of Tanakh? Is this part of Torah? No. These books are helpful, intertestamental Jewish books. That's what they are. That's what they are to me. I don't think they have any particular authority for the church and I don't think they should be viewed that way.

Female 1: Someone told me once that the Catholic Church has them because it supports their beliefs and traditions and their catechisms.

Yes. I don't think it's so much that as that these books have been found to be - I tell you, though, they are problematic. I mean, the wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira. There is a lot of good stuff in there. There is also some misogynist stuff in there.

Some stuff that is not really critical of women but would suggest that women are an inferior grade of human beings. I'm really glad it's not in my Bible, to be honest with you. I'm thankful that Sirach is not in my canon. There would be a lot of explaining to do.

I think they're valuable sources about intertestamental Judaism and there is some wonderful stuff in there. And there is no question that two of those books, The Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach influenced various of the New Testament writers.

They were influenced by these books. Jesus, Himself, was influenced by these books. I'll give you just one example. The famous, "Take my yoke upon you before my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

It's almost a direct quote from Sirach, only in Sirach, it's referring to Torah. The Torah is speaking, saying, "Take my yoke upon you" in a personification. Isn't that interesting. [murmuring]

Now Jesus is saying it instead. Early Jews would have heard this and gone, "Oh! This must be a different yoke."

The word yoke was a normal term for taking on the obligation to obey the commandments of Torah. Jesus is offering a different yoke; a different law; a different set of commands. It's powerful.

So, I think the church got it right. I like what Bruce Metzger says. If you want to read a good book, or two good books, maybe, on how we got the canon of our scripture, either read Bruce Metzger's book on the canon of holy scripture, or read Fred Bruce's book on the canon of scripture. These are both good and
they’re useful summaries about the history of how we got the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. They will not do the Dan Brown historical falsehood treatment of things.

One other thing that I really want to stress about this as we get clear about this - the church recognized the canon. It did not form the canon. That is, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and after careful reflection and discussion over the period of two centuries, the church came to the conclusion that these books should be recognized and no others as our Christian documents. Okay?

Now do you see the difference between saying the church recognizes the canon and the church forms the canon? If the church forms the canon, who has the final authority? It's the church. That would be the Catholic position. That would be the Orthodox position, as well.

Now I’m saying, that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the church came to the conclusion, being convicted by the Holy Spirit, if these 27 books and no others, so the church came to recognize the canon. So the final authority does not lie in the church. The final authority lies in these apostolic documents.

Now, that’s what you might expect a good Protestant to say. You know, sola scriptura, the B-I-B-L-E, yes, that’s the book for me. Right?

But I think historically that’s right. You see, the church didn’t give authority to these books. The church recognized the inspiration and authority of these books. There’s such a difference.

I recognize the inspiration and authority of these books, but I can’t give them one ounce of authority just because I recognize them. You know? It’s not happening. No matter what my opinion is about a book, it doesn’t change the truth claims of the book.

To reemphasize, no gnostic document was excluded from any canon list. They were never even considered possible books to be debated for inclusion.

Now, there is a canon list from the second century A.D. that is very interesting. It’s called the Muratorian canon list. It’s the first Orthodox canon list. It comes from the end of the second century A.D. and it includes no gnostic documents at all. Zero.

Even the heretic Marcion who began this process of thinking about canon lists, in the early second century A.D. said, "The only authentic gospel is the Gospel of Luke, and the only authentic other part of the Bible is some letters of Paul."

Now that’s what I call a really short canon. Okay? But notice what he’s not saying. Instead of the apostolic documents, give me some of these gnostic documents. Even a heretic like Marcion knew that the gnostic gospels were not early. They weren’t.

In the fourth century the Council of Carthage, Pope Innocent and Athanasius in North Africa, in the church in the East, the church in the West with Pope Innocent - all agreed these 27 books and no others. And they all came to this conclusion independently.

Now if you’ve ever been to church councils where you’re trying to hammer out faith statements, the idea that before the Internet age three different churches, largely independent of each other, would all come to exactly the same conclusion on which books were our New Testament and which weren’t is a miracle. There is no collusion here. They all agreed these 27 and no others. It’s really amazing that that happened because it was not a unified single church. It absolutely wasn’t.
There were church centers in various places. There were popes in Egypt who didn't recognize the popes in Rome. And there still are. There is Pope Shenouda XXIII, who is the pope of the Ethiopic Orthodox and Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt and Ethiopia. He has nothing to do with the pope in Rome.

These churches were not unified; not under one ecclesiastical structure, and yet they all agreed to these 27 books. I'd call that a miracle.

I've given you this before, so we won't need to rehearse this, but the reason that the four gospels we have were received is, of course, because they were either written by eyewitnesses, or apostles or their co-workers. In other words, the principle of the formation of the canon was a historical principle.

We need the earliest, we need the most authentic, we need the most apostolic documents. That's it. Okay. Now what we want to do is, we want to move on to a different portion of the New Testament. Before I do that, any questions about canonization, gnostic gospels, those kinds of things. What kind of questions do you have about that stuff?

Female 2: This goes back a little bit to what you talked about this morning.

That's okay.

Female 2: You were talking about the King James Version and how -

Yes.

Female 2: Now -

Yes.

Female 2: We have better ability to know what it meant. Why is that? Is that psychology, or more -

No, there are a lot of reasons. And you can get this in detail in the Living Word of God. Towards the end. I deal with why this translation over that translation. That sort of stuff, okay?

But the short answer is this. The King James Version was based on inferior manuscripts. Your translation is only as good as the source document from which you are translating, okay?

So the King James Version was based on an inferior knowledge of what the original text said. That's point number two.

Then you have the New King James which is the King James in more modern English so we've improved the English side of the equation, but have we improved the text criticism? Not so much.

We've not done the right job in regard to coming to the right conclusion about what was the original Greek text and what did it look like of the New Testament. We've not done the homework that way because we don't want to give up on the King James.

Now maybe you've not run into these folks, but I sure have. The KJV only people who think that the KJV is an inerrant translation. Never mind the original documents are in there, this is an inerrant translation, and that even the new King James is a slippage issue.

Oh, yes. These folks are out there. I get them attacking me all the time. Don't confuse me with the facts about the original Greek New Testament. I knows what I knows. This is an inerrant translation.

And you know their theology is not any different from Joseph Smith's ridiculous mythological claims that he had found gold tablets dropped from the sky, which is the basis of the Book of Mormon. Which, by the
way, is the same kind of claim made about the Quran. The reason they know they have the original words of God is because, you know, tablets were dropped from the sky. You know?

That's not how our New Testament came into being. The King James was a marvelous translation for its day, written in beautiful Shakespearean English. I'm not knocking what it is. They did the best they could with what they had.

Most people don’t know that it’s largely plagiarism. It’s largely a copy of William Tyndale’s translation. About 80 percent of William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament was taken over and just borrowed for the King James Version.

Most KJV only people don’t have any clue about this. You know? They don’t know the history.

This is a big problem, especially in Protestantism. We don’t know church history. And when you don’t know church history, you don’t know any of this stuff. You know, you're just like ignorant about all of this and it’s problematic.

The big text critical problem with the KJV only people is that they are violating one of the most fundamental principles of text criticisms, which is, that if you go with a majority text based on inferior originals, you may have the majority of your manuscripts on your side, but you don’t have the earliest and best reading of the text. That’s what I’m getting at.

And more to the point, the earlier fragments that we have found, like P 52 of the Gospel of John make very clear to us that the judgments that the text critical scholars have made about the original form of the Gospel of John are right, and that the western text, which is the basis of the Vulgate, which is the basis of the King James Version, are wrong about what was in the original text of the Greek New Testaments.

So, it’s bad text criticism; it’s bad translation principles; and it results in a Bible that is not the earliest and best we can do, which is the goal of this whole process. Get back to the original. Ad fontes. That’s the goal. So, I mean - that's kind of the short story.

Now, sometimes you have to break this to people carefully. [chuckling] There is a grandmama I used to love to go visit. She liked to cross stitch and she would make little pillows that would say things like, “My hearing aids working, my teeth fit fine, but Lord, oh Lord, how I miss my mind.” You know? [chuckling]

The King James is it. Right? You know, this is the Bible. Period. Exclamation point. Don’t confuse me with the facts.

Well, as Kenny Rogers said, “You gotta know when to hold ‘em and know when to fold ‘em.” This is a sincere Christian person who loves the Lord and you know, at this point, she’s not going to change her views about this. So, you need to learn how to be compassionate with folks like that. And unless they are influencing other people deleteriously, leading them down a wrong garden path, you just let sleeping dogs lie with those kinds of issues, you know?

I remember one Pentecostal woman who said, when I said, "Look, the King James Version was translated by a team of scholars from Oxford and Cambridge” and she fired right back, "No it wasn’t! Says on the front page of my Bible, translation by King James. My Bible does not lie.” [slapping on table]

Okay, honey. I’m letting that one go. [chuckling] You know? My life is interesting. [laughing] You would not believe the hundreds and thousands of letters I get. You know, I get 50 emails a day or more. Some of the letters are just unbelievable. [chuckling]
And let me tell you about a letter I got. [chuckling]

We're going to move on to the apocalypse since we're talking about Johanan literature last, we're going to move on to the Apocalypse, because I figure the Apocalypse will keep you awake for the rest of the afternoon. [chuckling] We're going to deal with the literature called the Apocalypse.

Here is the letter. You know how Time Magazine sends renewal letters every now and again. Well, they left it to the computer to write this letter, and you know how they try to insert your name periodically to make it look "personal"? Right. Well, they left it to the computer. Time Warner is a big company, right?

So the letter read, I kid you not:

"Dear Doctor Third. [laughing] We know you're one of the most important persons in your neighborhood, yes. Dr. Third, we're making this personal appeal. Surely you wish to keep abreast of domestic and foreign events, and if you'll just sign your name at the bottom, Dr. Third, we'll continue to send you our great American news weekly. Surely, Dr. Third, through this personal appeal we can convince you to renew your subscription. Yours sincerely, Time, Incorporated"

You know, I was tempted to write them back, "Dear Inc." [chuckling] See, when the world tries to be personal it treats people like numbers and things. When God is personal he calls you by name.

I love that in the Gospel of John. You know? In John 10 Jesus says "The shepherd knows his sheep and he calls them by name." At what juncture does Mary Magdalene realize He's really Jesus? It's when He says, "Miriam."

Not when he began talking to her. It's when he says, "Miriam" and she says, "Rabboni." There is a personal interchange.

Alright. What we're going to do now, is we're going to move on to deal with the genre of Apocalyptic literature.

We're talking about the Book of Revelation. We have a single book of prophecy in the New Testament. We have some prophecy sprinkled in to other New Testament books, like the gospels, but we only have one book that qualifies as a book of prophecy in the New Testament. I think there is a reason for that. The reason for that is, that we are now living in the age of fulfillment and we don't so much need a bunch of new prophecies. All we need is the old ones fulfilled.

And the New Testament writers realized this. The New Testament writers were all about the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus did this in order that this prophecy might be fulfilled. The spirit fell on the church in order that the prophecy of Joel might be fulfilled. The earliest Christians all believed they lived in the end times.

You know, this is one of the things I love to talk to people about. Some people come to me and say, "When will the end times begin?" And my answer is, "They began 2000 years ago. Jesus brought in the end times. The eschatological age began with Jesus.

That's what the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand now. This is an eschatological statement. We are in the end times, and if you're asking me when are the end of the end times? No one knows. [murmuring] So no more theological weather forecasting, thank you very much.

No one knows. Even Jesus said - wait for it - "Of that bad day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the sun knows. Only the Father knows." Mark 13:32.
New Testament Introduction. Dr. Ben Witherington

So enough with the theological weather forecasting. Right? here's what I say about all that stuff. God has revealed enough about the future to give us hope, but not so much that we don't have to live by faith every single day. If He were to give us a blueprint for what's going to happen in the next 15 years and exactly when He was coming back, well then, you know what would happen? We'd be running around sinning with impunity and saying, 'I've got three more days of sin to go and then I'm good.' [chuckling] You know? I know human nature. We'll take the path of least resistance. He is so not going to do that! That is not happening. He is not going to reveal that much about the future to us because it wouldn't be good for us, to say the least.

When we get to the Book of Revelation, it's a specific kind of literature. When we're talking about the genre of this literature, we are dealing with Apocalyptic prophecy, not just any kind of prophecy. We are dealing with Apocalyptic prophecy. And it's powerful stuff.

Now, what do I mean? Well, here is the definition that the Society of Biblical Literature has come up with: "It is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an other worldly being to a human recipient."

That's a mouthful. We need to unpack that. That's just big.


Easy peasy. Not so easy with visionary literature, because you see, when you see something you have to describe it and there are a million different ways you could describe it. So what happens with visionary literature is it analogical.

In visionary literature the author has to keep saying, "It was like. It was like. It was like. It was like." Listen to Ezekiel, Chapter 1. I've always liked Ezekiel, Chapter 1 and one of the reasons is it has the word "like" a lot in it. [chuckling]

Listen to this vision of Ezekiel. Just listen to this first chapter. We're talking about the Throne-Chariot vision. Starting with verse 4.

This is the earliest piece of Apocalyptic vision that we have in the Bible. In the Old Testament we have three such pieces of literature. Portions of Ezekiel, portions of Daniel, portions of Zechariah. That's Apocalyptic prophecy in the Old Testament, okay? This is the kind of prophecy that did not exist before the exile.

"As I looked a stormy wind came out of the north. A great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire something like I gleaming amber."

I want somebody to volunteer to count how many "likes" we get in this passage. Alright? Sam's going to do it for us. We just had one.

"In the middle of it was something "like" for living creatures. This was their appearance. They were like human form. Each had four faces. Each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight and the soles of their feet were like the soles of the calf's foot."
"And they sparkled like burnished bronze. And under the wings on their foreshad they had human hands and the four had their faces and their wings, thus: Their wings touched one another and each of them moved straight ahead without turning as they moved.

"And as for the appearance of their faces, the four have the face of a human being, the face of a lion, and on the right side the face of an ox, on the left side the face of an eagle. Such were their faces.

"Their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wings of the other while two covered their bodies. Each moved straight ahead wherever the spirit would go, they went without turning as they went.

"And in the middle of the living creatures, there was something that looked like burning coals of fire. Like torches moving to and fro amongst the living creatures. The fire was bright and lightning issued from the fire. And the living creatures darted to and fro like a flash of lightning.

"As I looked at the living creatures I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. And as for the appearance of the wheels and their construction, their appearance was like that of gleaming burl and the four had the same form.

"And their construction being something like a wheel within a wheel. And when they moved, they moved in any of four directions without veering as they moved and their rims were tall and awesome for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.

"And when the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them, and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose, and wherever the spirits would go, they went. The wheels rose along with them for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

"And when they moved, the others moved and when they stopped the others stopped. And when they rose from the earth the wheels rose along with them where the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

"And over the head of the living creatures there was something like a dome, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the dome their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another, and each of the creatures had two wings covering his body.

"And when they moved, I heard the sound of their wings which was like the sound of mighty waters and like the thunder of the Almighty. The sound of tumult like the sound of an army.

"And when they stopped they let down their wings and there came a voice from above the dome over their heads, and when the stopped they let down their wings. And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne.

"An appearance like sapphire. And then seated above the likeness of the throne, there was something that seemed like a human form. And upward from what appeared like the loins of that person, I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around.

"And downward from what looked like the loins, I saw something that looked like fire. And there was a splendor all around like the bow in the cloud on a rainy day. Such was the appearance of the splendor all around.

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord, and when I saw this, I fell on my face and shut up." [muttering]
New Testament Introduction. Dr. Ben Witherington

How many likes did we end up? [muttering] Twenty-six uses of the language of analogy. It was like. It was like. It was like. And why?

When you encounter the mysterium trimendum there are not words big enough to describe it. Our vocabulary is inadequate. And so the reason that Apocalyptic prophecy is inherently metaphorical is because of the greatness of God and the smallness of our vocabulary. Even when it's a revelation of God, it's a revelation mediated to us with our finite minds and finite language in a way that we can kind of understand, like you know what I mean? Okay? You get the picture?

Well, this is the nature of Apocalyptic prophecy. It is analogical, it's metaphorical, and here's the important point.

You know, when the old battle between the literal and the figurative, right? Conservative Christians tend to go, "Give me the literal." You know?

Well, here's the problem with that. If you're dealing with the genre of literature that is deliberately figurative, the way to honor that is to interpret it figuratively. Interpret the stuff that was intended to be literal, literally; interpret the metaphors as metaphors. So when does Psalmus say, "I saw the hills skip like rams." We should not hear Julie Andrews singing, [musically] "The hills are alive and it's very frightening."

You know, you're not thinking earthquake here. Right? It's a metaphor for joy. Joy of the creation welcoming the Creator as He comes down. Okay?

This language is analogical; it's metaphorical; but it's referential. Now here's one of the problems. In the old literal versus figurative debate, some people think, "Well, if you say something is fiction, or if you say something is figurative, it must not be real. You must be saying it's a myth."

No! I'm saying it's referential. It's just that the description is not literal. Ezekiel is not reflecting on having had too much pizza one night and conjuring up a nightmare. [chuckling] He had a close encounter with God. Okay? But he describes it in deliberately metaphorical terms because the words aren't big enough.

So it's okay if it's analogical. It's okay if it's figurative. It's okay if it's metaphorical. In fact, it's better if it is because I frankly don't want a description of the loins of God. Thank you very much. [chuckling]

God doesn't really actually have any. Okay? So, are you getting the picture here? It's metaphorical language. It's figurative language. It's analogical language, and this is just as true with the Book of Revelation as it is the Throne-Chariot Vision in Ezekiel I. All of this literature is that way, so that's kind of point one.

Now, here's the other half of the definition. It discloses a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisions the eschatological future of salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world.

Now, what this part of the definition is telling us is, that it's going to tell us something about the heavenly realm and what's going on in Heaven or Hell, or wherever. The supernatural realm, right?

But it's also going to tell us something about the present and the future, so it's not just horizontal prophecy dealing with human history, but it does. And it's not just vertical prophecy giving us a vision of Heaven. It's both/and. What do we have in the Book of Revelation? Do we have both/and? Yes, we do.
We have a visionary description of Heaven and we have a visionary description of the future. We have both. This is typical of Apocalyptic literature. We tend to have both. Alright?

Now, you may have noticed in that description/definition genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an other worldly being. Absolutely.

Listen to Revelation, Chapter 1. Yes, it involves God’s FedEx boys, the angels. Listen to the beginning of the Book of Revelation.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him" - the "Him" is Jesus, alright? So who gave the revelation to Jesus? God gave the revelation to Jesus, then He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John.

So we have God to Jesus to the angel to John. The angel [coughing] is the FedEx boy who gets it to the door front. He's the one who brings the revelation to John in person. [muttering] Apocalyptic literature has intermediaries who deliver the messages.

Now, think about the beginning of the gospels again. How did Mary get the word that she was "preggers", as the Australians would say?

Male 3: Angels.

An angel. That’s right. That’s exactly right. In some sense, all of the New Testament reflects an Apocalyptic world view. In order to understand something God has said, we need an intermediary to tell us. We need an angel or Jesus, or somebody, to tell us because otherwise we’re pretty much in the dark.

And you see, this is something that Jews in Jesus’s day believed. The reason John the Baptist was such a surprise is that there were many early Jews who thought the Age of Prophecy was over. Where are the prophets nowadays? And then John the Baptist shows up and this is a shock.

And then all of a sudden angels start showing up and indicating the new work of God is beginning. One of the things I can tell you about Biblical history and church history is that whenever a new work of God happens there usually new Revelation to kick it off.

The angels get into the process. The miracles start happening and you’re off and running again. That’s pretty typical. As I’ve stressed, it’s referential.

Now the word “apokalupsis”. Lets deal with the Greek word, if we can, the word apokalupsis. [muttering] [writing on board] Here is your word. It’s the word from which we get Apocalyptica, Apocalypse. What it means is the unveiling of secrets.

What it means is the revelation of something you wouldn’t have otherwise known, whether it's information about the past, or present or future. It’s information you wouldn’t otherwise have know. An Apocalypse is a revelation that you would not have gotten any other way.

And you know what? Jesus Himself was an Apocalyptic seer. At one point he says, "I thank you, Father, that You have revealed this unto me. No one knows the Father except the Son and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except those to whom I reveal Him." Says Jesus. That’s Apocalyptic thinking.

You wouldn’t have known Him without a special revelation. This is information you wouldn’t have guessed just off the top of your head. You would have never guessed Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God without help from Revelation. Now that’s part of the world view out of which this literature comes.
Now, no one Apocalyptic document has all the same features. There are a constellation of features that regularly occur. Okay?

Now, here’s something that’s so important, that’s so different between late Western Christians and the original recipients of this document. This document was intended to comfort the afflicted. This document was intended to comfort the persecuted. Are you with me now?

It was not intended for armchair scholars sitting in their easy chairs who are not under persecution at all to sit back and just speculate endlessly about. The document was intended to comfort persecuted Christians who were being pressured and persecuted and in some cases, executed.

Did you hear about Anthropus? Executed as a martyr for Christian faith. Are you with me now? You get the picture?

This is minority literature written in coded language and if you don’t understand the Apocalyptic code, or how to read Apocalyptic symbols, guess what. You’re going to misunderstand this, or just not get it at all.

This is one of the problems with Christians reading Apocalyptic literature today. They’ve never studied it in the context of other Apocalyptic literature, and they have no clue. They don’t know what the symbols stand for.

Let me stress to you the following principle. What it meant when the original inspired author wrote it is still what it means today. The meaning has not changed. It has not morphed into something it wasn’t in the first century A.D. What it meant is still what it means.

Now, imagine if John of Patmos had written to the church in Ephesus as follows: "And in the year 2001 we will prepare for war and Americans will roll into Iraq with tanks."

How would the Christians in Ephesus in 95 A.D. received this news? [muttering] First of all, it would have made no sense because there was no America and there was no Iraq. Secondly, it would have made no sense because there were no tanks. I could keep going. [chuckling]

This Word of God was not in the first place, a revelation for late Western Christians who think it’s all about them. [chuckling] It was a revelation in the first place for the first century Christians, and then the second century Christians, and it’s been a revelation to every generation of Christian history.

And it is the height of arrogance and stupidity to suggest that those poor slobs couldn’t have understood it. But I can now because it’s all about me. [chuckling] Wrong.

It’s all about having a Biblical world view about history in general and how God’s going to wrap it up. And here’s the big message. Though it looks bad for the Christians, it may look like Lions - 10, Christians - 0 right now. You may be suffering discomfort or persecution or pressure or prosecution or execution. Be of good cheer. The lamb is still on his throne. God is still in His Heaven and in the end, all things will be right with this world.

That’s the promise of Revelation. The promise is, that the sovereignty of God will be exercised and however bad things may be now, eventually the truth will be out and salvation will appear and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.
It is a reassurance kind of literature. And it’s not only that. It’s the most anti-militaristic literature imaginable, because the advice of John of Patmos to his seven churches is, do not take up arms. Do not start fighting your persecutors and prosecutors and executors.

Be prepared for martyrdom. The message that is continually given in this literature to God's people is, "Vengeance is mine," sayeth the Lord. "I will repay."

Now the light’s going to come on. Get ready for this. Who is the only person who was worthy to unseal the can of whoop-ass on the world? According to the Book of Revelation that would be the lamb sitting on his throne. He’s the only one who has the authority, the power, the knowledge and the compassion to judge and redeem the world in a way that is appropriate. And we don’t have that knowledge.

The Book of Revelation is not ramping up the rhetoric to encourage military adventures. It’s telling Christians to be prepared for martyrdom and if you’re worried about the outcome, the lamb has got it covered. He will judge the world. It’s not your job to do it.

That's the message of Revelation. That's the message of Revelation. Over and over and over again. and even when you get to what is called Armageddon, after the millennium in Revelation, Chapter 20, guess what - there is no battle.

The armies of the world assemble. Jesus simply says, "You’re toast." Fire falls from Heaven. We're done! There is no battle of Armageddon. There is simply a friar roasting. There is simply a fire, and then the new heaven and then earth.

And why? Because judgment is in the hands of the Lord, and thank goodness it is. It’s not up to us to be the avenging angels of God. It’s a powerful message.

Let's deal with one of the most important words in this book, just for a minute. That word is "martus".

This is the Greek word for witness. It is the word from which we get the word "martyr". Martus means witness. And what John is calling his fellow Christians is, to martus. Bear witness even unto death if necessary. Remain faithful to the witness. Be a good witness. Even unto death if necessary, like our fellow brother, Anthropus, who died for the cause.

These documents are written to persecuted, pressured, prosecuted and occasionally executed minorities. [music begins] Meant to reassure the audience that justice will indeed be done.
Chapter 9

Revelation and the Rapture

Let's talk about Apocalyptic literature. It's fun and exciting stuff and it's terribly confusing and it's the most mis-interpreted portion of the canon, etc.

Apocalyptic literature arose in a Jewish context. Now here's a good rule of the thumb. Alright? If you're dealing with a neophyte Christian or somebody who has not done any serious study of the New Testament, let me tell you which book of the Bible not to start with. That would be the Revelation. Okay?

Don't start there. I have to tell you a story. [chuckling] I was riding in the mountains of North Carolina on the Blue Ridge Parkway - not to be confused with the Blue Grass Parkway, which is in Kentucky - with my friend, Doug Harris. This was 1969 and I was driving my father's Chevy Bel Air two-tone, column shift, 1955. And the clutch blew out!

As the Bible said, my countenance failed. So, we had to push the car off of the Blue Ridge Parkway, down a ramp, into a Texaco station. The guy couldn't fix it, so we decided to hitchhike home to the middle of the state of North Carolina. We were picked up by a really wizened, old, elderly couple driving a black '48 Plymouth. We got in the car and my friend Doug, who is now a lawyer in North Carolina, said to them, "Well what did you think about the moon landing? Neil Armstrong? All that."

They said, "That's fake. That never happened. Besides, anyway," said the driver of the car, "everybody knows those pictures of the world, round and revolving are fake. The world is not round."

Doug's eyes opened like this, and he went, he looked at me. See, the problem with Doug is he didn't recognize invincible ignorance when he saw it. [chuckling]

So Doug says, "Why do you think the world is not round and revolving?"

And I kept going, [whispering] "Shut up, Doug. We need this ride. We're hitchhiking home. Be quiet." Right?

The man said, "Well, it's perfectly clear. It says in the Book of Revelations that the angels will spin on the four corners of the earth. It can't be round if it's got four corners, now can it, Mister?"

He had a second infallible proof that I liked better. [chuckling] He said, "Of course the world is not revolving around the sun. I mean, have you ever gone out at nighttime and been standing upside down in your front yard? I think not," says the man.

I'm going, "Whoa! Dude!" Okay. These were flatlanders from the mountains of North Carolina and there really are still some flatlanders out there. Now what was his problem with his interpretation of the book he called Revelations, which by the way, is not the name of this book? It's Revelation, single; not Revelations, plural. Are you with me now? So no Revelations stuff, right? It's the Revelation of John. That's what it is.

The problem is not that he took the Book of Revelation seriously. The problem is, he didn't know what kind of literature it was, and therefore he took figurative language literally. And what that figurative
language meant was that God will send his angels to all four corners of the earth to bring in the saved people.

It's a description of theology and history, not cosmology. It's not trying to teach cosmology. And I don't know when conservative Christians are ever going to get the point, that it's not teaching cosmology. It's teaching history and theology. That's what it's teaching. And ethics. Okay?

So, there's a long history of misinterpreting the Book of Revelation. It's still happening aplenty today. Just turn on your television sometime.

Apocalyptic literature arose in a Jewish context. It arose out of the experience of exile. Now, I want you to think about this because this is powerful.

Why is it that visionary literature first arises out of the experience of exile? Well, here's the thing. How long did the exile even of the southern tribes last? I already told you this. Probably 70 years. That's more than a generation.

How long is a Biblical generation? Forty. So we're talking about almost two generations of life here. Right? Some have lived and died in exile. Some were born in exile and have never experienced the Holy Land. Are you with me now? You get the picture? [chuckling]

And here's the problem. The problem is they believed in an almighty, singular god - monotheism - who did justice. And the problem is, that justice was not happening. They were in exile.

"Our captors asked us to sing us one of the songs of Zion but how can you sing the songs of Zion when you're in a foreign land?" says the Psalmist.

Exile had a profound, profound effect on the psyche of Jews. It still does. It still does. And one of the effects was that they learned that justice was not necessarily going to be done in their lifetime. Now this is a shocking revelation if you're a devout Jew.

Do you know how strong the passion is for justice in the human heart? Just watch TV sometime. The passion for justice has always been profound and no more so, than for God's people who think they are on the right side of God's law, and He's a righteous and all-powerful God.

So, how come justice is not happening for us? Yes, ma'am.

Female 1: But they were constantly disobeying -

Mm-hmm.

Female 1: God's word, and He kept reminding them -

Yes.

Female 1: Over and over again, and they kept -

I know. I know. But you know what, lets take it personally for a minute. Don't you ask, sometimes, the question, "Lord, why is this happening to me? I didn't deserve to have that car accident, did I? Why is this happening to me? I mean, I'm a good Christian. Come on, now."

Right? You get the point? They weren't claiming to be sinless. They just didn't understand why their captors, who were more wicked than they were, were faring better than they were. Right? How come?
Why? And how come justice is not being done? We're being enslaved. We're being killed. We're being horsewhipped. Why?

Female 1: You just said they didn't get it.

You could say that, but that would be unfair because there were some of them who recognized and repented of their sins when they went into exile, and said, "Lord, okay, we've done the repentance dance. How about some justice now?" You know?

"How about at least lets return from exile?"

And it didn't happen. And it didn't happen for a long time. Then when it did happen it was a shocker. [chuckles] They were sent home by Cyrus, who is called in the Book of Isaiah "my anointed one".

[chuckles]
The only person in the Old Testament my anointed one by God is not King David; it's Cyrus, the pagan ruler of Persia. That's a shocker. He's called the messiah. That's the word. Mashiach. Cyrus was my mashiach. My messiah - Cyrus. He sent his people home. Right?

Well, so here's the deal. Apocalyptic literature arises when justices is deferred. Apocalyptic literature arises when there are profound questions of theodicy.

Why are God's people suffering disproportionately since they are proportionately better than other people? Okay? Why is this happening?

And so what happens, here is the profound thing that happens in exile, is that they begin to develop an actual theology of the afterlife. If things are not corrected in this lifetime, then they'll be connected when? In the life to come.

And what happens in Apocalyptic literature is a development of a profound theology of the afterlife. Not merely life in Heaven. I mean, before the time of Ezekiel you pretty much had to have your names start with "e" to get beamed up into Heaven. You're either Enoch or Elijah or you don't go. Right?

What did Jews actually believe about the afterlife prior to the exile? They believed you died and you were gathered to your ancestors and you lived in Sheol. You're just in the land of the dead.

Unless you're some superhero prophet you just in the land of the dead. Abraham's in the land of the dead, was gathered to his ancestors. Isaac's in the land of the dead; he was gathered to his ancestors. Jacob, Joseph, Moses - all the big dogs. Okay?

What happens in exile is they begin to have a more viable and positive view of the afterlife. They begin to have an actual theology of Heaven and not Heaven.

And not only that, more importantly perhaps, they begin to have a theology of Heaven come on earth at the end of human history. And of course, you can certainly see this in Isaiah.

By the time you get to Isaiah, and Second Isaiah anyway, Isaiah 40 through 60 something was probably written from exile. You have the visions of lions lying down with lambs and swords beaten into plowshares. You know, endless vineyards and olive trees, and the sky is not cloudy all day. You know, all of that good stuff. Right? Oh, home on the range. Are you with me now? You get the picture?

So, what happens in exile is a much more vital, vibrant and positive view of the afterlife. It begins to develop in Apocalyptic literature. It is not an accident that the first place that the idea of resurrection arises in Jewish literature is in Apocalyptic literature.
The first place we even hear this concept is in [musically] "Dem bones, dem bones, them dry bones, gonna rise up one day." That would be Ezekiel.

The only other place that resurrection is really talked about is in the Prophet Daniel. Daniel 12:1-2, "You will rise from the dust of the earth and shine like the stars." It's Apocalyptic literature that begins to talk about the other world and the afterlife.

Now this is the distinction I want you to get hold of, because when they were thinking about a better place, they thought about it in two ways. They thought about it vertically, in terms of the other world, and they thought about it horizontally, in terms of the afterlife. The life after this life, in the future. Okay?

And the emphasis was on the afterlife, not the other world. In fact, in the New Testament that is where the emphasis is. About 10 percent of the New Testament talks about Heaven or Hell. Ninety percent of the eschatology of the New Testament is about what is going to happen in the future down here.

It's all about what's going to happen when Jesus comes back and He rules on the earth, and there is a new Heaven and new earth, etc. The finish line is not [musically] "Somewhere, out there [regular voice] in Heaven."

No, in the New Testament Heaven is seen as an ultra clean bus station on the way to the new Heaven and the new earth. It's an interim condition. It's not the final destination. It's not God's final answer on you.

Final answer on you is you will be conformed to the image of Christ by resurrection, on the earth, in this world, in the new Heaven and new earth. Okay?

Now this whole theology of the afterlife, of resurrection, of a judgment day in the future that will resolve all justice issues, all of that - this really begins to be developed during the exile and you see it in the Apocalyptic literature of the exile in Ezekiel and in Daniel and in Zechariah.

There became a very strong view that if God is not going to rectify things now, He will in the afterlife. He will fix it later, so that by the time you get to the New Testament there is a profound theology of the afterlife running. But there are some old school people. They are called the Sadducees. They were the ones who sang [musically] "Give me that old time religion." [coughing]

Their theology was the theology of Sheol. When you die, you're gathered to your ancestors and you're just in the land of the dead, and that's the end of that.

They didn't believe in resurrection. They didn't believe in dying and going to Heaven. They just believed you went to Sheol. Right? That's the Sadducees.

What about the Pharisees? Did they believe in resurrection? Yes. That's what distinguished them, chiefly, from the Sadducees. That's why they were so sad, you see, because they didn't believe in resurrection. There was a problem here.

If I were to ask you who was Jesus more like in terms of the afterlife theology, the Sadducees or the Pharisees, you would say no question He was more like the Pharisees. And so was Paul.

In fact, Paul was a card carrying Pharisee before he became a Christian. So some of His belief system carried over quite nicely into his Christian faith. Namely the idea of resurrection.

I don't think I need to emphasize to you, but I will say to you, that the word resurrection does not refer to dying and going to Heaven. And it does not refer to some purely spiritual experience.
Resurrection to an early Jew always meant something that happened to a physical body. We're not talking about a visionary experience when we're talking about the resurrection of Jesus. We're not talking about something that's in the eye of the believing beholder. We're talking about something that actually happened to the dead Jesus and was promised to happen to His followers.

This is why Paul, in First Corinthians 15 says, that Christ is but the first fruits of the resurrection. And who would be the latter fruits? This is the only chance I get to call you fruits. [chuckling] Okay?

We would be the latter fruits. Right? A resurrection. We will be conformed to the image of Christ by means of resurrection when He returns. We will be the rest of the crop. Very important.

"We shall be made like Him, in the flesh just as we are now being conformed internally to His character. So that He will have brace of kinsmen, risen brothers and sisters like unto Jesus. And we will see Him face to face and reflect His image."

That's an afterlife theology. I can't wait for the day that I'm really a lot more like Jesus. That's an afterlife theology.

Well, the Book of Revelation has a full-blown afterlife theology and other world theology and we're going to get some of both. It's minority literature and that means you need to understand symbols.

You need to understand the code of language. You need to understand the symbolic numbers. There are all kinds of symbolic numbers. Unfortunately, the Jehovah’s Witnesses didn’t get the memo. One hundred forty-four thousand is not intended to be the exact number of the saved. It is a multiple of 12 and up to 12 tribes and it simply means that all of God’s “chilluns” are going to be there. That’s all. It’s a symbolic number that’s a multiple of 12.

You need to understand the symbolic numbers. What are the big symbolic numbers in the Book of Revelation and in early Jewish Gematria? That would be three, and seven, and 12 and multiples of these numbers. Forty would be another good one, yes.

So, 70 is - 10 by the way. Ten is also a big symbolic number. So, when we hear about 70 weeks of years you’re not supposed to just count to 70 or 700, you’re supposed to think of this as a big honkin’ number that is complete. The point of the number is it’s a complete number. It’s a perfect number.

The same with the thousand year reign. Thousand is a multiple of what? Ten and a hundred, and he’s not saying it’s going to be exactly a thousand years when Jesus comes back and reigns on the earth before the new Heaven and earth. He’s saying it’s going to be a long old honkin’ time.

These are symbolic numbers; they are not literal numbers any more than the image of the dragon head in Revelation - Mr. Dragon Breath is a literal description - either.

They are symbolic numbers and the most important of the symbolic numbers we are going to decode now, so stick with me. I was saving this for a moment when you were flagging. He we go. [chuckling]

Here’s the number: 6-6-6.

Now the first thing to say about this number is it's just shy of seven. So if seven means completion what does 6-6-6 mean? It is the number of chaos; of incompletion. Of destruction. Very important. But there is so much more to this number and now the truth is about to be told. So here we go.

It is deliberately a coded number. Now let me explain to you about Gematria for a minute. [writing on board] Gematria is the practice of turning names into numbers. You with me now?
You assign numerical value to letters of an alphabet. It could be the Hebrew alphabet. It could be the Greek alphabet. It could be the Latin alphabet. Are you with me now?

It’s assigning numbers to names. So, for example, in the catacombs you see this graffiti. It says, “I love a girl whose name is 6-1-4.” That’s not her cell phone number. That’s her name. It’s Gematria. It’s turning names into numbers.

Now, I wish my sister was here who could actually draw, but you’ll have to put up with me.

Here is a coin. This is a Roman coin. Got a good Roman nose there. This is Nero. Are you with me now? We’ll put a little laurel wreath on his head. Here he is. This is a denarius; a silver denarius. On the silver denarius of Nero, which by the way, he had these little spiky things on the laurel crown which indicated his divinity. If you get spiky bits on the laurel crown it indicates that you have and you are radiating divine glory. Alright?

Now, here’s what the inscription says: [writing on board] Neron Caesar divi filii Augusti. Nero Caesar the divine son of the divine Augustus. You with me now? It’s a claim to divinity, and here’s where I tell you that if you add up the numerical value of all of the letters on the front of this coin, it equals: 6-6-6

So who is Mr. Six-Six-Six according to John of Patmos? That would be Nero. Who was the first person who instigated a persecution of Christians? That would be Nero. He was the archetypal image of the anti-Christ. But here’s the thing. Notice I said the archetypal image of the anti-Christ. What they believed was that in every age of the eschaton there were false Christs and false prophets and all kinds of nefarious dudes running around.

Nero sits for the portrait of Mr. Six-Six-Six and when he wants to describe the final Mr. Six-Six-Six, he says he’s going to be like that bad boy. You get the picture?

Now everybody knew about Nero, and he was not anybody Christian’s hero. But then what happened is the Nero legend. According to the Nero legend Nero came back from the dead. He had a fatal wound in his head and he rose from the dead and he reappeared in the emperor’s chair as Domitian; as Domitianus.

The ruler in the ’90s who did guess what? Also persecuted Christians. There were two emperors in the first century A.D. who persecuted Christians. Nero and Domitian. One in the ’60s, one in the ’90s and what was whispered by Jews and Christians about Domitianus is he’s Nero back from the dead. He’s Nero redivivus. He’s Nero, the sequel. A little bit louder and a little bit worse.

You see, the thing about these archetypal symbols that are being used is that they are multivalent.

[writing on board] What does the word multivalent mean? Any of you know this word? We need a definition, right?

Multi” means more than one, right? ”Valent” means value. So multivalent would mean that this symbol is deliberately, deliberately more universal. It’s deliberately vague; it’s deliberately more universal because why?

It’s not just describing one person. It’s describing a kind of person. A type of person. A world ruling, tyrannical, Christian-hating dictator. That’s what it’s describing. And there are a lot of people that could sit for that portrait.

How about Stalin or Mussolini or Adolph Hitler, or Idi Amin? We could keep going. There are a lot of people that could sit for this picture. No question. In every age of church history.
What John is saying is once the eschaton begins you’re going to have people like this. The battle of good and evil is going to keep on going until its brought to a close. And what’s going to bring it to a close is not any preliminary events that happen. What’s going to bring it to a close is the return of the thief in the night. So whatever the mess is that we’re suffering now and wherever we are on the eschatological time clock is really quite irrelevant. The bottom line is, God is still in His Heaven and all will be right with the world when Jesus comes back.

And that's the message. And in the meantime, don’t be silly little naive Christians who put your faith in any worldly empire or country or nation or government, or principles or constitutions. Don’t do that because the kingdom that you owe allegiance to is the Kingdom of God and the citizenship that matters to you is the citizenship you have in Heaven.

That's the message to the Christians. So it's deconstructing any kind of idolatrous loyalties to particular earthly systems. And it's intended to do that. One of the ways it does that is it depicts an emperor who is like Darth Vader. It's an archetypal multivalent symbol.

Now, does John believe that there will probably be one ultra big, ultra bad emperor at the end of human history that Jesus is going to have to come deal with? Yes, he probably does. But he's not trying to give you a description of who that will be by name. He's trying to give you a character description of what kind of person he will be.

He will be like Nero. He will be like Domitian. I mean, that's the point.

So, what you can tell people is, I have no idea who this is going to be, but I sure know what kind of person he’s going to be. And I sure know what kind of empire he’s interested in building. And it sure ain’t Christian.

You know a lot about the character of the future. You don’t know the particulars about times and dates and personal names. And that’s okay. I’d rather know the character of how it’s going to come out than all of the particulars. It’s alright with me. I can trust God for the particulars.

Now, as I say here, many of these symbols are deliberately multivalent. They are referential but they could refer to a variety of persons and things because they are so generic in character, and that’s by intention. It’s be design.

It’s not because John practices fuzzy math. It’s not because John has fuzzy thoughts about the future. It’s because he’s only revealing what God told him to reveal. Enough about the future to give us hope.

Not so much that we have this enormously detailed blueprint about exactly everything blow-by-blow and how it’s going to happen because we don’t. We don’t know.

Now, here’s where it gets interesting and it shows you how plastic these images are. I read to you Ezekiel 1, right? Remember Ezekiel 1? [chuckling] Now I’m going to read to you Revelation 4. This should sound eerily familiar, but not identical. [sound of page turning] Listen to Revelation Chapter 4. [sound of pages turning]

"After this," says John, "I looked in there in Heaven and doors did open. And the first voice which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here and I'll show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the spirit and there in Heaven stood a throne."
Now, just for a moment - this has nothing to do with the bodily Rapture of John of Patmos into Heaven. He's on the Island of Patmos. This is about a spiritual visionary experience. He sees into Heaven when he becomes in the spirit and is inspired to see a vision into Heaven.

So this is not about flying Air Ruach to Heaven. Right? He's in the spirit and he sees into Heaven. He's still firmly planted on Patmos and he's in exile. He's in exile. He's out there saying [musically] "You load 16 tons and what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt. Saint Peter don't you call me, 'cause I can't go. I owe my soul to the Roman Empire." Or something like that. [murmuring] Right?

He's in exile. He's in a mining colony on the Island of Patmos in exile, but he has a vision of Heaven. So what does he see? Listen to what he sees.

"I was in the spirit and there in Heaven stood a throne with one seated on the throne and the one seated there looks like" - I want to ask you to count again, Sam, we're going to get a lot of likes here. Right?

"And the one seated there looked like jasper and carnelian. And around the throne was a rainbow that looks like an emerald and around the throne were 24 thrones and seated on the throne were 24 elders dressed in white robes with gold crowns on their heads.

"And coming from the throne are flashes of lightning and rumbles and peals of thunder. In front of the throne burnt seven flaming torches which are the seven spirits of God. And in front of the throne there is something that's like a sea of crystal like glass.

"And around the throne on each side of the throne are four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first living creature is like a lion. The second living creature is like an ox. The third living creature has a face like a human being. The fourth living creature like a flying eagle."

By the way, this is where you get the four medieval symbols for the gospels. It's from these four critters in Ezekiel and in Revelation.

The lion is the symbol for which gospel? [muttering] No. That would be the eagle. The eagle eye view of the gospel. The ox is the symbol for Luke. The human face is the symbol for Mark, and so the lion gospel is -

Male 1: Matthew.

Matthew. That's right. And that's where the medieval symbols for the gospels come from. They come this Revelation which has nothing to do with the gospels, but that's okay.

"And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings are full of eyes all around, inside, day and night without ceasing they sang Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

"And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives there forever and ever."

They are casting down their crowns before the throne, singing [musically] "Thou art worthy, thou art worthy, thou art worthy, oh, Lord. To receive glory, glory and honor and glory and honor and power."

"For by you we were all created and by your will we exist." Amen

Now, if you compare Ezekiel 1 which is much longer to this vision than Revelation 4, are there striking similarities? Yes. Absolutely so. Are they identical? No.
For one thing, the eyes are in different places. Got eyes in the wheels back there. Got eyes elsewhere here.

For another thing, the four living creatures are described differently. It seems in Ezekiel the four living creatures each have four faces. Here we have one living creature per face.

Now what that is telling you is, that these images are plastic. They’re not literal descriptions. They are metaphorical descriptions, and therefore they are malleable. They can change.

Throne chariot vision, yes? Identical description? No, because this isn’t a literal description anyway. It’s a flexible description.

Now, here’s where it gets exciting. This is an image of worship. Worship going on in Heaven, and guess who’s worshipping? Everybody. All creatures great and small.

You’ve got the angels. You’ve got the critters. You’ve got the human beings represented by the elders, and they are all lifting up the throne of God. Wow!

This is a vision of worship. That’s what it is. Heavenly worship. You know, in the Orthodox tradition they believe that what we’re doing on earth is participating in Heavenly worship if we do it right.

So we are joining with the saints in Heaven worshipping God. Right? But that image is of all of creations. The animal creation, the angelic creation, the human creation. All of those things that are not the creator are worshipping the creator. This is an image of worshipping the creator. In the next chapter we have the worshipping of the redeemer. The lamb.

So, this is the worshipping of the creator god, and in the next chapter it’s the worshipping of the redeemer god. It’s a powerful two chapters that go together - Revelation 4 and 5.

And it gives you a powerful start to this whole book, because what is going on here is God is being worshipped for what He is about to do to transform the world into His kingdom. And these folks were all thanking God for both the justice and the redemption that is yet to come.

Remember, we get to this Revelation and the saints under the altar in Heaven are cranky. They go, "How long, oh, Lord?" You remember this?

They’re not up there going, [musically] "I’ve been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. I’ve been redeemed." You know?

No, they’re going, [musically] "My mama done told me, I’m havin’ a bad day. How long, oh, Lord [regular voice] before the redemption comes on earth?"

How long before the justice is unloosed upon the earth, and they are given a choir robe and they’re told to hush. All in God’s good time. All in God’s good time.

You see, the saints in Heaven aren’t finished and they know they’ve not reached the finish line. They know that God’s not done yet. Those who are up there are awaiting what happens down here to finish, and we will be joined with them when Jesus returns with the saints.

It’s a powerful image in the Book of Revelation. It’s a powerful theology of the afterlife and what that theology of the afterlife in the end times does, is it comes back and changes the way we look at things now, like worship.

Worship in light of the eschaton should look different. It’s part of what Revelation is trying to teach us.
Now, if you compare the throne chariot vision in Ezekiel 1 and the one in Revelation 4, it's perfectly clear that these images are flexible and plastic. They can be modified. They are not liberal descriptions of anything. We're dealing with analogical language. "It was like" and metaphorical language.

The description of Christ in the Book of Revelation is very interesting and it's metaphorical. Jesus is not Bar am You in Heaven. Jesus is a human being in Heaven, but he's described as the lamb. The slain lamb who has yet triumphed and is on the throne.

This image here is the central image or way of depicting Christ in this book. It’s the most frequent image of Christ in this book, by far. He's only called the lion of the Tribe of Judah once. He's called Alpha and Omega once at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, once at the end. He's called Christ and He's called Lord, and you know, Son of God, now and again, in the Book of Revelation.

But the central and most important image is of the slain lamb. Now why do you think that is? Why would the slain lamb who has yet triumphed and risen and is reigning from above is the central image and message to be conveyed to this seven churches?

Male 2: Could that be because of persecution and harm that they are experiencing and that they are slain?
Absolutely because Jesus is the witness who sets the pattern for Martus, thus as witnesses, who will faithfully witness even unto death. Listen to the promises given to the seven churches just for a minute. And the promises, of course, all come at the end of each message.

"To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God."

This is verse seven of chapter 2. The end of the message to the church in Ephesus. Now, by the way, the verb "conquer" is nikao from which we get Nike, as in victory. Are you with me? As in Nike tennis shoes. Nikao is the Greek word. Here is the verb, and there is the goddess Nike. The goddess of victory.

What does he mean by conquering? He means being faithful unto death and dying with your boots on for the Lord. Conquering doesn't have to do with military victory over other peoples in this book. Conquering has to do with remaining faithful even unto death for the Lord. Everyone who conquers I will give permission to eat from the tree of Life that is in the paradise of God.

Or take the message to Smyrna, the end says: 10B - "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life and let anyone who has ears to hear, listen to what the spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death."

Notice you are not promised exemption from the first death. This is the Book of the Martyrs, friends. This is the book of the martyrs.

Listen to the end of the message to Pergamum. [pages turning]

"To everyone who conquers I'll give some of the hidden manna. I'll give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it."

Or the end of the message to Thyatiera, verse 28: "Even as I also received authority from the Father to the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. Let everyone who has ears listen to what the spirit is saying to the churches."

Or verse 26 even. "To everyone who conquers and continues to do my work to the end I will give authority over the nations. Only hold fast until I come."
Or the end of the Revelation to Sardis, verse of chapter 3. "If you conquer you will be clothed like them in white robes and I will not blot your name out of the book of life."

By the way, this implies that your name could be blotted out of the book of life if you commit apostasy. These chapters 2 and 3 are strong warnings against apostasy.

A positive outcome would be faithful unto death even if you have to be martyred. The negative possible outcome would be apostasy, and if you commit apostasy, guess what. Your name may have been provisionally in the book of life, but it can be blotted out. In other words, you’re not eternally secure until you’re securely in eternity.

Short of that, apostasy is possible. That’s the warning here. It’s intended to be a strong warning.

The message to Laodicea, the last of these. Listen to the end, verse 21. "To the one who conquers I’ll give a place with me on my throne just as I myself conquered."

Did you hear that? We’re going to conquer in the same way that Jesus conquered. And how did Jesus conquer? By dying on the cross. Conquering comes through dying, not through killing.

"To the one who conquers I’ll give a place with me on my throne just as I myself conquered, and sat down with my father on his throne. Let anyone has ears hear what I have to say to the churches.”

What we’re dealing here, then, is a church that’s being pressured, persecuted, in some cases prosecuted, in rare cases executed - I’m not talking about mass persecution in the sense of mass execution. We don’t have any historical evidence for that.

But what we do have is evidence of Christians having their property confiscated, being thrown into jail for a period, being harassed, being shunned, being - having their businesses burned down. All of that sort of stuff, and occasionally there was martyrdom as well.

Well, our author is saying get ready for it. Are you ready to rumble? This is what’s going to happen to you. Right? And he’s saying, if need be, you need to be prepared to die with your boots on. You need to be prepared to be faithful unto death like Jesus was, and die a martyr’s death. This is the Book of Martyrs.

Now, I’ve talked to you about Gematria. I’ve talked to you about the symbolic numbers three, seven, 10, 12, 6-6-6. Here’s where I want to talk to you about how different John’s revelation is from other early Jewish Apocalypses of which we have about 15.

You know, this is often a revelation to Christians. There are about 15 other early Jewish Apocalypses that you can read to compare to the Book of Revelation and you discover very quickly what kind of literature this is.

For example, you could read the Book of Enoch. In particular you could read the so-called Parables of Enoch and what you discover is, that Enoch is taken on a heavenly journey, given a tour of Heaven very much like some of the descriptions of Heaven in the Book of Revelation. There are plenty of other early Jewish Apocalypses of which we have about 15.

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What makes this book stand apart from these other early Jewish Apocalypses is they seem to be almost all pseudonymous. Now, do you know what I mean by pseudonymous?

What does the word "pseudo" mean? [muttering] Yes, right. So, a pseudonym would be what? A false name. Right? It’s attributed to somebody who didn’t write it. You with me now?
So, for example, the Testament of Abraham, a Jewish Apocalyptic book - not written by Abraham. The Testament of Isaac - not written by Isaac; the Testament of Jacob - not written by Jacob; Testament of Levi - not so much.

These were documents written in the first century B.C. or the first century A.D. who are attributed to ancient worthies and the reason they are attributed to ancient worthies is so that they will be books that look like prophecy but are in fact, not.

Let me say that one more time so it sinks in. These documents that have pseudonymous authors appended to them are made to look like prophecies given from really a long time ago when in fact they were written in the first century B.C. or the first century A.D., and so instead of being prophecy presented, they are actually history written up as if it had been prophecy from long time ago. You see what I'm saying?

So, there is a pseudo character to these other early Jewish Apocalyptic works. What stands out about John of Patmos is he’s not claiming to be Enoch. He’s claiming to be - wait for it - John of Patmos! He’s speaking in his own voice. He's using his own name and he is indeed offering genuine prophecy, not pseudo prophecy.

There was a lot of pseudo prophecy out there. As a consequence, what we’re dealing with in the Book of Revelation is actual Apocalyptic prophecy like that of Ezekiel and Daniel and Zechariah. What we are not dealing with is Apocalyptic prophecy like that in the pseudonymous early Jewish books that are called Apocalyptic books. We're dealing with genuine prophecy, if you will, in the Book of Revelation.

Now here’s the other thing. To interpret the Book of Revelation you need a lot of prior understanding up front of the kind of literature we’re dealing with. You need more contextual help, not less. What I tell young Christians is, start easy; work up to the more complex literature in the Bible. Start with something simple like the Sermon on the Mount.

"Blessed are the poor." Okay. Let’s start with that. If you don’t have the prior knowledge, if you don't have the contextual understanding it’s like dealing with a fractured fairy tale. It doesn’t have coherence.

What do you think John of Patmos assumes about the understanding of his audience before he writes these 20 plus chapters of prophecy? Do you think he assumes there are enough Jews in his audience that understand Apocalyptic literature? That somebody is going to get this and understand it and help the rest of the church to understand it?

Yes, I think he absolutely has to assume that. If he was writing to a purely Gentile audience they would have been going, "Say what?" If they did not know the Old Testament, if they did not know Jewish Apocalyptic [coughing] literature, this would not make a whole lot of sense.

And indeed, here’s the other interesting thing. By the time you get to the middle of the second century A.D. the church is largely Gentile. Into the third and fourth century A.D. even more so. Are you with me now? The more Gentile the church becomes the less it understands the Book of Revelation.

And this ignorance continued well into church history. John Calvin said, and I quote, "I have written a commentary on every other book of the New Testament but frankly I don't understand the Book of Revelation, and so I'm not writing a commentary on it."

God bless him. An honest scholar who says, "I don't understand it. I'm not writing a commentary on it."
Martin Luther had a little chutzpah. He said, "You know, it's hard to understand, but I think I've got it. The anti-Christ is the pope. Let's start there." On further review, he was wrong, but I understand why he said it.

John Wesley, on his notes on the New Testament, he said, "You know, fool's rush in where angels fear to tread."

I'm going to give you some notes on the Book of Revelation, but what I'm doing is simply repeating what that great German scholar Johannes Bengel said. "Take it for what it is. I don't claim this is a perfect interpretation. I simply think it's better than the other ones I've read."

So he's not sure what's going on with the Book of Revelation, either. And the reason, dear friends, is we are so far removed from being a Jewish group who understands early Jewish literature and Jewish ways of thinking and Jewish Apocalyptic thought in general, that we are clueless and bound to misinterpret it. And of course, this is what has drastically happened and in dispensationalism. Which leads me to take just a little side turn and deal with this dispensationalism and the theology of the Rapture, so, it's time for some Rapture theology. I promised you more excitement as we went on, so we're going to have the more now.

Let's deal with the history of dispensationalism first. You need to know the backdrop to get the fore drop, so we're going to deal with the history of dispensationalism and then we're going to deal with the text that they think talks about a Rapture.

So, a little background. It starts with a wee Scottish girl named Margaret McDonald in 1830. She went to a revival in Glasgow and she had a visionary experience. There was at that revival a very famous preacher. His name was John Nelson Darby. He was the founder of the Plymouth Brethren.

John Nelson Darby was the founder of the Plymouth Brethren which was an important low church Protestant movement in the 19th century that led to all kinds of things. What Margaret McDonald had a vision of was of a pre-tribulation Rapture of the church out of the world before all of this gnarly stuff happens to happen before Jesus comes back.

She's the first person in church history that we know of who talked about a Rapture of the church out of the world during some terrible period of tribulation, or right before a terrible period of tribulation.

Now this idea might have died completely except for John Nelson Darby. Darby was an evangelist both in the U.K. and in the U.S. So follow the bouncing ball now.

He comes to the United States before the Civil War. He runs into a man named D.L. Moody, the most famous evangelist of his day in the 19th century; the Billy Graham of his day. And the Civil War was breaking out in 1860 and tearing our country to shreds.

Do you know that more Americans died in the Civil War than in all subsequent wars we have fought combined? More Americans died in those 4 1/2 - 5 years than in all World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, etc., etc., etc. We lost more humanity in that one war on our own soil than all subsequent wars combined since.

It was a horrific period of time and Christians could be forgiven for saying, "Beam me up, Scotty. I want out of here. This is horrible. I'm watching all of my relatives be killed off."
In terms of the history of this dispensationalism let me tell you right now, any time America gets into a crisis, dispensational theology plays really well. The sales of dispensational books go way up. No question.

A good example would be a book by John Walvoord, Armageddon and Middle East Oil. It was first published in the '70s during the oil crisis; sold well. When the Gulf War came around, new edition. When you get into a crisis mode the comfort food that lots of conservative Christians want is dispensational theology which promises there is a way out of here. You’re going to be beamed up. You don’t have to suffer. Or at least not much.

So this theology of Rapture which led to the whole system of dispensationalism begins to spread during the American Civil War and then after the Civil War, but that’s by no means all.

Let’s talk about the ideas that are involved. One of the ideas which the early church didn’t believe in at all is that Christ was coming back twice. Once invisibly to the Rapture of the church and once visibly to judge the world.

The early church didn’t believe that. The first century church didn’t believe that, the second century church didn’t believe that. They believed there would be only one second coming, not a second and a third coming. They believed in only one second coming.

And here’s part of the problem with the dispensational hermeneutic. The hermeneutic divides up ideas and texts into two piles. Here are prophecies meant for Israel; here are prophecies meant for the church. Here are prophecies about the invisible return of Christ; here are prophecies about the second coming for judgment that will be visible. Okay?

There’s a lot of bifurcating of things that the early church all thought referred to one thing and not two things. What we are told by Miss McDonald and then Darby and then D.L. Moody is that the former of the two returns will coincide with a Rapture of the church into Heaven for at least seven years or we could debate how long it’s going to be.

However, the real second coming is called the Glorious Appearing, which is mentioned in Titus 2:13 when the New Jerusalem will be established on earth as it is in Heaven. That’s the second coming that everybody agrees is going to happen.

Here’s what happened. The harmonic convergence of the message of Darby, between 1859 and 1977, and the desire to escape from the horrors of the Civil War were so strong that it was during this period of time - especially in the south, because the whole Civil War except Gettysburg, was fought basically in the south, right? It became so ingrained in the south that this whole Rapture theology took root in the south and grew and spread like Kudzu across the land. Like a vine in all directions, as a theological form of comfort food.

If we talk about Darby himself, you have to say about Darby that he abstained from trying to predict the exact timing of the Rapture or the timing of the second coming, or the Parousia, the Glorious Appearing.

Subsequent prognosticators did not so refrain. Dwight L. Moody, for whom Moody Bible Institute is named; form whom Moody Press is named; Moody Radio Network is named, the whole nine yards. Right? Moody was a disciple of Darby. He was a Darbyite. He was a disciple of Darby. He got this theology from Darby.
And so Moody set up Moody Bible Institute. And he initially did the most to spread the message of dispensationalism in the last few decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Here is the point. This is new theology. This theology is as new as Mormonism. It began in the 19th century. It’s continued today, into the 21st century. Right? This is not the original theology of the early church. It’s something new.

Then there’s this fellow. Every hear of the Scofield Reference Bible? Probably you have. Cyrus Scofield - You know, most of these folks were good, sincere Christians. Cyrus Scofield was a scoundrel.

Cyrus Scofield was someone who ran out on his wife, committed all kinds of fraud, got himself out of hot water with his idea of selling Bibles. A particular kind of Bible. A Bible that had notes at the bottom of the page. But here was the kicker. Scofield decided to put headings in the text of the Bible. As in, ”This passage refers to the Rapture.” [chuckling]

Just so you get it clearly, not in the notes. In the text of the Bible there’s a bold headline in all capped letters, right? Jesus predicts the Rapture. That sort of thing. Nice subtle theology. Right in the text.

He’s an entrepreneur. He abandons his family. He’s in jail. If you want to read the real story of this shyster read a book by J.M. Canfield entitled The Incredible Cyrus Scofield and His Book He’s not a reputable person. And his story is a sad story.

The Scofield Reference Bible is published in 1909 and becomes a million seller in 1913. What happened in 1913? And ’14? And ’15? Here we go. Archduke Ferdinand, World War I ramping up. By the time Mr. Scofield got to 1920 and the end of World War I he had made a lot of money off our misery by giving us a Bible that says, ”We can get out of here. Beam me up.” It’s true.

There’s another person who helped the movement along, and his name was W.E. Dubois. He was a Chicago businessman who was in contact with Moody, and he wrote the best selling Christian book in the last two decades of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. No, it was not In His Steps. The best selling book is Jesus is Coming.

But this is a businessman that was afraid of the implications of losing his business if people didn’t like this book, so it was published under the name W.E.B. Just the initials instead of his full name. Jesus is Coming, in 1787.

Here’s where I tell you that the full-blown dispensational schema of theology, of dividing the church history up into periods comes based on not any knowledge of Greek or Hebrew at all.

Where does it come from? It comes from a particular reading of the King James Bible. Why would that surprise you? What’s the number one Bible of America at the beginning of the 20th century?

It’s the King James Bible, by far the most popular and most sold Bible. The dispensational schema was based on a certain kind of close reading of the King James Version and not of the original manuscripts of the New Testament.

Here’s where I say it was a laity movement. Dispensationalism was carried by strong lay people, not by clergy. There was a clergy person who was worried about this. He was a Presbyterian minister and his name was Lewis Chafer.

Lewis Chafer was one of the first clergy persons that was disturbed that there wasn’t more exegetical and theological underpinning to this whole theology of the Rapture, so he founded the Dallas Dispensational
And what was the purpose? The original purpose of Dallas Dispensational Training Institute? To provide a scholarly basis for a theology they already believed. Let me say that one more time. The reason for the founding of Dallas Dispensational Training Center was, that in fact, they wanted to provide scholarly underpinnings for a theology they already believed.

So with the after the fact justification by scholarship, its eisegesis before exegesis. That's exactly right. So, Dallas Dispensational Institute evolves into Dallas Theological Seminary.

Now, I have to tell you that today Dallas Theological Seminary is miles apart from the Dallas Dispensational Institute in the '20s. There are plenty of good Christian scholars there, but they do all still subscribe to the theology of the Rapture. You have to as part of the faith statement to teach on that faculty.

One of the things that this movement, that this dispensational movement did is it spawned a whole series of people who were really zealous about spreading the dispensational truth. There were a whole series of writers, some of whose names you should know, who wrote million selling books that promoted this theology. John Walvoord, who was the president of this seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, in 1952 to '86. Charles Ryrie, maybe you've heard of the Ryrie Study Bible, which was the supplement, or replacement for the Scofield Reference Bible.

There is Hal Lindsey, the Late Great, Planet Earth, right? Timothy LaHaye, The Left Behind Series. These folks all come out of Dallas Theological Seminary. The whole batch of them. And a few supplements from Moody Bible Institute. These are the two big in the mid-west bastions of dispensational theology and they are, you know, publishing their way into the Kingdom of God. They are big on publishing popular books that get lay people all "het" up about this theology and they have enormously succeeded.

The Left Behind Series has sold over 15 million books. Oh, yes. It's a little scary, honestly. But, you know, it's strange where you find encouragement. There was a year, 2004, when in Dan Brown's The DaVinci Code outsold the Bible in that given year in America. Do you know what he eclipsed off the best-seller list? One of The Left Behind books. [chuckling] Neither of them very helpful when it comes to eschatology.

All of these persons, whether scholars or not, has spread the hermeneutic of this system through popular books, pamphlets, [coughing] tracks, and revivals.

Here's the conclusion about the history. Dispensationalism is a theory of interpreting Biblical prophecy which does not have deep historical roots and is not well grounded in the history of the interpretation of the Bible by the church over many centuries in particular.

Now I want to stress this. No one was arguing for Rapture doctrine before 1830. No one, which is severely problematic, because you know what? When you believe in the Holy Bible it's not the "new" that is the true; it's the "old". It's not the latest that's the greatest; it's the original. And that's part of the problem here.

I want to get at the heart of the matter because the heart of the matter is, they don't understand prophecy and they especially don't understand Apocalyptic prophecy. This is really the heart of the problem that we're dealing with here. How so?
Well, several points. Point number one: They don’t understand that most Old Testament prophecy was either, one - conditional; or two - has already been fulfilled; or three - was speaking about a situation in the life of Israel long, long ago, not speaking about the eschatological age. Three-pronged point.

Some of the prophecies in the Old Testament were deliberately conditional, and if Israel didn’t meet the condition, they weren’t happening.

"If my people call by my name, repent, I will bless them."

What happens if they don’t repent? All bets are off. It’s a conditional promise. It’s a conditional prophecy.

Secondly, most of the prophecies in the prophetic books of the Old Testament were near horizon prophecies. They were prophecies about their own age, or shortly thereafter.

They’re not about now, in the 21st century. They were never about now. They were about then. They were words on target then.

Thirdly, only a tiny minority of Old Testament prophecy is eschatological in character, speaking about the end of days. The end of the age.

I would say less than 15 percent of all prophetic text in the Old Testament are dealing with eschatology. They’re not. They’re mainly dealing with the history of Israel at some point or other juncture.

Female 2: Is that the same?

Yes, maybe 10 to 15 percent. And guess which portion is most likely to give us something that’s about the end of age. Apocalyptic prophecy. Ezekiel, Daniel, or Zechariah. Or, Second Isaiah; Isaiah 40 and following. That’s pretty much it.

Now here’s the other thing. When you get to the New Testament era Jesus is saying that all of this is being fulfilled in Him and in His movement. Now this is the crucial thing. This is the most important problem with dispensationalism other than the idea of the Rapture. Paul puts it this way.

"The promises and prophecies of God are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus."

And did you catch that? Let me say it one more time. I’m going to lay it out to you in lavender.

"The promises and prophecies of God are fulfilled in and through Christ and His people and not elsewhere."

Are you beginning to get the picture here? There are not two peoples of God at any one time in human history. There is only one people of God. Who is the people of God? Jew and Gentile, united in Christ. That’s it. There are not two peoples of God right now on the earth. There is only one.

And Paul is very clear about this. He says that Jews who have rejected their messiah are temporarily broken off from the people of God. Go back and read Romans 9 through 11. He’s perfectly clear about this. Where are the people of God on earth? Answer: In the New Testament there is only one answer. It’s Jesus and His people. That’s the only people of God.

There are not two, three or 10 peoples of God. There is only one, and therefore, the promises of Abraham, says Paul, are fulfilled through Christ and for Christ’s people. The promises of Moses, and Isaac, and Jacob and David are fulfilled into Christ, and in His people and for His people. Not elsewhere.
So, should we be looking for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem? No. We should be looking for the return of Christ. Shouldn’t we be looking for a battle between Iraq and Iran and Israel? No. We shouldn’t. We should be looking for the return of Christ.

Should we think that in 1947 when a secular, socialist state was set up in Israel based on the theories of David Ben-Gurion, that we have now gotten back to Biblical Israel? No.

Even the Orthodox Jews in Israel say, “Oy, vey! We are not living according to the Bible.” The Knesset is not the Sanhedrin. You need to understand that Israel as it is now constituted is a modern, secular democracy. It’s not Biblical Israel and even Orthodox Jews do not think it’s Biblical Israel. Okay?

None of the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in 1947 when the secular state of Israel was set up. That’s not what it’s about. This is all dispensational theology. This is all dispensational interpretation. The signs of the end times. Israel has been set up. This is going to happen. This is going to happen.

You know? If the prophets were here today they’d all say, "You know, this is a surprise to me, because this is not what I had in mind."

And even more so, the writers of the New Testament would say, "This is a big surprise to me because honestly, I thought all the promises and prophecies of God were fulfilled in Christ and in His people and not somewhere apart from Christ."

It’s an incredible hermeneutic that divides the promises and prophecies of God into two piles and says one is for secular, or non-Christian Israel, and the other is for the church. That’s not how the Old Testament reads.

All the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament are simply for the people of God. And all the promises and prophecies in the New Testament are simply for the people of God. And that’s it. There is no such division of labor between the promises for Israel and the promises for the people. It’s just not there.

Even more problematic is the failure to recognize that the writers of the New Testament are unanimous. They are unanimous. All the prophecies and promises of God are fulfilled in Christ and in His people. Jew and Gentile united in Christ. Not two different peoples of God. Not through two different comings of Christ. Just one in each case.

In other words, what’s going down in dispensationalism is that their authors of dispensational books do not agree with the hermeneutics of the New Testament writers. They do not agree that all these prophecies are fulfilled in Christ and in His people, which is exactly what the New Testament writers are claiming. As Paul puts it, "All of this is ‘yes’ and ‘amen’ and Jesus Christ and in His people."

I’m not going to go through all of that. I do want to look just for a couple of minutes, because I know you’re tired, about a couple of Rapture texts. We need to look at these so-called Rapture texts and have a little bit of understanding of the Rapture texts just for a minute.

I’ve already dealt with this one. "I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day and I heard and I saw."

Is this about a Rapture into Heaven? It is not. It is about a visionary experience. We could look at a parallel to that in Revelation 17 where John says "I was taken in the spirit to see something by a lake where there was this beast in the water." Revelation 17.
Again, he's not moving from the Island of Patmos. He's seeing in the spirit. This is not about a Rapture or about flying Air Ruach.

Revelation 17:3, "The angel carried me away." Not in the flesh. He carried me away in the spirit, into the desert. Not in the flesh. This is not about Holy Spirit Transportation System. It's not about that. It's about having a vision.

In other words, what's going in dispensationalism is a failure to recognize the character of Apocalyptic visions. That's the problem. Now, I'm really going to get to the coup de grace. Up to now I have been teaching, and now I'm going to start meddling. I'm working my way to a climax here.

Remember all of those "one was left and the other was taken" texts? Let's deal with them for a minute. Matthew 24. Only we're going to have to hear them with first century ears to get the point. Matthew 24:36-41. A very favorite text for dispensational theology.

"But about that day and hour no one knows. Neither the angels in Heaven nor the Son, only the Father. Whereas the days of Noah were, so will be the days of the coming of the Son of Man.

"For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage until the day Noah entered the ark. And they knew nothing until the flood came, and took them all away.

"So, too, will it be like this in the coming of the Son of Man. There will be two in the field. One will be taken away and the other will be left behind."

Now, in the Noah story, who was swept away? The lost. Who was left behind? The good guys. Noah and those in the ark. Are you with me now? The left behind are going "Whew! I'm glad I missed that judgment."

The taken away are the ones taken away for judgment. This is not about a Rapture, pre-, post- or mid-tribulation. This is about judgment on those who were taken away and those who were left behind are going, "Thank God I was left behind."

This has nothing to do with the pre-tribulation Rapture. It has to do with escaping the final judgment. Praise God for those left behind.

But then, the real coup de grace comes - In other words, they've interpreted these verses exactly the opposite of what they mean. The left behind are seen as the poor slobs who are going to get zapped. Quite the opposite of that.

But the real coup de grace comes with the misinterpretation of First Thessalonians 4. We got to finish with a bang here. We're going to finish with First Thessalonians 4, so get on your jet boots. We're going up to rise up into the air and meet Jesus. Here we go. Listen closely. I'm going to start with verse 13 of chapter 4.

"But we don't want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died."

First of all, this is an attempt to offer pastoral comfort. You with me now? Pastoral comfort, to a church that's persecuted. If you read all of First and Second Thessalonians, these Christians are being persecuted. They've lost some of their loved ones. Some of them have been killed. And yet, they are still hanging in there. They are still remaining faithful.
"But we don't want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have died."

You see? It’s comfort that’s going on here.

"For this we declared to you by the word of God that we who are alive who are left until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those have died. For the Lord Himself, with the cry of command, with the archangels’ call and the sound of God’s trumpet will descend from Heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up into the air and the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air."

By the way, footnote: "Air" does not equal Heaven. He’s talking about in the atmosphere. This is not about a Rapture into Heaven. It's about going up to meet Him in the air. Very important.

"And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Alright. Now, let’s get the picture here. And in order to get the picture, you’re going to have to understand something about the way a king came to a town. So, let’s see if we can get this.

The second half of Psalm 24 is an entrance liturgy, so I’m going to give you a part. You’re going to help me out here. Alright?

Your line is "Who is the King of glory?" Are You with me now? I think you can handle this. [chuckling]

"Lift up your heads, o ye gates. Be lifted up ye ancient doors, so the King of glory may come in."

Audience: "Who is the King of glory?"

"The Lord, strong and mighty. The Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, o ye gates. Be lifted up ye ancient doors, so the King of glory may come in."

Audience: "Who is the King of glory?"

"The Lord. The Lord. He is the King of glory."

Now this is an entrance liturgy which talks about the process of how you welcome a king into a city. Alright? And this is the image Paul is going to use here in this passage to describe the return of the king, Christ Himself.

Here’s the process. Before the king comes the herald, who has a trumpet. [imitates trumpet]

And the herald says, "Lift up your heads, o ye gates, so the great and mighty King may come in."

And there’s a watchman on the wall. You played the part of the watchman on the wall. The watchman on the wall says, [musically] "Who is the King of glory? Who is the King of glory?" Okay?

That’s the watchman saying stand and deliver. Tell me who you’re talking about. We’re talking about your king, buddy, you’d better open the door. You better let him in.

Then what happened? When the identification was clear, and everybody knew who it was, the doors of the walled city would open, and the greeting committee came out to meet the king on the road where he was. Right?
Then where did they go? Did they just hunker down on the road and say, "You know, we’re enjoying meeting you out here on this dirty trail, here. Where shall we go from here? Shall we go back where you came from, or shall we welcome him into the city?"

Answer: They’re all going back into the city to party down. Are you with me now? That’s a royal welcome. That’s how the welcome committee works. That’s the entrance liturgy.

It was well known throughout the ancient Near East. It’s mentioned in Psalm 24 and this is the image that Jesus uses. He says, "When Jesus returns from Heaven, there will be a trumpet blast and a cry of command."

What is the cry of command? In this case, "Wake up all you people. The king is coming to town. You need to come out and greet him."

So where do they go and greet him? They go and greet him in the air. Are you with me now? They are greeting him in the air. Then the question is, where do they go from there?

Not up into Heaven. They go back down to earth to rule with Christ on the earth. This is not about a Rapture into Heaven. It’s about meeting the Lord in the air and returning to reign with him on the earth.

After all, who were the first who got to meet the Lord? Those who were raised from the dead. They get to go up first. The living go up second, and all God’s children reign with Christ upon the earth, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with a pre-tribulation Rapture. Nada, zilch, zero. Nothing. [chuckling]

There isn’t a single church father in the second, or third, or fourth, or fifth or six centuries who thought it did and they knew the Greek New Testament before we even knew there was a Greek New Testament.

So, I’m simply saying, this is wrong. It’s w-r-o-n-g. It’s not debatable. It’s not a matter of opinion. It’s wrong. Here at the end of the day, I feel like being a little emphatic. [chuckling] Are you getting the picture?

Male 3: Yes.

I’m glad, because I don’t usually go to preaching. [chuckling] But you know? This exercises me as they would say in England. This exercises me a little bit.

And here’s the problem. A text without a context is just a pretext for what you want it to mean. They don’t know the context. They don’t understand the epiphany of a king theology, the Parousia of a king theology. And Paul understands it.

Let me tell you right now, the Thessalonians understood it. You know why? They lived in a walled city. Guess who founded it? Alexander the Great. It’s named after Alexander the Great’s sister, Thessalonike.

And they knew very well about welcoming kings, say, starting with Alexander. After that they welcomed Cicero. They welcomed Mark Anthony. They knew how to do up a party for a king. And they knew perfectly well what Paul was talking about - a royal welcome for King Jesus when He comes back.

They knew he was not talking about pre-tribulation Rapture. And so should we. Now what happens if you don’t have the escape clause? What happens to your theology if you suddenly learn Christians in every age of church history have had to suffer, and some have been martyred?

Why should we think that the last generation of Christians should be exempt from suffering before Jesus’s return? What makes us special? Nothing, according to the Bible. We’re just another generation of Christians.
So, we are not exempt from this. Indeed, dear friends, our greatest honor would be to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ and die in His name. These persons, says the author of Revelation, are the ones who conquer, and have a special place in Heaven. And it would be our highest honor to follow in their footsteps. That’s the truth.

One of the things I pray regularly when I’m in dangerous places is, “Lord if it’s my time to go, let me be faithful to the last drop.”

And here’s where I tell you the story of Adoniram Judson and we’re going to call it a day.

Adoniram Judson was a great missionary to Burma. He went there and evangelized the tribes in Burma for 19 years with not single convert. I don’t know about you, but I don’t think I could do it. [chuckling] What do you think, Rob? A vineyard church that had not a single attender for 19 years. Would it work? I’m thinking not.

And in the 19th year of his sojourn with people who did not understand, he was tied to a stake by one of the tribal chieftains who was sick and tired of hearing about King Jesus. They were about to have him for lunch. The tribal chieftain looked one more time into the eyes of Adoniram Judson and he said, "What do you think now of your God and your future?"

And Adoniram Judson said in words that are famous, "The future is as bright as the promises of God. Go right ahead.”

And at that point, guess who blinked? It was the tribal chieftain. That was the day that the door of the gospel was opened by that tribe and Christianity came to Burma.

We embark today. It’s a powerful story, but it reminds us that when Jesus calls someone as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "He calls us to come and die. He calls us to take up our cross and follow Him."

Don’t you understand that that was in the contract from day one? In principle, you have given up your life. Brothers and sisters, I beseech you by the mercies of God to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, wholly and acceptable to God for this is your logical and spiritual worship. Think on these things and we’ll see you soon. God bless.
Chapter 10

Apocalyptic Literature

We were talking about things Apocalyptic and we need to finish that discussion so we’re going to spend some more time in the Book of Revelation.

But in order to do that, we need to front load a few things. So, what we’re going to do, is I need to give you some basic definitions because one of the problems in dealing with a Book of Revelation, or Daniel, or Ezekiel, or even parts of Zechariah is that there is not a basic framework of understanding as to how prophecy works, and especially how Apocalyptic prophecy works in the Biblical world. So we bring all kinds of our expectations to the text and we read things into the text. And it’s not helpful.

So, I want to start with the basic definition as to what the heck a prophet was. What was a prophet?

Well, a prophet’s an oracle. The most basic definition that will be cross-cultural for the ancient world, whether we’re talking about a prophet in Assyria, or Babylon, or Persia, or Israel or the later Greco-Roman world. A prophet is an oracle.

He, or she, is a mouthpiece for some divine being. And as such, he or she does not speak for himself or herself. Now, this is one of the things we need to understand because one of the things that becomes problematic for us is we say things, like “Well, this is the book Jeremiah wrote.”

Okay, well, actually Baruch wrote it for Jeremiah. But, besides that, Jeremiah is not taking intellectual rights to this because where does it ultimately come from? As far as he's concerned, this is from God’s lips to your ears. You know? This is a word of Yahweh to God’s people.

Our problem is that we live in a world of intellectual copyright and authorship concerns that were no part of the ancient world. So when we look at an Old Testament book and say “Ok, this was written by Isaiah, it reflects X, Y and Z,” well, there are some problems with that because the nature of prophecy is that a prophet is just passing along a message from where else? From God. He’s just passing along a message.

Another part of the problem, at least in the Protestant tradition, and maybe especially in the African-American Protestant tradition is we have somehow jumbled up prophet with preacher. Sometimes we assume preachers are prophets, some preachers think they are prophetic, when they are just actually pathetic, [chuckling] and it’s a problem.

Some preachers actually get so overcome with exuberance of their verbosity that they really think that they are inspired, and in fact, they have just expired or perspired, or both. The truth of the matter is, that we need to be clear that what we’re talking about when we’re talking about Biblical prophecy is a revelation from above. We’re not talking about a prepared sermon. We’re not talking about somebody who’s enthusiastic and [excitedly] all revved up and wants to preach the Word of God. That’s not prophecy.

It may be proclamation, but it’s not prophecy. There’s a difference. A prophecy is a late word from God that you wouldn’t have otherwise thought of because it just came to you from God. That’s a prophecy. Other things are not.
Now, having said that - I mean, a prophet can wear a lot of different hats. There are prophets like Elijah that are also miracle workers. But miracle working is not necessarily indigenous to the role of being a prophet. [murmuring]

I mean, there are plenty of Old Testament prophets that are not miracle workers. There are prophets who are also court sages. They advise kings; they advise queens. They tell them what to do. This is a different role. There are prophets who are teachers. They disciple people. Elijah discipled Elisha.

But even at the end of that process, notice what Elisha asked at the very end. "And just for good measure, how about a double portion of your spirit, because I need to be inspired, too," says Elisha.

So he perfectly well understands that the teaching role is not the same as the prophetic role. Without the spirit of God in his life he is so not going to be a prophet.

We need to not mush together all of these categories of prophet, teacher, sage, and preacher and all of those kinds of things. A prophet is an oracle; he’s a mouthpiece for some divine being and as such, he, or she does not speak for himself or for any other human being. If he’s a true prophet he’s speaking from the divine source.

And these roles - prophet, priest, king, sage, teacher or magoff/magoyz - astrologer, can all be distinguished.

Here is something else that’s interesting. Most of you will remember the story of Balaam, if for no other reason than it involves a talking donkey. There is no Shrek, but there is a talking donkey. [chuckling]

Prophecy, in the world of the Old Testament and into New Testament time, was a multicultural phenomena. Balaam is not an Israelite prophet. Do you remember this? He’s a prophet from another country that God uses to speak on behalf of Israel and not against Israel. Remember these stories from Numbers, right?

So, prophecy, whether from Ari, Jerusalem, or the Oracle of Delphi, the mountains of Greece or Rome, point number one: A genuine prophecy was intended to be understood at some level and it was spoken in known languages.

Right off the bat, here’s a little help from First Corinthians 14. Prophecy and speaking in tongues - not the same thing. They are both spiritual gifts according to Paul, but not the same gift.

Nor is the interpretation of tongues prophecy. In fact, we have three different gifts. One is the gift of tongues, the other is the gift of having the spiritual discernment to figure out what the tongues are saying, and a third gift is the gift of prophecy. These are different gifts. Different strokes for different folks, given out by God’s spirit.

Prophecy is spoken in a known language. And here is something that’s really interesting. Prophets in antiquity were the original hip hop artists. They spoke in poetry. It had rhythm; it had rhyme, every time. It had assonance; it had alliteration, depending on the language that you’re talking about. It was poetic in form.

Now, sometimes when we translate it into English you can still tell that. I mean, for example, if you go back and read the beautiful material in Isaiah 40 through 66 there are whole passages of that where you’re going, "Wow! This is eloquent!"
Even plain old plebian English can give you a feel that this is poetry. Well, it is. Prophets tended to speak in a poetic form. They also spoke in an intelligible way. In other words, not just in a known language, but in an intelligible way.

However, most prophecy could not ever have put into a manual that was labeled "Prophecy for Dummies", because it was never simple. It was always complex. It was often deliberately puzzling. It was meant to tease the mind into active thought.

So, for example, when somebody went to the Oracle at Delphi, the king, Agamemnon, he asks the Pythia, the woman sitting on the tri-cornered stool, "Should I go to war with Persia? What do the gods say?"

And she chews on a pycanthra leaf, makes all kinds of weird, strange noises and then the man who is the priest in the temple, who is by the way, called the prophetess, comes and says - This is what she says - He's got the gift of the interpretation of the unutterable shrieks of the Pythia. She says, "If you go to war with the Persians, a great victory will be won."

Agamemnon puts on his glasses and goes, "Okay, by who?" [chuckling]

How helpful was that? The words of a prophet were often enigmatic and they are not perfectly clear. They would involve metaphors and similes. And like poetry does, dramatic hyperbole. I mean, it's like the Psalms. These are songs that often used dramatic hyperbole. You know, there is a psalm that says "The hills skipped like rams in the presence of Yahweh." Okay?

Well, this is not a literal description of what the hills are doing. It's just talking about how all of creation reacts to its Maker when He descends and comes down in the glory cloud.

Prophecy was like that as well, and more to the point, especially Apocalyptic prophecy was like that. It was full of dramatic hyperbolic images. I mean, you have multi-headed beasts, you have gnarly emperors that die and come back again. I mean, you've got all kinds of stuff going on here.

Now, it's referential but it's not perfectly clear what it means. It requires thought, reflection, wisdom. In fact, John of Patmos tells us this, doesn’t he? He says, "To understand the number of the beasts requires" what? Wisdom. Yes. It's not self-evident.

Now, we are a culture that is not patient with enigmatic. We like perspicuous, clear, simple, dumb it down, put the cookies on the bottom shelf. If that's your deal - you should not study prophecy, because you're going to be constantly frustrated. Because it ain't that way baby, it just ain't. That's not the way prophecy works. It's not the form of prophecy, either.

Sometimes prophecy involves absolutely spontaneous utterances, but under the broad heading of prophecy is also the gift of reading the signs of the times. Reading the signs in nature, or in history. So, it's not just a matter of hearing a late word from God and proclaiming it. Sometimes it's also a reading of omens or signs of various sorts.

Let me tell you what it is not. Prophecy is not the ability to decipher ancient texts. That’s what a scribe does. That’s what a scholar did in antiquity. That is not the job of the prophet. The prophet is not a scholar. The prophet can be Amos the fig plucker.

"What do you mean I've got to put my figs down and go all the way up to those northern tribes? I don’t even like the northern tribes. And say what?"

They will not receive that with gladness. [chuckling]
"You want me to do what?" [chuckling] "Alright, I'm going. But I'm coming back afterwards. I ain't staying up there."

Okay. Here's a farmer, minding his business. He gets a late word from God; a news bulletin.

"You need to go tell those boys they are in a deep place, and they are about to answer to God, so they need a little forewarning." Right? Okay.

Anybody could be a prophet so long as they had a relationship with God. A grocery store bagging boy could be a prophet, because you don't have to go to school to be a prophet. You just have to be accessible to God.

And even if you're obtuse, like Balaam, God will find a way to get through to you even if he has to have your donkey talk to you. [chuckling]

A spontaneous utterance, a reading of omens or signs - it's not a matter of deciphering ancient texts. That was the task of scribes and wise men and exegesis.

Consulting a prophet was a regular activity in antiquity. People tried to obtain a late word from God about some pressing or impending matter. Having given you a sort of flavor for what the role of the prophet was - he's an oracle, and where his information comes from - it doesn't come from study, this should lead us to certain kinds of principles of interpreting Biblical prophecy. Most Biblical prophecy is a late word from God for the present or for the very near horizon of events. That's what it is.

It's not primarily for a group of people 2000 years later who happen to have prophetic fever. In the first place, it was the word of God for its original intended audience. It's secondarily a word of God for us.

When some Old Testament prophecy is viewed Messianically in the New Testament, it is very rarely viewed as speaking about some remote or very distant future event.

And here's the thing, the writers of the New Testament all put on their "Christological" glasses, and they read the Old Testament with their Christological glasses on. So what they say about the Old Testament is that all the promises and all the prophecies of God are "yea" and "amen" in Jesus Christ.

It's all about Jesus. The law? It's about Jesus. The prophets? It's about Jesus. There's a theme here. Wisdom literature? It's about Jesus. Are you getting the picture here?

Christ is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament institutions. He's the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament promises and prophecies. He's the fulfillment of the law.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 10: "Christ is the end of the law as a way of righteousness. He put an end to the Mosaic law as a way of righteousness."

We were driving up here, there in the cornfield, and good King James with all 10 Commandments on two gigantic billboards on Highway 71 heading north. I would have been better pleased if he had put up the Sermon on the Mount, but okay. Here we go.

You need to understand the hermeneutic, the lenses through which Christians - the earliest Christians - read the Old Testament. Christ has the key to it all. That's the hermeneutic. And furthermore, they believe that it would all be fulfilled in Christ, through Christ, or by Christ and His people.

It wasn't about some other nation, lets say America 2000 years hence. It's about Christ and His people. It's not about, lets say a secular democracy being set up in the Holy Land and calling it Israel. That's a whole different ballgame.
It's about God and His people. More specifically, it's about Christ and His people. So, when the New Testament writers were dealing with Old Testament prophecy, they didn't lump them together into three piles.

Fulfilled prophecies? Done; nothing more to be said about those.

Unfulfilled prophesies - two categories: Israel; the church. Wrong. They are not two categories of unfulfilled prophecies. There is just one. All of those prophecies are fulfilled in, by and for Christ and His people.

How do Jews get in on these prophesies and these promises? Through Christ. In Christ. Not from Christ. Christ is the mediator of all of these things coming true. The hopes and fears of all are met in Him tonight. Look nowhere else.

We need to understand then, not only in the way that prophecy works, we need to understand the New Testament way of reading Old Testament prophecy including Apocalyptic. And when we get there, we're better.

It was believed by the New Testament writers that the eschatological age had already begun in their own day and when they think about the end of the end times, they don't speak precisely about it.

They were just happy to say, [musically] "I've been redeemed by the blood of the lamb." And we're in the end times, how much more do you need to know? Get on with living in the light of Christ, who has already come, and in the shadow of eternity.

You're betwixt and between. You're already in the kingdom but you're not yet fully revealed to be what you should be in the kingdom. We're in the eschatological age. Let's get on with living in that fashion.

And I want to stress, as I have stressed, that the nature of the material in this prophecy is imagaic; it's metaphorical; it's poetic. And this is especially true in Apocalyptic prophecy. Ordinary prophecy can be a bit more literal.

So Nakrub is going to whack King Uzziah on the head; news at eleven. That's fairly literal. Right? Okay. Whoa unto the city.

Apocalyptic prophecy is a little more metaphorical. I would say, first of all, the first question to be asked is, why was this prophecy given when it was given, and of what relevance would it have been to its original audience. Okay? That's just the first question. It's not the only question I would want you to ask about it.

The second thing I would do is the intertextuality thing. Why aren't these prophecies sited or alluded to anywhere in the New Testament, and if they are, how are they used in the New Testament? Because that gives a clue as to how Christians would use them; the original Christians would use them.

So that's sort of stage two. I'm going to look at the New Testament and see how Christians used these prophecies and in what ways they saw them fulfilled or not yet fulfilled. That's clue number two.

And then the third thing, having gone through that nice process, I'm then going to ask, of what relevance is this to me and my faith now? Now, what usually happens, of course, when we read the Bible, is we skip over one and two and we go right to number three and then we get confused. Because -
Here's why. If you understand it in its original context and then you understand it when it's been re-audenced for the first Christian audience in the New Testament, then you will already have some guidelines as to what it can and can't mean. For you.

I mean, the point is, it's not going to mean something for you that contradicts what it meant when the original prophet spoke it or when the Christians first understood it. It's not going to mean something antithetical or contrary to what it meant originally.

When we talked about Apocalyptic last time I gave you this definition of the nature of Apocalyptic literature, so I'm not going to rehearse it again, but the main thing to be said is it's revelatory literature and it's literature about things that have been seen.

Now we're not just talking about oracles. Most of the prophecy in the Old Testament is oracular prophecy, meant to be heard. When we get to Apocalyptic we're talking about prophecies that have been seen. We're talking about visionary literature. We're talking about not merely an oracle but a "see-er".

John of Patmos is "see-er". [music crescendos]

And this gives you a flavor of what we're talking about here. He's minding his own business. All of a sudden he's in the spirit on the Lord's day and he hears and he sees. Well, then what happens? Then, having had the vision, he's got to write it down. [coughing]

Writing down is not the vision. It's the recording of the vision. And then he's got to decide how to describe what he saw. It's one thing to hear God say, "Thus sayeth Yahweh." Boom!

You can write that down verbatim. It's a whole 'nother ballgame to see [chuckling] a lamb unsealing seven seals. So, we have this language of analogy. It was like. It was like. It was like.

Let me urge you to realize that your experience of God is far more profound than your understanding of God and not only is your experience of God far more profound than your understanding of God, your experience of God, if its real, is far more profound than your ability to articulate what you have understood.

What is asked of John is not merely to have an experience. He had it. But he's asked to then, understand it and then try to describe; it to articulate it in language that made some sense. And the only language that made sense was analogy.

It was like this. It was like that. It was like this. It was like this. It wasn't exactly this, but it sure was like that. You get the picture?

When you run out of adequate vocabulary you start using analogies because the experience of the divine tremendum is so overwhelming that human language is not adequate to describe God. It's not adequate.

Male 1: Is God giving him the prophet - or her - the words, or giving him or her the images and they have to find the words to describe it?

Well, if I understand Apocalyptic right, they are given words. They are also seeing things. Right? So, it's a multi-media presentation. Right. [chuckling]

The question is how you connect the words with what you're seeing, because sometimes the words are interpretive and sometimes they are not. Sometimes they are supplemental. You know? And it's complex.

And then, after the fact, to sit down and then you try to say, "Okay, how in the world do I write this down?" I mean, no wonder he's having problems here. "How in the world do I write this down?"
God bless him for trying and we're richer for it. You need to understand that he's trying to describe a transcendent reality.

Now, I want to say something on a pastoral moment. I just have a pastoral moment with you.

My grandmother had no more than a seventh grade education. She could no more have written a term paper on the nature of the trinity than she could have written a term paper on how astrophysics works.

She was a profoundly devoutly Christian person. She knew in whom she believed. She believed it profoundly. Her problem was, she couldn't articulate all that she had experienced. And know, there are a lot of Christians like this.

We need to understand this and be a little bit merciful, because some people rightly complain, as Moses complained, "I don't speak so good. I don't have the gift of articulation. I don't write so well. I don't speak so good."

I would just say to you, that when you're confronted with Apocalyptic literature, which has confused and bamboozled everyone who has confronted it to one degree or another, it ought to humble us.

It ought to cause us to take a humility pill once in a while and say, "You know, what I know for sure is I don't know enough. And my ability to even articulate what I know is not good enough. I need to keep working on it.

See, this is especially a word in due season for teachers and preachers. I mean, one of the reasons the New Testament has let not many of you become teachers is because it is difficult to go through all three stages of experience, understanding and articulation and adequately, never mind exemplarily, adequately describe what it is that you've experienced or not, you know. I'm constantly confronted with that.

Now let me tell you what helps. Jesus says, "Don't worry about your words not being adequate enough because the spirit will give you guidance and utterance in saying the right thing in due season."

We need to understand that adequate articulation of the truth about these prophecies or in the gospel in general requires ongoing and perpetual dependence on God. It's not about us having a one-time experience of Jesus, after which we live in the afterglow and it's been left up to us ever since.

These prophecies are referential, but Apocalyptic is about the revelation of secrets; whether about the past, present or future. And there are a constellation of features that Apocalyptic prophecy has.

For example, one of the reasons for Apocalyptic originally, which began in exile, when God's people were in exile - By the way, did you notice? The only book of Apocalyptic prophecy in the New Testament is written by whom? Somebody who is...exile.

Let's see if we can connect the dots. Ezekiel - exile; Zechariah - exile; Daniel - exile; John of Patmos - exile. What have all these people got in common? They are all in exile. Uh-huh.

This is prophecy, from and for the persecuted. And we who are so very far from any genuine persecution have trouble understanding it. We like to say, "Why is it encoded language?"

I'll tell you why. Somebody's looking over John of Patmos's shoulder while he's in exile. He's not on this pile of rocks all by himself. He's being watched. He's being observed by pagan officials. That was true of Ezekiel; that was true of Daniel; that was true of Zechariah.

It's coded language for a reason. If they could have put the whole thing in Cherokee they would have. Then nobody would have gotten it without a translator. [coughing]
Part of the experience of exile, dear friends, is realizing that things are not going right. And it leads to a reflection: What did we do wrong that we ended up in this place? It further led to a belief that God would rectify things, either in another world or later in this life.

As I suggested to you last time, and I would want to emphasize now, we’re going to talk about this whole afterlife theology that develops in God’s people by means of progressive revelation. We need to understand that it took exile before God’s people realized, “You know? Justice might just not be completely done in my lifetime. So, when is God going to make it right?” And they began to think about the afterlife.

If we compare the Throne-Chariot vision of Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1 and a similar Throne-Chariot vision in Revelation 4, one of the things that becomes clear is not only are these two passages analogical in nature - It was like. It was like. It was like. It was like. Read through Ezekiel 1. We have how many "it was likes"? There are about 20 of them in the first 25 verses.

The same sort of thing in Revelation 4. Not only do we see that, but what we learn is that the descriptions themselves are metaphorical. So, for example, if you do a descriptive analysis of comparing and contrasting the vision of Ezekiel 1 and the vision in Revelation 4, one of the things you’re going to discover is that the critters are not exactly the same; the four creatures. And you’re going to discover that the eyes aren’t in the same place, and that the wheels don’t work the same way. And yet, it’s recognizably a vision of God’s Throne-Chariot in both cases.

Now, what does this tell you? It’s a plastic, modifiable, metaphorical image. It’s not a literal description. When you have wheels within wheels, the message is that God can go anywhere at any time. He can be omnipresent.

What’s the function of the image of the wheels? What’s the function of the image of the throne? These are the kinds of questions you need to ask about it. Not why is it the description in Revelation 4 doesn’t match up exactly with the description in Ezekiel 1.

Well, the answer to that is these two prophets both saw the living presence of God on his Throne-Chariot vision but they described it using slightly different analogies or kinds of analogies.

Maybe you have noticed that it’s not even just in the most directly imagaic portions of the Book of Revelation, but the author is groping for images big enough to describe the central character of the book, who is Jesus Christ. So He’s the lion, who is also the lamb, who is also the day star, who is also the rider on the white horse, who is also the Alpha, and Omega, and Christ, and the Son of God, and the one like the Son of Man, and I could go on.

You could put up a whole poster of the images and terms applied to Jesus just in the Book of Revelation. The point is no one descriptor adequately describes him. He’s looking for a language large enough, big enough, adequate enough to convey the majesty and transcendence of this Christ in the Book of Revelation.

Here’s the most important point that you need to get. These terms are character descriptions. They are character descriptions. They tell us what kind of person Christ is. Some aspect of his character is being revealed.

So, when he’s called the day star, what are we learning about Him? He’s the light of the world. He’s the Revelation of God that eclipses all other revelations. When we’re told He’s the Alpha and Omega, we’re not merely being told He was there at the beginning and will be there at the end. What are we being told?
He is the beginning. He's God. He is the end. If you want to know what God is like A to Zed, look at Jesus.

He's the Alpha and Omega; the full alphabet soup of what God is like. The same can be said of the Nero-like figure, Mr. Six-Six-Six. This is a character description. If seven is the number of perfection then 6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6 is what? It's the number of imperfection. It's the number of chaos. It's the number of destruction. It's the number of falling short. It's a character description of this gnarly ruler.

He looks good on paper. He's got a lot of digits. He's in the Fortune 600 company. However, something is terribly wrong.

Now, I do want to talk to you about the numbers in the Book of Revelation a little bit more, because it's part of a larger phenomena in Jewish literature called Gematria.

Gematria is the use of symbolic numbers, and some of them are certainly Biblically significant. They are symbolic numbers. The number three; the number seven; the number 10; the number 12 and multiples thereof.

If seven is the number of perfection then 6-6-6 is the number of imperfection; incompletion; chaos. In the Gospel of John the number seven gets rung, the change is on. We have seven "I am" sayings. We have seven "I am" discourses. We have seven sign narratives. Are you getting the picture?

What is this telling us? That perfection has now shown up. The perfect one has now shown up and He does all things well; indeed, perfectly.

Now these numbers represent definite things, but very seldom are these numbers or their multiples used literally. For example, let's talk millennium for a minute. It's a good thing to do when you're in the 21st century, [chuckling] breaking in a new millennium.

A thousand is a multiple of? Ten. It's a whole number. It's a round number, and when Jews used a number like this, they meant to say, it's a big ol' long honkin' period of time. But the point of calling it a thousand is, it has a definite beginning and it has a definite end. It's a determined, long period of time.

It's not like the number for pi - 3.14 etc., etc., etc., etc., etc. It's a definite long period of time. It's a multiple of 10. It just means a long time.

Or let's take the number 144,000. You know that one shows up in Revelation, right? The Jehovah's Witnesses tried hard for a long time to read this as a literal number, but when there were more than 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses they had to recalibrate. [chuckling]

It's not a literal number; it's a multiple of what? Twelve. As in the 12 tribes; as in the 12 apostles. So 144,000 would be all of the Old Testament people of God plus all of the New Testament people of God. They are all in that number when the saints (who dat?) go marching in. [chuckling]

You with me now? It just means the whole people of God; and a lot of them. The good news is there will be a lot of them. Got the Old and New Testament people of God.

If seven is the number of perfection then 3½ is what? It's half of perfection, right? It's an incomplete kind. So when Daniel says there will be a time, a time, and a time and a half - that's how many? One, two, three and a half. It's half of seven. It's not a complete or perfect time. It's an incomplete time. This is the way Gematria works.
But there's more to Gematria than that, because these numbers were not just symbolic numbers, they
were turned into coded words. Letters of the alphabet were assigned numbers. You with me now?

Now, it would be easy if one was "a" and two was "b" and three was "c", etc., etc. The truth is, they didn't
have Arabic numbers. There was no one, two, three. So, ancient people tended to use letters of the
alphabet for numbers anyway.


These are letters of the alphabet. They are also doubling as...numbers. This is the way the Hebrews did it.
By the way, just a little footnote. Some of those egregiously gigantic numbers in the Old Testament...these
are just "guestimations" because what we have is Hebrew words like "ephah" and we don't know whether
that means there were ten tent groups or there were ten million. We just don't know.

We're better off in the New Testament because the Greeks had a better way of counting than the Jews did.
Numbers are always squirrelly is my point in the Bible.

Let's talk about the use of numbers for names. Right? Famous graffito in the Roman catacomb. I love a girl
whose number is 5-3-4. This is not her cell phone number. This is the numerical value of her name. You
add up the letters of her name, you get 5-3-4. Okay?

Now, it's easy to go from a name, with a preexisting numbering system to a number. Oh, but try to go
from a number back to the name. There are many permutations and combinations possible. Her name
could be Ann; her name could be Susan; her name could be Sam. You see what I'm getting at?

Any number of names could add up to 5-3-4, depending on the letters in the name. Well, that brings me
to the most famous of all numbers. This one. I want to go over this one more time just to make sure you
get it.

Here is a coin. Here is our boy, Nero, on the coin. The inscription on the coin is "Augusti caesar neron divi
filii". Sometimes the words are arranged differently, but those are the words. "Nero, the divine son of
Augustus Caesar."

Now here's what we know about Latin or Greek Gematria. If you add this up in either Latin or Greek, this
inscription adds up to 6-6-6. The audience of John living in Ephesus and other such cities who knew Latin
and knew Greek, know perfectly well what this symbolic number refers to.

This is not a great mystery, but it requires wisdom to interpret it. What's interesting to me is that we have
a textual problem. Some manuscripts, instead of the number 6-6-6 have the number 6-1-6. Some of our
Greek manuscripts have 6-6-6; some have 6-1-6.

What is interesting about that is just this: This is the, if you will, Latin form. Right? The Greek form takes
away just one letter. That letter. Now guess what happens when you take away that one letter from the
inscription? The numerical value of that name is this.

Now, here is what's interesting about that. It means, that the scribes who were copying this manuscript in
the Greek speaking East, read the inscription on the coin and said, "Oh, they must have meant 6-1-6."
Whereas the scribes who were copying in the Latin speaking West, read this inscription on the coin and
said, "Oh, they must be referring to 6-6-6."

And that's why we have a textual problem there. It's different scribes from different parts of the empire
looking at the inscription differently.
Gematria is the use of symbolic numbers, not only to convey concepts like perfection or imperfection, but also to give a coded name to somebody. John’s Revelation stands apart from any Jewish Apocalyptic works in that John is a real person who is presenting his own real visions.

So, unlike early Jewish Apocalyptic literature that say the testament of Abraham, the testament of Enoch, the parables of Enoch, John really wrote his own Revelation. Abraham did not write the testament of Abraham. It was written in the first century B.C. Enoch did not write the parables of Enoch. It was also written in the first century B.D. or first century A.D.

These documents, the Jewish Apocalyptic documents, non-canonical, are pseudonymous. They have a falsely attributed author from antiquity. That’s not true with John of Patmos. John’s Revelation was written by John, a first century Christian prophet.

Here’s why you don’t start studying the New Testament with the Book of Revelation. To understand Apocalyptic literature requires a prior understanding of this kind of literature. So here’s where I ask you, who was the Book of Revelation written to?

It was written to first century Christians in seven cities in the province of Asia starting with Ephesus and going all the way around to Laodicea. And they are all on the same road. In fact, the letters to the churches are listed in the exact order that you would have gone to each of these cities on that road. Isn’t that interesting?

So what does that tell you? This document was intended to be taken as a circular letter for multiple Christian congregations to one, and then the next, and then the next, and then the next, and then the next, and you know what? John wants each of these churches to hear about the dirty laundry of the other churches.

He wants them all to hold each other accountable because he’s not there. These are his churches but he’s not there to hold them accountable, so the messenger has to take this and proclaim it orally to them in these seven churches. That’s what’s required.

This literature was not intended to only make sense now that we’ve gotten to the 21st century. It had a meaning for first century Christians, and second century Christians, and third century Christians.

But if we’re talking big picture here is big picture one more time. Though things seem to be going awfully wrong just now - the economy is bad; there are wars everywhere; suddenly there is an earthquake. Does this sound familiar?

Never mind. God is still on His throne. God is still sovereign over all of human history, and though things may all seem to be going quickly to Hates in a hand basket, in fact, in the end God will have the victory and so will his people.

So, until then, God’s people are to hunker down, be faithful to the end, not commit apostasy, and be prepared to suffer and if necessary, die for the faith.

This is the Book of the Martyrs. Be prepared to suffer. John is saying for those about to die, "We salute you. Remain faithful to Jesus Christ."

As I said to you before, the word Nike, victors, Nike. Who are those who conquer? Those who are faithful even unto death. The conquerors are not those who take up the sword and kill people. The conquerors are those who are faithful to their faith even if they are martyred. They are the over comers.
Now, the other part of this message, when it comes to not the salvation part, but the justice part is, leave justice in whose hands? The man upstairs. This is a book that is not a call to arms. It's a call to remember "Vengeance is mine," sayeth the Lord. "I will repay."

Only Christ is worthy to unseal the seals; open up those cans of mayhem and destruction on the world. We're not worthy of doing this.

Now I want to talk about envisioning, if we can, the process by which this book was written.

A: John has the vision, but

B: He has to set some of what he saw down in writing.

Obviously he could not describe everything he saw. He had to be selective. The problem with visionary experiences, as I stressed as opposed to auditory ones, is that only the latter can be conveyed verbatim. A visionary experience can not. So, there's that, but then he has to realign these different visionary experiences. He has to line them up in some kind of order that makes some kind of sense, because when you actually read the Book of Revelation this is not just one revelation. This is not just one vision. We're talking about multiple visions.

So that in more than one place, for example in Revelation 1 and also in Revelation 4 we hear, "I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day and I heard and I saw."

We're talking about two visions, not one. In fact, we're talking about multiple visions, so in terms of the literary process he had to arrange this material. There was a literary arrangement of the visions.

And then there was the whole issue that he had to send this document from a distance. So, what does he do? At the beginning and the end of the document he set all of those visions in an epistolary framework. He addresses letters before he gives all the vision.

So we have a little bit of epistolary part at the beginning and the end; Revelation 2 and Revelation 3; Revelation 22 at the end. And in between we have a whole mass of visions that have been arranged.

Now here is Revelation's structure. Taking all that into consideration, here is the structure. There is the prologue; there is inaugural vision of Christ and seven messages to his churches. Then there is the inaugural vision of worship in Heaven.

Now this leads to three sets of sevens and there are two, what shall we say? Interludes in the three sets of seven? There are seven seals; there are seven bowls; there are seven trumpets.

Here is one of the interludes. Revelation chapter 12, the story of God's people in conflict with evil. The woman, the man-child, Satan...stay tuned. We're going to say more about that.

That's right in the middle of talking about the seven trumpets. We have the seven seals, then we have the seven trumpets, then there is this little, if you will, interlude, or commentary on the story. Then there are the seven bowls, and then we have a long description of Babylon, the harlot.

The end of the book is a tale of two cities. [speaking in character] "In this corner, weighing 185, bad to the bone, Babylon the harlot. And over in this corner, looking like a bride coming down the heavenly staircase, the New Jerusalem."
The end of the book is a tale of two cities. Here is the issue for you. Which city do you want to be a citizen of? You need to decide now, says John of Patmos. If you haven’t already sold your soul to Babylon and the devil, now would be a good time to align yourself in the other direction, says John.

So we have the story of Babylon, the harlot. We have a transition from Babylon to the New Jerusalem, called the millennium, and then the end of the book, the New Jerusalem and the epilogue.

Now, it’s not a terribly complicated structure. Three sets of seven judgments; interluded commentary; two cities at the end pitted against each other; the resolution of human history; Heaven comes down and merges with earth.

It’s a spectacularly comprehensive vision. From stem to stern we are told everything we ever needed to know, not everything we wanted to know, about both what’s up there and what’s out there - both the future and now. It’s comprehensive.

Now why has John downloaded this whole big whopping thing on those seven unsuspecting churches? I mean, can you imagine being in one of these churches that for the first time had somebody stand up and on one single occasion read this whole thing out to them. And then at the end say, "Did you get it?" [chuckling]

I mean - picture this! Because you need to have gotten it because I’ve got to move on to the next church. I’m the herald; don’t shoot the messenger.

Are you beginning to get the picture? They didn’t have the luxury of him handing out a scroll to each church and [coughing] say, "Here you go. You can study this for a while. I’ll be back. If you didn’t get it the first time, go online and look at the power point."

No! That’s not how it went down. How it went down is this whole, huge thing was downloaded on them and eventually it was copied. And the good news for them is their oral memory was way better than ours. The other good news for them is they were already in an environment where they understood this kind of literature.

The other good news is they could relate to the speaker because they too were being persecuted, so there was an empathy between the speaker and the audience. I mean, they had a lot of advantages.

The other good news is, they all spoke Greek. I mean, they had a lot of advantages we don’t have as a head start to understanding this book. So, don’t feel terribly sorry for them. They had a lot of advantages. There were way ahead of the curve already.

What is clear to me is that John of Patmos had been a prophet in these churches before this period of time. That’s why he has the authority to address them this way now. This is not like, you know, a messenger from Mars that they had never heard of before, talking to them. No, this is their prophet. This is their authority figure and he’s speaking to an audience that he knows.

He even knows what their spiritual condition is. He knows when they’ve been naughty. He knows when they’ve been nice. He knows when they’ve been bad or good, and he’s addressing them with knowledge of their character and condition.

And if you read those seven letters carefully you know what else you learn? You learn that these churches have had a long history. You don’t start telling the church the [in character] the thrill is gone and you’ve lost your first love.
You know? You don’t go singing [musically] "You’ve lost that lovin' feeling - " Unless it was a long time ago that they first began to love.

There is a clear sense of a long history here of these congregations. Some are going well and some are going not so well, you know? And now he’s addressing them well down the line, long after they began.

He’s trying to help them at a time of persecution, prosecution and execution and probably under Domitian. He’s trying to help them. [coughing] They certainly needed the help.

What I want to do now, is I want us to look at one passage. Just one, because it’s very important for us to understand this because here we have John’s vision of worship. It’s actually a dual passage - Revelation 4 and 5, but we’re just going to look at Revelation 4.

Revelation 4 is vision of the creator god. Revelation 5 is a vision of the redeemer god. So Revelation 4 is the focusing on God, the Father. Revelation 5 is the vision focusing on Christ, the Son.

What makes that very interesting, of course, is that it’s in Revelation 4 that we have the image of all creatures great and small worshipping God - the angels, the humans, and the animals.

But in Revelation 5 the focus is on the lamb and the word. Now think about this. Revelation 4 - the God of Creation; Revelation 5 - the God of Redemption. Which one has the scrolls? It’s the second one.

You see, you can learn that God is Creator just by looking at creation. But without special Revelation, without the scroll, without the book - you don’t get the memo about redemption. There is a definite purpose to the way these visions go down in terms of revealing the creator god and the redeemer god. Lets hear about the creator god.

"After this I looked, and there before me a door was standing open in Heaven. And a voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.' And at once I was in the spirit.

"And there before me was the throne in Heaven with somebody sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald and circled the throne. And surrounding the throne were 24 other thrones and seated on them were 24 elders, and they were dressed in white and had crowns of golden on their heads.

"And from the throne came flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. And before the throne seven lamps were blazing."

These are the seven spirits of God.

"Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, of crystal; clear as crystal. And in the center around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes in front and back."

Where are the eyes in Ezekiel? They are in the wheels, remember?

"The first living creature was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a face like a man; the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings.

"Day and night they never stopped saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, God Almighty who was and is and is to come.'"
And whenever the creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him to who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and they worship him who lives forever and ever.

They lay their crowns. They cast their crowns before the throne and say, [musically] 'Thou art worthy. Thou are worthy. Thou art worthy oh, Lord. To receive glory, glory and honor and glory and honor and power. For thou hast created, hast all things created, thou has created all things. And for your pleasure they were created, for thou are worthy, oh, Lord." Amen. The story of the worship of the creator god.

I want us to compare three visions. Lets start with Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6. Do you remember when he went into the temple? Do you remember what happened when he went into the temple?

He goes into the temple and he encounters something he hadn't entirely counted on. He says, [musically] "I saw the Lord, sitting on His throne. He is high and lifted up and His trains fill the temple. He is high and lifted up and his trains fill the temple. And the angels cried, 'Holy!' The angels cried 'Holy!' The angels cried 'Holy is His name!'"

You see the temple in all ancient near Eastern religions is the junctions between Heaven and earth. It's the contact point for an ancient person with God.

Now the thing about encountering God - dear friends, hear me very clearly - is that any genuine encounter with the genuine god both narrows and widens the gap between us and God. It narrows it because God comes closer to us. We experience God and we begin to understand God better.

But when it is God that we experience, the immediate, instantaneous reaction of a sinful person, when he encounters the Holy God is, "Woe betide me, for I am a man of unclean lips," says Isaiah, "and I dwell amidst the people of unclean lips."

He realizes instantly, "I am so not God. I am not holy like that being is holy."

It both narrows and widens the gap between us and God. Worship happens when the creature realizes she or he is not the creator, and bows down and worships the one who is.

Let me say that again. Worship as it is described in Revelation 4 happens when the creature, whether it be angelic, or human or subhuman creature, recognizes that he or she is not the creator, and bows down before the one who is.

This is true worship. It's about giving up, surrendering, presenting yourself as a living sacrifice, bowing down, recognizing and restoring the order of creation.

You see, worship creates a communion between two very different beings. It's not worship that happens if you fall in love with yourself.

G.K. Chesterton put it this way. He says: "A creature is not made so that he can worship himself any more than you can fall in love with yourself. Or if in a fit of narcissism you do, it will be a monotonous courtship."

Worship is about us having communion with the Holy Other, who is so not me. That would be worship.

Now let me explain to you something important. Worship of a holy, pure, righteous, just, and yes, loving and merciful and compassionate God is not about our cozying up to God, our buddy or pal, because this is not a parenting relationship, and it will never be a parenting relationship.
Yes, there is intimacy with Abba, but we're not being set up in a partnership of equals in worship. I mean, that's my point. That's not worship; that's fellowship. I like Tom Skinner's definition of fellowship: A bunch of fellows in the same ship. [chuckling]

That is not worship. Fellowship is one thing; worship is another. An awful lot of time because we don't have teachers and preachers to explain a theology of worship, these two things get "cornfused". Or just used.

Worship is not fellowship. Fellowship is not worship. They are both good. I'm not condemning fellowship. I am telling you, though, that worship is theocentric. It focuses on God. It does not focus on us. It does not focus on our problems. It's not all about us. It's about God.

When Isaiah went into the temple, the focus was entirely on God and being caught up in wonder and praise of God. That is worship. It's not fellowship. It's worship.

A partnership between equals results in fellowship, not worship. So the experience of Isaiah was worship. Any experience which seeks to put us upon God's level is not worship, it is the opposite of worship. It is idolatry - and you remember what the Bible says about idolatry.

Worship implies a distinction between the worshipper and the one who is worshipped, such that there can be communion between the two.

Now, here's the thing, when you really encounter God it's both truth and consequences. You realize, as you may never have realized before, who you really are. What is the real truth about you?

Isaiah is a mighty priest and prophet of God. He goes into the temple and wham! "I encountered the Holy God. Whoa betide me. For I am a man of unclean lips. And He gets the mesquite grilled treatment on his lips and tongue. God can fix that.

The word worship comes from two old English words: worth and ship. It is ascribing to God His worth. What happens at the end of that Isaiah passage? Did you notice? "Thou art worthy. I am not."

What happens in Revelation 5 in regard to the scroll. The question is, who is worthy to unseal the seals? Are you with me? Worship clarifies for you who is worthy, and who is not. And the answer to that is we are not. We are so not, and God is. It's a theocentric thing.

Now listen to me. None of us are worthy of absolute, unconditional devotion and adoration. If you give absolute, unconditional devotion and adoration to another human being, that is idolatry. It's the polar opposite of worship. It's ascribing deity to and serving and sublimating oneself before someone that is less than God.

And even if it's well-intended, if you give that unconditional absolute devotion to a parent, a ruler, a friend, a conqueror, a lover, a teacher or a mentor, or even to yourself worst of all - everyone of those is idolatry. Only God is worthy our worship and he is so worthy of our worship.

Let's consider another such encounter with God. Ezekiel's experience. Here's Ezekiel, out by the Canal Chi Bar in Iraq, swatting mosquitoes and small birds. [coughing] And he is having a pity party. You want to know why? It's his birthday and nobody baked him a cake. But more importantly, he's of a priestly line. On his birthday, he was supposed to be anointed to be a priest in the temple in Jerusalem and he is so not in Jerusalem.

So, he's out there singing the blues. [musically] "My mama done tol' me, I'm havin' a bad day - "

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And in the middle of that pity party here comes this incredible Throne-Chariot vision - God, coming to a theatre near him. Boom! Bigger than avatar and no 3D glasses needed. This was an out of this world experience.

What he learned on that day is that worship need not be confined to a holy place, because God is not confined to sacred space. God is on the move in this world, and He will come to you.

I love the story of C.S. Lewis. It means a lot to me personally. I spent a good deal of time in Oxford. I've read all of his books, and to me the most moving part of the early story of C.S. Lewis is the day he became a Christian.

He was a don, a brilliant English literature professor at Oxford. God had been working on him for a while. He had Christian friends.

J.R.R. Tolkien, who was also a teacher there, was a devout Roman Catholic, which if you know anything about C.S. Lewis, he was an Ulster Protestant. He's of an Ulster Protestant background. Tolkien and Lewis should have been killing each other, because their ancestors did.

Lewis says that on the day that he became a Christian God backed him into a corner in his office until he said "uncle". And here's what he said about that experience. "On that day, I became the most miserable Christian in all of Christendom."

Because he realized how unworthy he was to be a follower of the King of kings. This was not [musically] "I've been redeemed, by the blood of the lamb." This was, "Oh my God. What just happened to me? God got hold of me."

You see, there are as many different conversion experiences as there are people and we should never try to put everybody through the same conversion experience Cuisinart. God can do it however God wants to do it - slow or fast, dramatic or quiet, painful or not so much. You know? It's different strokes for different folks, and that's okay.

"On that day I became the most miserable convert in all of Christendom," said C.S. Lewis.

Alrighty, then. Not so much "I've been redeemed by the blood of the lamb."

Ezekiel on that day realized that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof and He can be worshipped anywhere at any time, because He's in all of those places. You can commune with God anywhere at any time, even at surprising times and places - like in Iraq, by a canal, far removed from your priestly calling in Jerusalem.

I am very clear that John of Patmos must have identified with that Ezekiel story, because his experience was similar. He was suffering severely in exile. Now, Daniel didn't have it so bad most of the time. Go back and read the Book of Daniel. Ezekiel? It was a different story.

I think John of Patmos must have really identified with Ezekiel and so it's not a surprise that he has a vision that's similar to Ezekiel. Now this vision is not about calling him to a prophetic ministry. He already has it. This is a vision about reminding him to make the main thing the main thing, which is the worship of the one true God.

Hear me now. The most important act that happens on the planet earth is not what happens in Washington, D.C., or what happens in London, or what happens in Iraq. The most important act that happens on all of this globe is the one true worship of the one true God. That, from God's perspective is
what makes the world go around. Right? And sets us all in our creaturely places where we ought to be. It's the most important thing we can do.

Let's talk about John's experience in Revelation 4. He says he was in the spirit. Earlier, in Revelation 1, he says, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day."

Now you notice he does not say the spirit was in "me" though that was certainly also true. He says, "I was in the spirit." You know what that means? I was so immersed in the living presence of God that I heard and I saw.

When is the last time you were so immersed in the living presence of God that you saw and that you heard? Wow! I like the way Dean Jones tried to portray this having of the vision. He says, "I don't know that I can describe it to you."

He gets to the part about the star falling from the sky. Wormwood - remember Wormwood, falling from the sky? And he's going, [stammering]. That's a very good description of something that's so overwhelming. It was overwhelming. He was in the spirit.

Notice it doesn't say he was in the church on the Lord's day. It says he was in the spirit and he heard and he saw. He was in exile on a rock pile. And he heard and he saw. It was not a matter of holy space for him. It was a matter of receptivity to the holy. [coughing] It was a matter of receptivity to the holy - have you turned off the noise in your life so that you can be receptive to God?

The psalmist says this: "Let all the earth be silent. God is in this place. Let all the earth keep silence. God is in this place."

It was a holy time for John. I think Revelation 4 asks for us and answers some of our most profound questions about the nature of worship and our posture and preparation for it. So often we hear people caught up in the American consumer syndrome say, "You know, I don't go to that church because frankly I don't get much out of it."

See, they are evaluating their church like they are evaluating their spaghetti - as a consumer. Let me just explain to you that you don't go to church to be a consumer. You go to church to be a producer of worship.

I'm going to say that one more time. If you consume something while you are busy producing something, that's a bonus and a byproduct. But that ain't why you should go.

I had a little old lady in my home church. She was deaf as a post and blind as a bat. She had these big old hearing aids, and these glasses, you know, before Lens Crafters, when the glasses were like Coke bottle bottoms. You know? Thick glasses.

And she was - Because many are called and few are chosen. I mean, she was always on the third row every Sunday, religiously. And on that same row was a young lady, a much younger lady, and she just couldn't understand why the little old lady was there, because she could hardly hear and hardly see.

To her, this made not sense because she didn't seem to be [emphatically] getting anything out of it. So, she asked one day. She mustered up her courage and asked her, "Why are you here?" Not in a rude way.

The little old lady stood up to her full 5 foot 2 height. Mustered up all of her 105 pounds and said, "I'm not here for what I can get out of it. I'm here for what I can give to the Lord, Jesus Christ and to His people, which is my praise and adoration of our God. During the week I read the bulletin. I find out what
hymns we’re going to sing. I read the scriptures that are announced as the scriptures for the coming service. I pray and reflect on what it is and I come prepared to worship. I don’t come prepared to get; I come prepared to give. Worship is not the performance of the few for the couch potatoes for Jesus in the pews. It’s not entertainment. It’s worship.”

We are all creatures, great and small, to be caught up like in John’s vision in love and wondering praise of our God, so that all creatures of our God and King worship God together. That’s worship.

The young woman was stunned by the old lady’s response. The old lady admitted, she hadn’t gotten as much out of it as she used to, but it was okay, because she came and met the Lord there, and worshipped him.

Worship was not intended, friends, to be a spectator sport. It’s a participatory thing. The consumer approach to worship puts the “em-pha-sis” entirely on the wrong “sy-llab-le”. It leads pastors desperately to seek to change worship patterns and acts, so it will attract a bigger crowd, [speaking louder] on the theory that worship should be a matter of giving the people what they want and crave. [normal voice] Wrong.

Much of what people want is not good for them and much of what they crave is not Godly. Worship is not about giving the people what they want and crave. It’s about giving God what He desires and requires. Let me say that one more time. Worship is not about giving the people what they want and crave. It’s not anthropocentric. The focus is not supposed to be on [louder] little old us! That’s narcissism.

Worship is about giving God what he desires and He requires. Read the Bible. Look at the worship scenes in the Bible.

Let’s consider for a minute what the prerequisite was for John receiving the vision. It was not that the right mood had been set by the music. [chuckling] [in voice] “Tain’t no music goin’ on, on that rock pile.” Unless John is singing, okay?

As a musician, let me just say to you what the function of music is not. The function of music is not to set the mood, nor is it primarily to rev up the troops. The function of music is to minister to a part of you - the affective side of you - so that your whole being will be caught up in worship, not just your cognitive part, but also your affective part.

The music reaches you at levels beyond your cognitive part. The point of the music is so that we all are caught up in our whole selves in love and wonder and praise of God. That is worship, when we are totally engaged with God. Our whole being.

The proper theology of music in worship is, that music is the response to encountering God. Look what happens in Revelation 4. What happens? They burst out spontaneously in song because they have seen His glory, and they wish to praise His name as a result. We need to rethink this worship thing, and this music thing.

John was not in the spirit because the music had set the mood. He was not in the spirit because he was in the right church building. It was because he came prepared for a close encounter with God. He was in the spirit. That’s the prerequisite.

This is not just about turning off your cell phones. It’s about the spiritual preparation necessary to worship. An awful lot of people come in to worship and they are not prepared to worship. And they actually don’t get into the worship until well into the worship.

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And a lot of them have just turned off the whole first part of the service, waiting for the message because they are cognitive types. [coughing] And they are just kind of, "Okay, lets just wait for the word to be delivered from Mount Sinai and okay, I'll put up with the rest of this. I can’t really sing, so you know...”

My point is, we need to teach them what is the function of all these parts of worship and why is it important.

Michelle: Why isn't the teaching happening? Because I have been in very few churches where the body worshipping knows why they are there.

I know. Well, we have not because we haven't been taught. My latest book, which is coming out Monday, is called "We Have Seen His Glory - A Theology of New Testament Worship". Because this is a problem, friends. I have been running around the country giving this very part of my presentation tonight.

And the response has been overwhelming and the number one question is just exactly Michelle just asked me. Why have I never heard this before? And why haven't we been trained how to worship, and explained why we do the different things we do in worship?

Why is it important to sing? Why is it important to pray? Why is it important to give? Why is it important to listen to a message from God?

The interesting thing about it is, in the Protestant tradition, that we are so focused on the message. But you see, that’s the only part of worship that is from God to us, verbally. The preacher, or prophet or teacher is speaking in loco parentis. In the place of God, speaking directly to us, and you would be thankful for that because if God spoke directly to us it would be rather like what happened to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

"Please don’t do that again. Send Moses. We’ll take the mediator." Right?

What’s interesting about worship is, that we focus on God and that prepares us to hear from God, so the function of the preaching at the heart of worship is that God speaks to a people who are ready, [coughing] willing, able and prepared to hear.

Now, if you haven’t gone through all the preparation, how well [coughing] are you going to hear? [coughing]

"Let those with two good ears listen to the message."

It’s critical to understand the different parts of worship. You see, John had already immersed himself in the divine presence before the vision came. He didn’t get the vision until he was already in the spirit. The reason an awful lot of people don’t get a lot out of worship is they haven’t come in the spirit and they don’t leave that [coughing] way, either.

And therefore, they see the elements of worship, but they don’t enter fully into worship. It’s a problem. And when God gave this man a vision, what a vision it was. It was a vision of Heavenly worship, and it transfixed him and it transfigured him, and if you’ll remember the vision and what it did to Ezekiel - it struck him dumb for a week.

When was the last time you went to church and it struck you dumb for a week. I’m thinking not. This is different. This is different.

The thing that’s so amazing to me about this -
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Let's take the Throne-Chariot part. We've got four creatures: a face like a lion, a face like an ox, a face like an eagle and a face like a human. Here's what the rabbi said about Ezekiel 1.

The eagle - is it not the king of all of the birds of prey? The lion - is he not the king of all the beasts of prey? The ox - is he not the king of all the beasts of burden? And the human being - is he not the king of all creatures great and small?

The representatives of the great orders of creation all lifting up the Son of God. This is worship. All creatures great and small lifting up the throne of God. It's a vision of worship.

So powerful a vision that even angels blushed and the elders, the saints in Heaven bow down and cast their crowns before God, because you know, in the presence of God you realize you're not worthy to wear a crown. Only the King of kings is. Only He is worthy of worship.

By just talking to you a little bit about what makes the worthwhile worship, according to John, why is God worthy of such worship? Because He made us all. We have his branding. We belong to God. John Knox put it this way: "It is the chief aim of humankind to love God and enjoy and adore Him forever."

You know what worship is? Loving God with all your heart, and soul, and mind and strength together as part of the body of Christ. It's pouring out your love to God.

Do you want to have a good Valentine's Day? Pour out your love to God. I guarantee you He will respond. Worship Him with your whole heart. I guarantee you will get a Valentine's present like you've never had before.

The chief purpose for which God created us is not, is not to merely till the earth and fill it. The chief purpose for which He created us in His image is to worship Him. That's the main reason we were created.

Let me just say [coughing] one more corollary to this. The chief purpose of the church and of history is not the salvation of all human beings. That's a means to the end. The reason we need to save people is because they are not worshipping God. The means of salvation, the end is worship.

Revelation 4 tells us about the end; worship. Revelation 5 tells us about the means, the savior who is worthy to judge and save the world.

So let's review. True worship requires [coughing] that we be in the spirit on the Lord's day and give our whole selves to God. This in turn implies that we come as true worshippers wide open to give praise and glory to God, having already received the grace necessary to do so, having already put aside all distractions and sins that readily encumbers us.

Only so are we really prepared to receive what God will give. The reason that the message comes late in the service is the assumption is we need to be prepared to receive it. That's always been the assumption.

Worship is chiefly what we do. We come to give honor and glory and praise to the worthy. We come primarily to give, rather than to get. But hear the good news, and this is the best part. If you will just open the door a crack, God is coming to give as well. God comes and meets you in worship and is prepared to give as well.

What kind of expectations do you have when you go to worship? Are you coming, being prepared to encounter God and to change? I mean, just think about when you were a child. The anticipation and expectation you had for Christmas.
Now think about having that kind of anticipation and that kind of expectation and that kind of hope invested in coming and worshipping God on the off chance that it might be - shizam! - God that you actually encountered in worship.

The good news is that God comes to give. It's not just all about you giving. God also comes to give. God bows down as we bow down to God. God comes to relate, to, empower, to heal, to save, to give vision to His people and proclaim His truth. The chief aim of worship is that we get caught up in love and wonder and praise with our God.

I want to tell you about a worship experience I had. I was ending a trip from the lands of the Bible. We finished in Rome and the catacombs on a Sunday morning down in the bowels of the earth. [sighs]

We were in a vaulted ceiling room. There were all these niches in the walls where the saints had been buried. The caskets were now removed. The place has been sanitized. There were candles everywhere. There was an altar. We were going to worship God and share in communion, and the sense of the Holy was all over this place. The saints were with us there, ready to worship with us.

Our guide, Georgio Botti, was something of a lapsed Catholic and a lothario. He was a great guy. He was a musician who was a talented guy, but the minute he came into this room, the minute he saw the candles and the minute I put on the robe and the minute we began to sing "Thou Art Worthy" he just began to weep. It was just like Isaiah, "Woe, be unto me, for I am a man of unclean life."

He came up to me and said, "Dr. Ben, I haven't lived right. But I do believe in God and I would like to sing His praise and make my life better. Can I please enter into the worship and not just watch it? Can I please come to the altar and confess my sins and receive Holy Communion?"

And I said, "Our liturgy says this: 'All ye who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins and are in love with God and in fellowship with your neighbor, and are prepared to own His Son, Jesus Christ, draw near with faith, and receive this sacrament to your good. And on that day, saints and sinners worshipped God, and we all wept. And we were all caught up in love and wonder and praise of God and the pilgrims who had gone on the tour finished with the saints in Heaven, in the heavenly courts.'"

I hope you have a vision of worship as big as John's.
Chapter 11

Afterlife

So, we’re going to review a topic that’s very important in Revelation. Revelation is all about the other world, and the afterlife. So, this is an important topic that helps us understand Revelation.

The truth of the matter is, that if we survey the Bible, the Bible is a book written over a period of well over a thousand years. And God’s people went through a lot in that period of time. And when we look at what the Bible has to say about the afterlife, you need to understand that it’s progressively revealed.

In the Old Testament times, the people that had the fullest form of an afterlife theology were the Egyptians. And they really believed you could take it with you. Go look at King Tut’s tomb, and what was crammed in there. You know, even little dog, Fifi, was crammed in there with King Tut. Because they believe you could take it all with you. This is, of course, the grave robbers ultimate dream. To find one of the Pharaoh's tombs.

The Egyptians believed there was a viable afterlife, and that you needed your body. That’s why the mummification. You needed your body. What they didn’t know about anatomy, however, is, that you know what they did? They would pickle your liver and your kidneys and your heart, and, this, that, and the other. Because you’d need those organs again in the next life. You’d need to be reassembled, right?

What they didn’t know is that this grey matter up here, they thought it was just goo. So, they sucked it all out with a straw and threw it away. So, you know, for Egyptians in the afterlife, it’s a no-brainer. [laughter] Quite literally.

Greco-Roman views of the afterlife. The Greco-Roman theology of the afterlife has to do with [inaudible] [02:35] of the soul. And sometimes this view is actually confused with the Christian view, and fused with the Christian view. You see this in the Middle Ages. You hear an awful lot of Medieval preaching about the immortal soul. This is not a Biblical idea. The Greco-Roman idea is that the soul has always existed. At some point, it comes into a human body, but the human body is seen as the prison-house of the soul. So, that when you die, the soul keeps going.

Now, here’s the point. The soul, in Greco-Roman thinking, is inherently immortal. It’s not a gift. It’s not grace. It’s not happening as a result of conversion experience. Your soul is inherently immortal. You with me now? However many religious experiences, or lack thereof, you have an immortal soul. So, you should not confuse the Greco-Roman idea of the immortality of the soul with the Christian idea of everlasting life. Because these are two different ideas. Very important.

In the Old Testament, in the early part of the Old Testament, the only view of the afterlife that, really, we get much of, is this view of Sheol. You die, you’re gathered to your ancestors, and you go to the land of the dead. Do not pass go, do not collect a hundred dollars. The spirits of the dead. That’s what sheol is all about.

This is very different from later Jewish views. The Pharisees believed in resurrection, as Jesus does. But the idea of resurrection is an idea that comes late to Israelite theology. It doesn’t show up before the Apocalyptic Books. Which is the latter part of Old Testament history. We’ll talk about that.
What the Old Testament basically says, is that when you die, you go to the land of the dead, unless, you know, your name begins with E, in which case you might be beamed up into the living presence of God, if you’re Enoch or Elijah.

But I’d like for us to look at a text. First Samuel 28, for a minute. This is verses three and following. Now you already know this story, right? You know about Saul going to the medium at Endor. It’s a powerful story. Here’s the crucial bit. I’m going to start with about verse 8. “So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night, he and two men went to the woman, the medium at Endor. ‘Consult a spirit for me,’ he says. ‘Bring up for me the one I name.’ But the woman said to him, ‘Surely you know what Saul has done. He’s cut off the mediums and spiritus from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?’”

Saul swore to her by the Lord, “As surely as the Lord lives, you will not be punished for this.” Now, here’s the king, who’s already banished these people, and now he’s so desperate for a late word from God, that he’s going to Sister Sarah to get his palm read. Then the woman says, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” “Bring up Samuel,” he said. And when the woman saw Samuel, she freaked out, and cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are King Saul.”

The King said to her, “Don’t worry, be happy. What do you see?” And the woman said, “I see a spirit, a god-like figure coming up out of the earth.” “What does he look like?” asked Saul. “An old man wearing a robe is coming up,” she said. “Yep, that’s him,” said Saul. And he bowed down and prostrated himself, with his face to the ground.

Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Notice, not, “Why did you bring me down from Heaven?” “Why have you brought me up from the land of the dead, from Sheol?” “I am in great distress,” Saul said. “The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me, and he no longer answers me, either by prophets or dreams. So, I have to call on you to tell me what to do.”

And Samuel says, “Why do you consult me now, that the Lord has departed from you and become your enemy,” and so on. Now, here’s the point. Where is Samuel? He’s just in the land of the dead. This is a genuine encounter with the spirit of the deceased, Samuel. Okay?

Here’s where I tell you that Old Testament people believe that the spirits of the dead are still out there, and can be consulted. And here’s where I tell you that all Greco-Roman people this as well. In fact, on the birthday of your deceased loved one, you go to have a birthday party at the graveyard. And, there’s a pouring tube into the tomb, so you can share the wine with them, while you’re partying on the tomb. Because they believed you can still have communion with the dead.

Why were the Corinthians baptizing people by proxy for the dead? Because they believed they were alive in the land of the dead, and things could still be done on their behalf. Why, in the Medieval tradition are people asking for the saints to pray for you? Because they’re still alive. They’re out there, and just as Samuel can be consulted, so it was believed that the dead could be consulted.

In a Greco-Roman home, that Paul will have seen many times, there will be a cabinet with the death masks of your ancestors. You open the cabinet when you are in a quandary, and you’re going to consult your genius. That’s the Latin word that means the spirit of your ancestor. Gene-plural, from which we get the word “genie”, as in, I’m a genie in a bottle, that saying. That comes from this Latin word that refers to the spirit of the deceased.
When a Greco-Roman Pagan person wanted advice from beyond the grave, the first people they would consult with is their ancestors, the spirit of their ancestors. Which was called a genius. This is where we get the word genius from. Originally, it meant a bright idea that you got from your ancestors, who were on the other side of the divide.

Theology of the afterlife in the Psalms is theology of Sheol. When you die, it’s like sinking to the bottom of the ocean. You go down to the bottom of the pit, and unless God rescues you, you’re just going to the land of the dead, and that’s the, that’s where you’re going to be.

So, there’s this sort of shadowy kind of afterlife. But it’s not really a very positive afterlife. It’s a shadowy existence. There began to be a more positive view of the afterlife, in the later, and especially the Apocalyptic prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel. Remember, “Them bones, them bones, them dry bones. Gonna rise up one day.” Ezekiel 37. Remember that?

We begin to have this notion of resurrection for the very first time in Israelite religion, in Ezekiel 37, and then in Daniel. And let me read for you the reference, very quickly, to Daniel. Here’s what it says. Listen closely to Daniel 12. “At that time, Michael, the great prince, who protects your people, will arise, and there will be a time of distress, such as not happened for before the beginning of the nations, until then. But at that time, your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the Heavens. And those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

Here we have theology resurrection. It’s not an accident it comes first in Apocalyptic literature. Why? Because, dear friends, justice and redemption is not happening in this lifetime, for the first generation in exile, so they must assume that God, being the right person that he is, and being the holy person that he is, he’s going to get it done later. There will be justice and redemption later on the earth, and therefore, the way justice comes to the dead is how? By raising them from the dead. You see? So that’s where this is going.

Now, here’s my bottom line. The Old Testament, apart from passing references to Enoch and Elijah, one verse each, mentions little or nothing about God’s people, in general, dying and going to Heaven. The focus of the Old Testament is certainly not dying and going to Heaven, and now you’re going to hear me say that’s not the focus of the New Testament, either. The focus of the New Testament is on resurrection.

In Daniel 12, 2 and 3, we have both a bad and a good resurrection. A resurrection unto life and righteousness, and a resurrection unto shame and contempt. We will also find this in John 5, when Jesus talks about “the righteous will come out of their graves to life, but the unrighteous will not.”

We see this in Revelation 20. There’s a resurrection of “the righteous” at the beginning of the millennium, but there’s a resurrection of those who are going to be judged and condemned at the end of the millennium. So there is this belief that there is two different resurrections. Two different everlasting destinies.

I mean, it’s not enough to be raised from the dead. Resurrection, good thing. It depends on where you’re going from there. Major conclusion: You need to have a concept of progressive revelation. Because the Old Testament doesn’t help us very much, when it comes to the subject of the afterlife. I mean, there’s just not a lot to say about the afterlife.
The Old Testament is a very much this-worldly, this-life book. And it always has been. So, if you’re wondering why it is that your Jewish friends don’t have much of a theology of the afterlife, well, just look at their sacred texts. Doesn’t say a lot. You die, you’re gathered to your ancestors. Thanks be to God for a good life. L’chaim.

What the Old Testament does suggest, what little it does suggest, is that we should focus on the afterlife on this earth, and not on the other world, namely Heaven. So let me say that one more time. If there is any theme in the latter part of the Old Testament, in Daniel or Ezekiel, the future lies with the afterlife, not the other world. The future lies with the afterlife, and not the other world.

One more point. The Old Testament is very clear about this. Your behavior in this life affects the eternal outcome. Who is it that rises to shine like the stars, in Daniel 12: 2 and 3?

Participant: The righteous.

The righteous rise, to shine like the stars. It isn’t just anybody. The others rise to stink. Not so good.

What happens when we get to the New Testament period? Well, here’s the thing about the Sage Sees. If you want to know why they’re so sad, you see, it’s because they don’t believe in resurrection. In fact, their theology of the afterlife is just what is the [inaudible] [14:48]. You die, you’re gathered to your ancestors. There is no resurrection.

You’ll remember the ridiculous conversation between Jesus and the Sage Sees, about Levirate marriage. This poor woman was hard on men. She went through seven brothers. Who will be her husband in the afterlife? Now, there is, actually, a proper answer to that question. According to Jewish law, it will be the first man, because only the first man was really married to her. The Levirate marriage was just a way to raise up an heir, in a culture that required that you have a descendant, or the property goes to somebody else. So, there is a proper answer to that question.

But, you see, the Sage Sees were asking the question because they didn’t believe in resurrection, and they thought that no doctrine could be believed that lead to the ridiculous situation of one woman with seven husbands. They’re raising it to ridicule Jesus’ theology of resurrection.

Of course, he has an interesting and surprising answer. The Pharisees, like Jesus, believed in resurrection of the sort that we saw in Daniel 12, 1 and 2. Let’s hear what Jesus himself says about this. We’re going to look at just a couple of verses in the Gospel of John. John 5, 28 and 29. In passing, but it’s there. Here’s what he says, “‘Do not be amazed at this.’ says Jesus, “time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice.” Very clearly, he’s talking about the dead. He’s not talking about the merely spiritually dead, he’s talking about the actually dead.

“A time will come when all who are in their graves will hear his voice.” That is, God’s voice. “And come out. Those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to condemnation.” Ahah. Which resurrection do you get in, on what basis? Does it have to do with behavior? Yes, it do. It do have to do with behavior in this life. According to Jesus, who ought to have known, our behavior after conversion matters. Some ministers of the Gospel have not gotten the memo.

But what happens at death? We’re in a very other-worldly mode, in the church these days. Even in the conservative Protestant church, people want to know more about Heaven, than they want to know about the afterlife, frankly. Because Heaven is closer. They think it’s far more likely that they’re going to die, than they’re going to last out until Jesus returns.
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So, they want to know about the other world. They want to know what happens at death, but before the final resurrection. So, you could give them 90 minutes in heaven, and give them a preview of coming attractions, or you could look at the Bible. The Old Testament doesn’t tell us a lot about this. But we have some clues in the teaching of Jesus. And this will help us get ready for tomorrow morning. Because the next genre of literature we’re going to look at in the morning is the Parables. It’s gonna be Parables morning, tomorrow morning. We’re going to have a good time.

Luke 16. You know this story. There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, and lived in luxury every day. And at his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. And even the dogs came and licked his sores. Yuck.

And the time came when the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. “Rock me in the soul of Abraham,” the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and he went to Hades, where he was in torment, and he looked up, and he saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, “Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in some water that’s cool, to cool my tongue. Because I am in agony in this fire.”

But Abraham said, “Son, remember that in your lifetime, you received your good things then. While Lazarus received bad things. Now he’s being comforted here, and you are in agony. And, besides all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to there cannot. Nor can anyone cross over from there to us.” This word just in. This life is the place of decision. There ain’t a second chance in the afterlife.

Jesus says, “The answer. Well, then I beg you, Father Abraham, send Lazarus back to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” And Abraham replied, “Well, they have Moses and the Prophets. Let him listen to them.” “No, Father Abraham,” he said, “if somebody will rise from the dead and go to them, well, they will repent.”

Not. If you won’t believe the Word of God, you won’t believe the work of God. Did you ever notice that? I mean, there are a lot of people who say, “If I could just see a miracle, then…” No, what would happen is you would reinterpret the miracle in light of your own world view. That’s what you would do.

“No, Father Abraham,” he said, “But if someone rises from the dead and goes to them, they will repent.” He said to them, “If they don’t listen to Moses in Provis, they will not be convinced, even if somebody rises from the dead.”

I could tell you a lot about the history of this story. This story is a story that is actually a story from all over the Middle East. It existed before the time of Jesus, and Jesus has modified it for his own purposes. But it’s a famous story about the afterlife. Its earliest form seems to have been in Egypt, and Jesus has adopted it for his own purposes.

What’s clear about this, is that Jesus believes there’s both a positive and a negative afterlife. There’s both a positive and negative other world. You with me now?

Now, let’s talk about cosmology for a minute. Because most of us get confused about this whole issue. Let’s think about it in terms of the ascension of Jesus. So, perk up. How did Jesus get into Heaven? Did he turn left at Mars, after he rocketed through the Earth’s atmosphere? Where exactly is Heaven?

See, we have this image of a three-story universe. Heaven is up, Earth is in the Middle, Hell is down. I’m telling you, that’s not what the Bible says. In fact, what the New Testament says is that the powers and
principalities are in the heavens. They’re in the air. Satan is called the power of what? The air. He’s up. He ain’t down. He’s going to be down. He’s on the way down, but he’s not all the way down yet. Okay?

In fact, in the Book of Revelation, there’s a threefold fall of Satan. From Heaven to Earth, from Earth to the Pit, from the Pit to the Lake of Fire. It’s a real downer, the Book of Revelation, for Satan. There’s a threefold fall of Satan in the Book of Revelation.

Now, here’s the thing. The way I would envision this, is parallel universes. Here’s the material universe, here’s the spiritual universe. You can enter the spiritual universe at any point, from any part of the physical universe. The function of the Ascension was not to get Jesus into Heaven. It was to make clear to the disciples that he was no longer physically present. After all, he was appearing and disappearing all the time, during the Easter season. He could have just disappeared just one final time. Right? Right.

So, the function of the Ascension Is not for Jesus’ benefit, so we could see the feet of him. The function of the Ascension is for our benefit. To know he is no longer physically present, and we must wait for a power from on high in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Two universes. The material universe, the spiritual universe. You can enter the spiritual universe from any point in the physical universe, and vice versa. So angels and demons can go back and forth. There’s quite a lot of traffic between these two universes. There is another world that involves Hades and Heaven. But there’s also an afterlife. There’s also an afterlife.

Jesus does discuss both the positive and negative forms of the afterlife on this Earth. He calls the afterlife, the negative afterlife “Gehenna”, and this comes from the word, “Hinnom”, from the valley. Here we go. Now, let me show you what this is all about.

Here is the Temple Mount, over here is the Mount of Olives. Any of you know what valley this is? Between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount?

Participant: Kidron Valley.

It’s the Kidron Valley. Very good, bonus points for you. Down here below the Temple Mount is the city of David, which is Old Jerusalem. Still called the City of David today. And below the City of David is the Hinnom Valley, the southernmost valley, at the southernmost part of Old Jerusalem.

Now, here’s what you need to know about the Hinnom Valley. It has two hideous associations. First of all, according to the Prophets in the Old Testament, it’s a place of child sacrifice to the god Molec. Yes, some Jews actually did this. Really negative vibes about the Hinnom Valley from antiquity.

But, more recently, the Hinnom Valley, then and today, was the garbage dump of Jerusalem. This is where you went and dumped the wet garbage, the dry garbage, any garbage that you had, human awful, well it was awful. It stunk, it rotted. In the summer heat, it was really bad. This is Jesus’ picture of Hell. When he describes Gehenna, he uses this word because you’ve got a powerful illustration just down the road, and your olfactory sense is working overtime thinking about it.

Jesus, when he describes Gehenna says, “It’s the place where the worm, that not die, and the fire never goes out. Well, guess what? That’s a garbage dump. They burned their garbage in antiquity. It had maggots in it, because it had wet garbage in it. “The worm doesn’t die and the fire never goes out.” This is where Jesus gets his images for what we would call Hell, Gehenna.

It comes from an illustration from Jerusalem. We all have different ideas about the afterlife. Jesus warns both friend and foe about missing entering the Kingdom, and instead going to Gehenna. That would be
Matthew 18: 2 to 9. The two ways you can go, is you can end up in Gehenna, or you can enter the Kingdom of God. That’s the way Jesus talked about this.

Consider the Parable of the Chief and the Goats. What happens to the goats?

Participant: [inaudible] [26:36]

They’re going straight to Gehenna, do not pass go, do not collect $200. Whereas the sheep are going into the Kingdom of God, which, by the way, is on Earth. We are praying in The Lord’s Prayer, what? Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, where? On Earth as it is in Heaven. You know, be careful what you pray for. You’re praying for the end of the world. You’re praying for the justice of God to come to Earth. You’re praying for the conclusion of things. And as C.S. Lewis says, “When the author of the play steps out on the stage, the play is over.” Jesus foresees the Kingdom coming on Earth.

Now, what’s interesting about this parable of the sheep and the goats is, here for the first time, we have both the notion of eternal life, and eternal punishment. Verse 40, Yes, Jesus, you may be surprised to hear this, but Jesus has more to say about hell than anybody else in the New Testament. And, in fact, Paul has almost nothing to say about Hell. He hardly ever mentions it. Once, in Second Thessalonians 2. Basically, not anywhere else. It is a subject that Jesus says more about than anybody else.

Now, I want to make the theological distinction between the eternal and everlasting. The life that we have, in Christ, that we’re given as a gift of God’s grace, begins now and continues into eternity. It should be called everlasting life. This is not the same as eternal life. This is a translation problem. The only being who has eternal life is the Eternal One, who always was, is, and always will be. So, I’d rather us not call it eternal life. I’d rather us call it everlasting life, because that then allows, at least, for the concept that it began at some point in time. Whereas eternal life sounds like the immortal soul. It sounds like you always had it.

Jesus talked about eternal life, and eternal punishment. Let’s just listen to the very end of this Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Jesus says this, “Then the righteous will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink, and when did we see you a stranger, and invite you in, or need clothing, and clothe you, when did we see you sick or in prison, and go visit you?’ And the King will reply, ‘Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

And then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger, you did not invite me in, I needed clothes, you didn’t cloth me, I was sick in prison, you didn’t look after me.”

They also answered, “But Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, or a stranger, or need clothes, or sick, or in prison, and did not help you?” And he says, “Truly, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you didn’t do to me.”

Then we have this verse. “Then they will go away to everlasting punishment, but the righteous to everlasting life.” There’s the contrast. A very clear contrast. Two afterlife destinations. one for everlasting life and one for everlasting punishment.

Here’s an important question to ask. Do things change after the resurrection of Jesus, in terms of thinking about the afterlife? And the answer is, “Yes.” Thinking about the afterlife changes after Jesus rises from the dead, in the middle of human history. All by himself.
Still, throughout the rest of the New Testament, the emphasis is not on dying and going to heaven. The emphasis is on being conformed to the image of Jesus by the resurrection of the righteous. That’s what Paul is talking about, First Corinthians, 15. He says that Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, and what are we? We’re the latter fruits.

Now, if you know anything about farming, first fruits, latter fruits, the first fruits are the harbingers of the latter fruits, you know, The whole crop involves all of us. What Paul says in First Corinthians 15, is, “When Christ returns, the dead in Christ will rise.” Notice it does not say all the dead will rise. What he says in First Corinthians 15 is the dead in Christ will arise, when Christ comes back. The other dead, do not arise, until the Kingdom of God spread throughout all the Earth.

And, we are told at the end of First Corinthians 15, that, when that happens, who is the last enemy to be conquered? Yes, of course, but death is is an abstract noun. What that really means is, the rest of the dead will rise at the end of the millennium. Because then there will be nobody in the land of the dead, will there?

If the Christian dead have risen at the beginning, when Christ returned. When Christ finishes putting all of his enemies under his feet, the last enemy being death, the other dead are raised from the dead. At that point, there is no more death. You get the point?

It’s the same picture in First Corinthians 15 that you get in Revelation 22. Resurrections, one of the righteous, one of the unrighteous, one at the beginning when Christ comes back, one later.

Now Second Corinthians 5:1 through 10 is the text I want us to finish with tonight. Because it gives us, actually, the most Paul ever has to say about Heaven. And it’s not much. Second Corinthians 5: 1 through 10. So, let’s hear now, the text.

Listen closely because it can be confusing. “For we know that if the Earthly tent we live in now is destroyed,” you notice he calls our body a tent, as in a temporary dwelling place, which is mobile. “We know that if the Earthly tent we live in now is destroyed, we have a building from God. An eternal house, a heavenly one, not built with human hands. Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. Because, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed, but to be further clothed with our heavenly dwelling. So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”

“Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit, as the downpayment, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore, we are always confident, and we know that as long as we are at home in this body, the tent, we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body, and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him. Whether we are at home, in the body, or away from it.”

Now, listen to this last verse. It’s the kicker that will wake you up. “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that every one of us may receive what is due to them, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Is there accountability for Christians for the deeds they do in the body? Yes or no.

Participant: Yes.

Yes. Absolutely. Now, let’s unpack this. Paul is talking about three conditions. Condition one, this stint, our earthly, mortal body. Condition two, a resurrection body, Condition three, he mentions only in
passing, nakedness. And when he wants to talk about this, he says, “When you go to be with the Lord, you are absent from the body,” and what? Present with the Lord. Three different conditions.’

This body, absent from the body, the heavenly body, i.e. the resurrection body. Are you with me now? And the way that Paul describes absent from the body is nakedness. Now if you know anything about early Jews, did they see nakedness as a good thing? No, it was not preferable. In certain places, it was even shameful.

Paul’s vision of what happens when you die is, your spirit goes to be with God. This is what Jesus says on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend my...spirit.” It’s your spirit that goes, not your immortal soul, your spirit that goes to be with God.

In Heaven, Jesus should be really easy to pick out. He’s the only one there with a resurrection body. We are simply spirits in the presence of God, when we die. What is confusing about this passage is, that when Paul wants to talk about the resurrection body, he calls it a heavenly dwelling place. That’s because, he’s not describing a closet in Heaven, that has bodies in it. He’s describing the condition of the resurrection body. It will be heavenly. It will be everlasting. It will be something God has fashioned for us in advance.

So, the point is not you get the resurrection body when you die. The point is, that eventually you are going to be in an eternal state of affairs, and you need to be in an eternal condition to be in an eternal state of affairs. You need to be in a heavenly condition to be in a heavenly state of affairs.

So, one more time, this body, a tent, temporary. When you die, that’s going in the ground, it ain’t going anywhere. Your spirit goes to be with the Lord. That’s nakedness. That’s absent from the body, present with the Lord. But when Jesus comes back, what happens to that body? Resurrection.

Now, we could ask an awful lot of questions about the resurrection body. The bottom line is, whether there is very little to reconstitute, or a lot, God can give you a resurrection body from scratch, if he need to. Even if there’s nothing left moldering in the grave. So you don’t need to worry about that.

If God can create something out of nothing at the beginning of human history, he can certainly do it again at the resurrection. So, that’s not something you need to worry yourself about. You know, it’s lead to unending speculation, though. My wife’s a biologist, so she knows far too much about these things. What I am told by my wife, is that some of the molecules running around in me now, have been in previous human beings, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, et cetera. I don’t quite understand that. That’s what the scientists say. So, you know, if you’re not feeling like yourself, it may be because you got too many molecules left over from previous persons.

None of that really much matters. What matters is, that when the Lord comes, whether through a raising of what was left of your old body, or whether reconstituting it, or whether constituting a whole new one, you are going to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. You are going to become what you admire. You are going to be given a body that is immune to disease, decay and death, suffering, sin and sorrow. And who doesn’t want to have one of those?
Chapter 12

Parables (part 1)

I am the vine and you are the branches. One of the notable differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels is lots of parables in the Synoptic Gospels and almost zero in John. Now, the little segment that I’ve shown you shows you one of the two places where you can really say there is a sort of parabolic utterance - I am the vine and you are the branches, but it raises the question “what are parables”? What exactly are they? We have quaint little definitions - a short story with long meaning, an earthly story with heavenly meaning, that sort of thing. We are used to think of parables as stories, but we really need to get to the root of the issue.

So let’s start with the Hebrew word, “mashal”, plural “meshalim”. That’s the Hebrew. The Greek is more recognizable “parabolas” and then the plural “parable”. Here’s the terminology. Here’s where I tell you that what this word means is basically figurative or metaphorical speech of any kind. It doesn’t have to be a story at all. For example, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, “Doubtless you will tell me the parable, you will say to me the parable physician heal thy self”, is one sentence. It's not a story. It's a metaphorical analogy.

Our task this morning is to look at the parables and understand their character. We talked previously about apocalyptic literature involving analogy, remember? Here’s where I tell you that parables are also analogies. They are comparisons between one thing and another. The nature of analogy, as I said to you before, is it is a comparison of two unlike things that in some particular ways are alike. That’s an analogy, that’s a metaphor. “My love is like a red, red rose”, valentine's is tomorrow. This does not mean that my wife is thorny or prickly. The comparison only goes so far. The analogy is only in certain aspects. Mashal is a figurative form of speaking, it’s a metaphor, it’s a comparison, it’s an analogy. Same with parabolas. We get two English words from this word, don’t we? Parable and parabola. One mathematical term and one literary term. Interesting. Jesus is not the inventor of parables. We actually have parables in the Old Testament. Remember Nathan confronting King David and he told him the parable of the ewe lamb. The man who had only one and the wealthy owner who stole it from him and then at the punch line Nathan says to the King, “You demand. You’re the one who did this”.

Parables are a form of wisdom speech. They’re part of the wisdom literature and the fact that Jesus’ public ministry focused on parables is immediately important because it tells us, right off the bat, that he intended to speak publicly in figurative ways. He intended to speak publicly in metaphorical ways. He was not giving them the cookies on the bottom shelf. He wanted to tease their minds into active thought. Now Jesus has something to say about why he does this in our earliest Gospel Mark this is what he says, this is Mark 4 beginning with the 10th verse, “When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables, parable. He told them, ‘The secret of the kingdom of God has already been given to you. But to those outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing, but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’.” Now, that is a literal quotation, in Greek to be sure. It’s a quotation from Isaiah 6.

So let’s go back to Isaiah 6 just for a minute. The famous scene where Isaiah comes into the Temple and is commissioned. Let’s look at the original context of this. What did God commission the Prophet Isaiah to
Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here I am. Send me!' He said, 'Go and tell the people the following: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.' Then I said, 'How long O Lord?' And he answered, 'Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ravaged, until the Lord has set everyone far away and the land is forsaken.'"

Now then, do you think parables are nice little stories that can warm the cockles of your heart with some moralistic message? I'm saying "no". That's not a function of the parables in the hands of an Isaiah or a Jesus. A parable is meant to make clear to the audience that they are not in the clear. A parable is meant to make clear to the audience that they are at a distance from God and do not understand. The parable is to make clear to the audience that their hearts are hardened and if they don't repent they're not going to get it. Many modern people would say this is bad pedagogy. You want people to understand things you don't become more obscure. But you see, the problem, the problem is not simply information its transformation.

Not long ago there was a campaign in the public schools when my kids were in the public schools about drugs. It was just say no. That was the slogan and the philosophy was if our children just have more education, if they just know more, they will behave better. Now what's wrong with this? The drug problem doesn't chiefly lie at the borders of our country, it lies at the borders of our hearts. The problem is in here. As Pogo once said, "I have seen the enemy, the enemy is me". Information without transformation - a veil it's not. And so Jesus says we're going to tell parables to them so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not hear unless [emphasis added 09:49] they turn and repent and give up their hard heartedness and then may, may indeed hear and see and understand.

Now, that's important in the characterization of the disciples in the Gospel of Mark because, of course, even the disciples are frequently not getting it. So what does that tell you about their spiritual condition. Well they don't yet have the Holy Spirit and they have not yet been truly transformed. They are disciples. The word means “learners”. They are in process [chuckle] of becoming true followers of Jesus but they’re not there yet, they're not Christians yet, they're in process. They’re simply followers of Jesus at this point. So what's the point of the parables? A parable is like a stone thrown through a plate glass window to shatter people's smug assumptions that they already know what they need to know and they already understand what they need to understand and don't confuse me with these stories and analogy.

And these parables really do shatter an awful lot of basic assumptions in early Judaism. Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. We've talked about this. This is a shattering parable because it makes even an expert in the law redefine who is my neighbor, or who counts as neighbor. Mashal, Meshalim, an analogy. Now, a parable is a literary fiction. Sometimes you will hear teachers say these parables are so true to life. My response to that is – not [emphasis]. Though they're true to the kingdom, they're not true to life. These are parables about the kingdom and we've talked about the nature of the kingdom before. What are we talking about here. We're not talking about a place, we're talking about the divine saving activity of God that breaks into human preconceptions and human fallingness and transforms human beings. That's what we're talking about. Jesus says, "To what shall I compare the kingdom. The basileia.” It is like this. Let's take a look at three parables about loss that'll help us get into this subject.

Turn with me, if you will, to Luke 15. Now I do want to make a distinction for you because, you know, under this heading comes the following things: Aphorisms, riddles, short metaphors and, yes, short
stories. What Luke does for us is he presents us more of the narrative parables. Not the one liners like, “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” That’s a parable. It’s a riddle. Parable is a big heading, it doesn’t just refer to story. Okay. It’s any kind of figurative or metaphorical wisdom speech.

Luke is a master of presenting us with Jesus’ longer parables than narrative parables and that’s what we’re going to look at in Luke 15. And here’s something interesting. It appears, if you study closely the parables of Jesus, that originally he told parables in pairs. One of which would be more addressed to the males in his audience and one of which would be more addressed to the females in his audience. Now on that note, listen to the following:

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathered around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ Then Jesus told them this parable: ‘Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and the neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ‘I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who don’t need to.’”

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Now according to my count, there are or about 35 or so different examples of wisdom speech in the Synoptic Gospels. When I say wisdom speech, I mean the general heading of parabolas. An aphorism or riddle or a short story, all of this is called parable. Now, what I want you to notice about these two is that one focuses on the task of a male herding sheep and the other thought focuses on the task of a female, keeping and sweeping the house.

What’s interesting is that the analogy is drawn between those two activities and the nature of God. Jesus is saying God is like a man who goes out after his one lost sheep. God is like a woman who searches until he finds the lost coin. This is daring. He doesn’t just draw an analogy between male behavior in God, he draws an analogy between female behavior in God. It’s a pair of parables and frankly, they both have the same point. They make the same point, but if his audience involved both men and women disciples and men and women listeners, how much more effective is this communication when he directs it to activities that each one of them would find as stereotypically theirs. Pairing of parables.

No it’s not distinctive to Luke because we do have some pairs of parables in Mark and in Q as well. So, no. I think this is distinctive of Jesus. I think this goes back to Jesus. Luke, however, likes to highlight these things. There is no question that Luke is more concerned and interested in the role of woman than say Mark. There is no question about that. And it is Luke alone who gives us Luke 8:1-3 the story of the female disciples Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, etc. So, Luke is more sensitive to the whole issue of female disciples than Mark would be.

Now let’s look at these parables just for a minute. We need a little more background, okay, so bear with me. We need a little more background here. Let me ask you a question. What the heck is an allegory? I’m sure you’ve heard the word. You’ve heard the word allegory, you’ve heard the word allegorical. John
Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress an allegory. A fictitious story, a moralizing Christian story about the Christian life the Christian walk. A classic, if you haven’t read it, shame on you. You need to be better apprised of Christian classics because their “ain’t” that many of them out there. You know Milton’s Paradise Laws, Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, you need to read the Christian classics. They aren’t that long and it’s not that hard.

No question Pilgrim’s Progress is an allegory. Now, the question arises, “What’s the difference between a parable and an allegory?” An awful lot of interpreters of parables treat them as if they were full blown allegories. This refers to this and this refers to this and this refers to this and this refers to this. An allegory is an artificially constructed story which is dictated by something outside of the story. That is, the story is made up so that all the elements in the story suit some abstract subject that’s not the story.

In an allegory, every cotton picking detail has some kind of symbolic significance. So you have the man named Christian in the Pilgrim’s Progress. He’s walking along the road of life and he falls into the swamp of despond. You see every single little element in the story. It’s not about the telling of the story itself, it’s about something that he wants to say is true about the Christian life outside the story. So every element of the story, every major element of the story is symbolic.

In a parable, a parable doesn’t work quite like that. A parable is not a full blown allegory. So you don’t sort of line up one of these narrative parables and say, this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that and this is that. However, that is exactly what medieval interpreters of the parable did. Let me give you an egregious example. Augustine’s famous interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. It went like this:

“A man was going down a road from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell amongst thieves.” Whose the “man”? He represents all in humanity who has fallen and can’t get up. “Priests went down the road and did not help him. Nor did Levites.” Who do they represent? They represent hardhearted clergy who are not responsive to their flocks’ spiritual death. And then a good Samaritan comes down the road. Who does that represent? Oh, that’s clearly Jesus. The Good Samaritan [chuckle 21:36] is Jesus. And what does the good Samaritan do? He takes out wine. Oh, that’s clearly the sacraments, which will give you life. And oil. Oh, that’s clearly anointing for healing to help the man lying on the side of the road and then he takes him to the Inn. “Oh, what is the Inn?” says Augustine. The Inn is the Church. He’s led the man dead in trespasses to the Church and he pays the Innkeeper. “Oh, what’s that?” That’s the tithe. He’s given the tithe for the dead man in advance to the Innkeeper.

Now, this is all nonsense. This is a Christian allegorizing of the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is not at all how Jesus or his immediate audience would have understood this parable. See, so what’s happened is he’s allegorized a basically non allegory. He’s allegorized a parable. Parables are not allegories.

There is some debate in regard to how many symbolic elements there are in a parable. There are certainly some. So, let’s take those two parables that we looked at. The parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. The basic point is simple. God’s seeking and saving the lost is like the extraordinary efforts of those two figures in these two parables. The point is God will go to great lengths to seek and save the lost. I mean that’s the point. There’s one main point, there’s not ten. There’s one main point.

Some parables are a little more complex so they have a little more allegorical elements to it. But here’s what I would want to say, there’s a sliding scale between parable and full blown allegory. Yes, parables have some symbolic elements in them, but each little picky detail of the parable is not to be interpreted.
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allegorically. That's my point. So a parable you could say, a narrative parable, is a story that has some symbolic or allegorical elements in it.

A narrative parable is a story that will have one or maybe two or three symbolic elements in it and let me stress to you, that these parables are not true to life. What cotton picking shepherd would leave 99 perfectly good sheep to go after one scraggly lost one, unless he had five helpers and two sheep dogs? But there's nothing about five helpers and two sheep dogs in this story, it's just the shepherd and his sheep. You get the point? This is not true to life, this is true to the Kingdom. God will move heaven and earth to reach a lost one is the point. This is not true to life, it's true to the Kingdom. It's true to God's nature, God's activity.

Similarly, with the lost coin. Now what we're talking about, just so you will know, is that women in that culture wore their dowry on their headdress. You will have seen middle eastern people today that wear a Burka with coins on it. Have you ever seen this? A middle eastern headdress with coins on it? Yeah. You can see it on CNN. It's their dowry, [slight chuckle 25:14] their carrying it with them. So, this is a story about a woman who loses one of the coins of her dowry. Is it really plausible that a woman would do the molly-maid thing to the whole house looking for one tiny coin that's probably a widow's mite. Well, maybe, but the point is that however untrue it might be to average normal everyday life, it is true of God's character. God will keep searching until he finds. I don't know about you, but I get a lot of comfort out of that. God will keep searching until he finds the lost one. He seeks and saves the lost. He goes above and beyond what any normal shepherd or housekeeper would go and do.

But, there is a third parable in Luke 15, isn't there? Another parable about lostness. A much more familiar one and a lengthy one. One of the things I would encourage you to do about this parable is go online, Google it, look up Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son. I love this painting. It's in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg in Russia. I've seen it twice. It's an enormous [emphasis 26:51] painting. It takes up a gigantic [emphasis 26:55] wall in this museum. Ah, he must have been painting for months and months to produce this.

Now what I want you to notice about this, I mean Rembrandt is a master of light. You see where the light focus' on. The relationship between the forgiving father and the penitent son. Just look at the hands [emphasis 27:19]. Look how gentle [emphasis 27:22] they are, see that? And you can't really see it in this image, but in the background the mother is watching and over here we have son, the older son, he is not best pleased with this little scenario. Reflect on that when I read you the parable.

Jesus continued, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger one said to his father, 'Father give me my share of the estate'”. Now, you need to understand the ramifications of this. You don't get your inheritance 'til your father dies. So, in essence, the son is shaming his father into saying you're as good as dead, give me my inheritance now. He’s publicly shaming his father. "Father, give me my share of the estate now. So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, he set off for a distant country.” In other words, he's going to a pagan nation. He's not only saying farewell to family, he's saying farewell to Judaism - “and there he squandered his wealth.” In, as the King James puts it, “riotess living”. Wild living [emphasis 28:45]. Superbowl partying on south beach with the Hooter's girls. “After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his field to feed the pigs.” Now if you know anything about Judaism, oink, oink, is the most unclean of all critters from a Jewish point of view. You're not ever going to go to a Jewish barbecue roast if it's pork. “He longed to fill his stomach with even the pods, the seed pods that the pigs were eating, but..."
no one gave him anything to eat. And when he came to his senses he said, 'How many of my father's
hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! Well I'll set out and go back to my
father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be
called your son so just treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

See, he has already planned his little speech. “So he got up and he went to his father.” Listen to this, “But
while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and filled with compassion, the father ran out to
meet his son and he threw his arms around him and he kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I
have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father
said to his servant, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and a bell on his
toes and a bone in his nose and bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For my son
was dead to me and is alive again; he was lost and has been found.’” So, they began to party. “Meanwhile,
the older son was in the field and when he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. And he
called one of the servants and said what...” the heck is going on. Well, they replied, um, “Your brother has
come home...”, yes, that brother, “and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has come home
safe and sound. At this the older brother became angry, he refused to go into the feast. So his father went
out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father with anger, 'Look! All these years I’ve been slaving
for you all over this property, never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even so much as a
goat to celebrate with my friends. But when this other son of yours...”, this prodigal, this immoral son,
“who has squandered half of your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fatted calf for him!”
Please says the father, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to
celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and now is
found.”

Now, this is a more complex narrative parable. It’s a literary fiction. We should discuss the fact that truth
can be conveyed just as well by fiction as by fact. This is telling us some truths about the nature of God
and the nature of redemption. We could debate the parable as to who the forgiving father represents.
Does it represent the God the Father or Jesus the Son? or both? I don’t think you can go wrong. It certainly
represents the character of God, whether Father or Son and, of course, it’s Jesus who seeks in saving the
lost so, maybe especially the son, is the Father here.

The Prodigal Son. Sinners. Remember the beginning of the parable. Who was it that was criticizing Jesus?
Jesus, you dine with IRS agents and the notably immoral. What’s up with that Jesus? And he tells them
the story. Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew sends out his disciples at one point two by two and he limits
who they are to go to. Who are they told they should go to? “Go only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The
most notorious sinners, the outcasts rather than the in crowd.

But what about the older brother? Who is he a characterization of? Well, he’s a characterization of the
long faithful Jew. The pious Jew who has never willfully broken his father’s commandment and never
willfully gone astray, he’s not like the prodigal son. He’s the unprodigal son, if you will. And there were
plenty in Jesus’ audience who thought they were in that category.

Remember the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Pharisee is not a hypocrite. In that
parable, the Pharisee is generally glad he’s not like this other person. He’s generally glad he’s a more
moral person than this other person. The problem is that the man’s morality is getting in the way of
reality. This happens. What kind of a sinner are you? A clean decent sinner or a notorious sinner? The
problem is not hypocrisy, the problem is a tunnel vision. I’m glad that I’m not like that. The next
statement should be: “Nevertheless, I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” But that’s not what happens in that parable.

Now this story, this story is powerful because in fact it’s not only providing a rationale for why Jesus is seeking out the ne’er-do-wells, it also is a critique of those who were critiquing his ministry, isn’t it? He’s critiquing those who are critiquing him spending time with sinners and tax collectors. He’s saying: You know, you’re just too precious to do what needs to be done to save the loss. So he is critiquing the critique of his ministry. This is all about how the Kingdom works. How God finds the lost. It’s a powerful parable.

Let’s look at one more before we take a break. Turn with me, still in Luke, to Luke 18. And once again, we have a pair of parables so we’ll deal with both of them and starting with Luke 18:1. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For sometime he refused. But finally he said to him, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me.’ And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes back to earth will he find faith on earth?’”

And to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

“Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people - robbers, evil doer’s, adulterer’s - or even like this’ yuck “tax collector, instead I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven but he beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you says Jesus, this latter man rather than the other went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humbled themselves shall be exalted.”

Now, the first first parable centers on the actions of a woman and the second parable centers on the actions of a man. Here we have another pair of parables meant to reach the whole audience that Jesus spoke, male and female.

Now here’s where we begin to see, in various ways, that these parables are not allegories. For example, God the Father is not like an adjust judge. So in this particular parable, we have a typical Jewish literary device called, “call wyomer [phonetic]”. No, call wyomer is not the name of a person you call. Call wyomer means how much more than. How much more than, “call wyomer”. The point is this: If even a wicked judge would vindicate this woman whose cause is just, how much more will the real God, who judges the world do right? You get the picture? This is a how much more than. The only comparison between the wicked judge, the unjust judge and the good judge is that in the end vindication happens.

Now, you need to know some details to understand this parable so let me unpack it bit. Here’s the way the judicial process went in Jesus’ world. A person goes to a judge and makes an accusation against someone else, and he may well bring a prosecutor with him. In this sort of justice system you have to have money to take people to court, you can’t just, you know, dial 1-800-litigate. In this world, judgment favors the rich. So what has happened in this case is that somebody has already gone to the judge and got
a ruling, and this woman is about to be out on her ear. She's about to lose her property, she's about to lose her home. She gets word of this after the fact. So what happens, she goes to the judge and says, “You [emphasis 42:29] have to got to vindicate me against my adversary.” It's a technical legal term. My legal adversary. And the judge says, “Why do I need to do that? I don't fear God or human beings, shoo.” Ah, but it's an honor and shame culture. The woman has one thing on her side, persistence. She says, okay, I'll see you tomorrow and the next day, and the next day, and the next day and you're back in court on Monday? I'll see you Monday and then Tuesday and then Wednesday. Now, see the thing is, she's trying to shame him even though he is not a moral person into acting. Because there is one thing that he does care about, his own reputation. He does care about keeping his job so he can keep on milking people of their money. He does care about that. So she's going to keep coming after him.

Now the ironic thing about this story and it's what makes it daring, is that in the earlier Jewish wisdom literature, even in the proverbs, there are sayings like this: To what shall we compare a persistent widow. She is like a constant dripping of water. It's not a positive analogy. She's annoying [emphasis 44:08] beyond believe is the point of the proverb, right? Jesus using the persistent widow as a positive example of beseeching God in prayer. He turns a negative example from the culture into a positive example here.

Now you will also not get the full color from this parable unless you know something else. Because what the judge actually says is, “Well I had better vindicate her before she comes and blackens my eye.” Before she comes and socks [emphasis 44:45] me in the face. You see, there's nothing more shaming in a whole patriarchal culture to get beat up by a little old lady. That's the most shameful thing that can happen to you. And this-this parable it just exudes that whole “okay, I'm just going to keep coming and if I have to, I'm going to sock him in the face until he gives me vindication”.

But remember, we are not being told that God is like that reluctant wicked judge, this is a “call wyomer’ story, a how much more than. If even that wicked judge will vindicate that widow who is defenseless and has nothing but her persistence on her side, how much more will God vindicate those who beseech you in earth. It’s a powerful story, and it's a story that tells us about how the Kingdom [emphasis 45:45] works. How God's character operates.

Alright, let's look at the male parable and then we'll take a couple of minutes for questions before we break.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the IRS Agent. The King James had the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. I had to keep telling my children that, “No, it's not Republican, it's Publican.” Here's the thing about this story. You need to understand that this Pharisee would probably be the very best member of your church. He's faithful to the last drop, he's fasting, he's tithing, he's attending, he's praying, he is like many of us, really very glad that he's not a drug addict living on the street in an immoral way. What's wrong with that? Nothing. Except this, he's picking himself and his self image up by putting somebody else down. Compared to him, says this man, I look good. Do you think God measures us that way, not so much.

Indeed, the most essential element in this story is this: One of these men recognizes is he is far from perfect and he is in daily need of the mercy of God. The other one doesn’t. So broken is this tax collector because of the sin of his life that he dares not even look up towards God, he bows his head and holds up his hands and says, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner”, and Jesus says...guess which one of these went away vindicated?
Some people have said Jesus doesn’t know anything about justification by grace through faith. Ooh, yes he does. Go read this parable again, this is a parable about mercy on the basis of repentance and a faith response to a merciful God. This is about justification by grace through faith.

These parables are not nice little moralizing lessons for life, they are social dynamites. We will say more about that after the break.

BREAK [48:55]

RETURN FROM BREAK [48:57]

Now one of the things that happens, that tends to happen with the study of the parables is that they really, in the Protestant tradition especially, they’ve been used for ethical purposes and that’s fine, because they certainly do have some ethical lessons to teach, there’s no doubt about that. However, I would like to say to you that they are theologically rich because they’re telling us a lot about the character of the father and the character of the son and it prompts a discussion of the relationship of the Father and Son.

For example, the parable of The Prodigal Son as I alluded to, raises questions, okay, whose the Father in the parable? You see. So, what I’d like to do now is we’re going to take a little theological g-joggle to the left for a minute and deal with the issue of the relationship with the Father and Son because the parables raise this issue.

One of the major surprises when you examine the Old Testament is how seldom God is called anything remotely like father. He’s called a lot of things, but father is like most never one of them. Deuteronomy 32:6 says, “Is he not your Father who created you?” That’s from The Song of Moses. Or, Isaiah 45:9 and 10, it’s an analogy. Actually, God is not addressed as Father. God is father-like and he’s also a potter that’s molding the clay. The real analogy in Isaiah 45 is focusing on the father-clay thing, but the father-like character of God is alluded to.

There are some royal psalms where God is said to be the Father of the King. In particular, Psalm 2:7. By the way, that’s the song that’s quoted at Jesus’ baptism. “This is my beloved son, today I have begotten thee.” That’s part of a coronation song. That is the words the priest said to the King on behalf of God on the day he became King, because in the ancient Near East, King’s were “the son” of that God. It’s part of a coronation oath. When you are crowned King you are said to be the son of your deity. That’s what Psalm 2 is all about. Now it’s very interesting then, that when Jesus is baptized and the voice of Heaven says, “You are my beloved Son, I am well pleased with you”, we are not just being told that he’s the son of the Father, we are being told he’s the King of the World. That’s what we’re being told at the baptism.

Another good example would be 2nd Samuel 7:14. “God will be the father of David and Solomon and his descendent’s. A special relationship between God and his Kingdom. And the king is called son.” Walt Brueggeman, a famous Old Testament scholar says this, “Father is a rare or minor image for God in the Old Testament far less frequent than the image of God as a King or a warrior or a creator or a judge or even a redeemer, and it’s not a prevalent image for God in the Old Testament. It just isn’t. And so far as I can tell, there is not once in the Old Testament that God is addressed in prayer as father, not once.

Now I’m going to let that soak in for a minute because of the contrast between that and what you find in the New Testament. There are a few places in the Old Testament where the metaphor of father is used for God - Like a father he does “x” and “y”. Jeremias 3:19, Jeremias 31:9. Ah, Hosea 11 is one of my favorite ones. “When Israel was a child, I took him up in my arms. How can I forsake you O Israel, how can I turn my back on you?” You hear that parental compassion in this wonderful passage in Hosea 11.
But, again, God is not addressed as father, he's not prayed to as father and what's especially interesting is that when you compare Old Testament literature to Babylonian literature and Hittite and the Syrian literature, Egyptian literature, guess what? The language of father addressing God as father, even in prayer, is fairly regular in other ancient Near Eastern literature, but not in the Old Testament. Why not? Why not indeed? Could it be because God was seen to be such a Holy other being? That a Holy God could not be drawn close to? You couldn't have an intimate personal relationship from the human side of the equation because who were you? The Psalmist says, “In sin was I conceived in the womb.” There was a sin problem that distanced people from God.

To what do we attribute then the dearth of father language used of God in the Old Testament? Not only in comparison to other ancient Near Eastern literature, but even more when you compare the Old Testament to the New Testament on this particular subject. Let me say, right off the bat, that the reason for the paucity of references to God as father in the Old Testament cannot have anything to do with whether the culture was patriarchal or not, because what we know about the Old Testament culture is that it was profoundly patriarchal, remember, patriarchal. Remember the patriarchs? This is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, we don’t hear about him being the God of Sarah and Rebecca and so on. It’s a profoundly patriarchal culture. That cannot be the reason why there is a paucity of references to God as father in the Old Testament. So it cannot be because the dominant culture of Old Testament times was not patriarchal, because it definitely was.

Christopher Seitz says this, he’s a wonderful Old Testament scholar, by the way I would recommend if you’re interested in prophecy, any book by Christopher Seitz on Isaiah or Old Testament prophecy, Sell the Dog, buy it. It’s just, it’s great. It’s so helpful. He says this, “There is a perspectival difference between the way the father language is used in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In the Old Testament things are seen from Yahweh’s, or the Father’s point of view. But in the New Testament, things are now viewed through the limbs of the Son, or a Christological point of view and there is a big difference.” Did you catch that?

In the Old Testament God’s people are seen from a God the Father point of view. But in the New Testament, both God and his people are viewed through a Christological lens, and that changes everything ’cause Christ changed the nature of our relationship with God.

Here’s what Chris Seitz goes on to say, “This change in view point has less to do with the matter of culture – Is it patriarchal or not? Or even less to do with”, ah, “or even something more personal and psychological. It has more to do with the appearance of the man Jesus and a change in perspective from the Son to Yahweh, who is referred to from that point of standing as Heavenly Father. In other words,” catch this, “the father language in the New Testament, which is so plentiful, has to with the emphasis Jesus himself placed on the matter saying that we could enter into the same relationship He had with the Heavenly Father, and before that point in time, you couldn’t have that relationship. Hence, God is not prayed to as Abba before then.” It’s powerful, there’s a sea change in the whole way we address God because of Jesus.

Now if you do a study of the further development of Jewish literature and father language, you can go to Wisdom of Solomon in your Testamental Book, Chapter 14. You can go to Sirach, Chapter 23 or 51 and go to the third Maccabees. What you begin to see is that there is a little more frequency of thinking of God as Father but even there, God is still not addressed as father in prayer. What God is called in this literature is Abba, not Abba and there’s a difference. Abba is Aramaic meaning father dearest, it doesn’t mean daddy by the way. No more sermons about Abba means daddy. It's not a
nickname, it's not casual speak. Abba is the language of a child, a term of endearment addressing father. It would be like our word “papa”. It's not a casual term, it's a respectful term. It's not “daddy”, you know the “big daddy” in the sky. It's more like father dearest. That's what Abba means. Abba simply means “father”, not father dearest. And what's interesting about that Sirach reference, Sirach 51:10, God is called Abba, Father. Here we have God being said to be the father of particular individuals, not just a group.

Now, this is very interesting, because in the Old Testament the other thing I should have said to you is that wherever the father language shows up, it's in relationship to a group of people, God's people. It's not about an individual personal relationship with the father, it's not about that in the Old Testament. This changes when you get to the New Testament. If [inaudible 1:00:12] in Christ, he's a new creature and he can call God Abba, Father. In fact, the Spirit prompts him to do so.

Well what about Qumran. We have some text in Qumran where God is called Father. Just a few, 4Q371 and 4Q372, what that refers to is a piece of papyrus that came out of the fourth cave at Qumran. God is addressed as Abba, Father, but not Abba, Father dearest. So what we can say is there seems to be a growing prayer practice during the very time of Jesus to begin to bear to address God as Father, and you see that at the Qumran.

Community. A contemporary of Jesus who was a famous sage, his name was Honi the Circle Drawer, he was called Honi the Circle Drawer because there is this famous story about how they were in a drought and Honi says to God's people, “If you were only pious enough, God would make it rain” and he said “I'll prove it”. He draws a circle around himself and it rains on him and no where else. Hence he was called Honi the Circle Drawer.

Now, the thing that's also interesting about Honi the Circle Drawer is that he draws an analogy between his own son's relationship with him and his relationship with God. He says this, “If you knew how to address God like my son calls me Abba, the Heavenly Abba would do something for you.” That's what he says in Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 23(b).

So, again, what looks like is happening in Jesus' own era, which is not in the Old Testament, is that people are beginning to think about addressing God as Father and so Jesus may be plugging in to a little bit of that preparatory way of thinking. But nevertheless, it is right to conclude that there is no precedent before Jesus for addressing God directly in prayer as Abba. Jesus is the first person to do that so far as we know. And that's not all, he instructs us to do it. The first word in the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic is “Abba”. Just Abba. You will see this in Luke 6. See, most of us have memorized the Lord's Prayer in which version, the Matthew version or the Lukan version. The Matthean version, and the Methian version says, “Our Father who art in Heaven”, are you with me? This is not the Lutheran version. The first word of the Lutheran version is simply, “Father”. Simply “Abba”, in fact.

We know that Jesus addressed God himself as Abba. We see this in Mark 14. Remember the Garden of Gethsemane? Jesus prays, “Abba, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine be done.” You remember this occasion? A very intimate, passionate beseeching prayer. He submits to the will of the Father but his preference would be to avoid the cross. For which human being would that not be the preference, you see. But he addresses God as Abba. It's right there in Mark 14 and he's taught his disciples to do likewise.

Now sometimes it's wrongly said that the use of father language by Jesus of God simply reflects cultural assumptions. No. It reflects the special indeed unique relationship that Jesus, the only begotten Son has with the Father. A relationship which is characterized as being unique. He is the only begotten Son of
God. See John, Chapter 1. The language of begetting in John 1 implies an inherent and integral relationship. It implies that he shares a nature with the Father. We are the adopted sons and daughters of God. And, by the way here’s a little footnote. When somebody says to you well, we’re all sons and daughters of God, this is exactly not what John 1 says. John 1 says for you to become children of God you must have a personal relationship with God. You are the creatures of God created in God’s image, but you are not the children of God except through a born again relationship with God. That’s what John 1 says. He says that there’s the only begotten Son and then there are the adopted sons and daughters who become sons and daughters how? Not by blood, not by the will of a parent but by being born again. This is how you become a son or daughter of God. So loose talk about us all being the sons and daughters of God, not so much says the author of John 1.

Yep.

Can you speak to the difference between the begotten Son of God vs. the created Son of God in terms of the word begotten.

Yeah, uh, Dan’s question has to do with Jesus as the only begotten Son as opposed to being the created Son. Well, this is a debate that you would have with Jehovah’s Witnesses for example. Sure. The word that we’re dealing with is monogenes in the Greek. It was debated [chuckle 1:06:28] in early Church history, ad infinitum, ad nauseam. The normal literal meaning of this word is just what it means in the genealogies in the Old Testament, an x begat y and y begat z. You get the picture? It’s talking about a literal, systemic connection between a parent and a child. Having said that, that got the Nicene Fathers’ knickers all in a knot because they wanted to argue that the Son had always existed just as the Father had always existed and the term “begotten” suggested there might have been a time when he was not. Do you see the theological problem here?

The proper answer to that problem is not to deny the Son’s begotteness, but to point out that time is part of the time-space continuum and before creation there was properly speaking neither space nor time. So you cannot say there was a time when the Son was not. So then you have to press the theological question back one more step.

You know, obviously these Church Fathers had way too much time on their hands. But some of the things they debated were just quite incredible. But here’s the point, the next question is was there a point in eternity when the Son was not? Or is the Trinity eternally there? Equally Orthodox Christians will come to different conclusions on that question depending on how literally they want to press the word “monogenes”. The Nicene Fathers, in their wisdom, didn’t like the idea of change happening to the God head. They advocated a concept of the immutability of God that change could not happen to God. Now, of course, that got them in big pickle with the incarnation because what is the incarnation if it doesn’t involve change to God. Not a change in character, but some kind of change.

You have these Greek philosophical notions of the immutability of a God or the impassibility of God that not only that God cannot change but God cannot feel emotions cause, etc., because he doesn’t have a body. I mean this is some of the highfalutin philosophical debate that was going on amongst the Church Fathers.

If you’re asking me personally what I think a Jewish person writing the Gospel of John meant, I think he meant what he said, which is “That Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father. Begotten, not made and therefore not a creature. But this isn’t the end of the debate because then the next question is could monogenes be a reference not to something that happened in eternity, but something that happened by
means of the virginal conception. Is the Son the only begotten of the Father because of what happened to
him in the virginal conception. The problem with that is it would suggest that he wasn’t the son before
the virginal conception and you don’t want to go there because elsewhere in the New Testament, the Son
pre-exists with the Father and helps in the act of creation.

So, bottom line, whatever only begotten means it has to have something to do with something that
happened to him in eternity before the creation of the Universe. And whatever that was, he was already
the Son before the Universe was created and, therefore, there is never a time [inaudible 1:10:50] time, tick-
tock time, space continuum time, there was never a time the Son was not. I don’t know all of the
particulars about what happened back there in eternity before the creation of the Universe and frankly,
I’m ready to take a pass on that [chuckle 1:11:08] okay?

What I know is he’s not a creature like other “made” beings. Adam is a made being, he’s fashioned out of
the earth. He’s the only begotten. He is the only person that, if you will, has a literal son-ship relationship
with God. The rest of us are only adopted sons and daughter of God.

It’s a great question though.

But here’s a question for you. We’re going to get to this when we get this afternoon to the Christological
hymns. We’re going to get to this. Here’s a question for you: Was there a point in time before which Jesus
was not or, put another way, is it appropriate to call the pre-existent Son of God, Jesus? And do you see
where I’m going with this? Was there a point in time before which the Son of God did not have a human
nature? Answer: Yes. And, therefore, there’s a point in time before which he did not deserve a human
name, didn’t have a human name. When did he get his human name? Survey says: After he became a
human being. Before that, he’s just a pre-existent Son of God.

So there’s a point in time where Jesus shows up by means of the virginal conception and is born and his
human name is, Jesus. That’s the name of a human being. If you agree there’s a point in time before which
he was not a human being, then there is a point in time before which he’s not Jesus and it’s theologically
inappropriate to call him Jesus, you call him the Son of God. That’s an interesting one and we’ll get to that
this afternoon with the Christological hymns.

As I was saying, the language of begetting implies an inherent and integral relationship, a sharing of
nature. This is exactly what Philippians 2 says, Philippians 2 says that, “The Son was equal with God and
shared in the very nature of God.” This is exactly what Philippians says and that’s exactly right.

Notice that in the Gospels, Jesus alone is depicted as addressing God as “my Father”. In fact, hear this,
even outside the Gospels the phrase “my Father” only occurs on the lips of Jesus. That’s different from
“our father”. Can you see that Jesus had a very unique relationship with God? He’s in a special way my
Father, in a way that is not true of any of the rest of us. Jesus, in the Temple, at age 12 in Luke 2:41-52 says
to his own mother, Mary, and to his step-father, if you will, Joseph, “Did I not have to be about my
Father’s business.” He’s got a relationship with God that we just don’t have. My Father.

The evidence of Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15-16 implies that Christians only began to call God “Abba”
after and because Jesus taught them to do that, and the Spirit prompted them to do that. I want to read to
you these two texts because they are very important. As you know, Paul’s letters are chronologically the
earliest documents we have in the New Testament and so they tell us a lot about the early prayer life of
the earliest Christians. Let’s hear first Galatians 4:6, Paul says: “Because you are his sons, God sent the
Spirit of his Son into our hearts, it is the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’. So you are no longer slaves,
but God’s children; and since you are his children, he’s has made you heirs.” You hear all that family
language there? What changed us into being a part of the family of God? It was the internal work of the Holy Spirit changing who we are, we are new creatures in Christ and the Spirit prompts us to pray “Abba”, Father.

Let’s look at another. Romans 8:15 and 16. Again, the word “Abba” comes into our prayer language. Here’s what Paul says, “For those who are led by the Spirit of God or the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again, rather the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to son-ship.” Did you hear that? Christ is the only begotten Son, we are the adopted sons and daughters. “The Spirit brought about your adoption to son-ship and by that Spirit we cry “Abba”, Father. The Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are children of God.” And if we are children, dear friends, we are co-heirs with Christ, Alleluia! We are in the Kingdom. We’ve got the inheritance. We’ve been given the promise, it’s power.

So, why do Christians pray to God just as Jesus did in Aramaic “Abba”? Because Christ has sent forth his Spirit into our hearts prompting us to relate to God in an intimate way like the intimacy that Son had with the Father when he walked this earth. Now that’s powerful. And if we contrast it with the way God was addressed in that time, it becomes more powerful. Do you realize that most pious Jews of Jesus’ day went out of their way not to pronounce any of the names of God? Instead of saying, “Blessed be God” they would say, “Blessed be He” or instead of saying, “Blessed be God”, they’d say, “Blessed be the Heavens”. This is why, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew you have the phrase, “The Kingdom of Heaven” instead of the “Kingdom of God”. They’re trying to avoid saying “God”. What a stark contrast that is to calling God directly “Abba” implying intimacy with the Father. This is powerful.

In early Judaism so had did they work not to mispronounce the sacred name of God, that they combined two Hebrew names for God into one so that they wouldn’t mispronounce either one. They took the consonants of Yahweh, they took the vowels of Adonai and what you get from that is Yhwhaoai [phonetic 1:18], which is not a name for God in the Bible at all. You will find it in the King James Version, Jehovah, but in fact that is a combination of two names for God and no single verse of Hebrew has this name for God. It’s a way of avoiding mispronouncing either Yahweh or Adonai. It’s a circumlocution. We don’t need [emphasis 1:19:15] any more circumlocutions, we can call God “Abba” because of Jesus. We go to the Father, through Jesus the Son who addressed him as “Abba”.

This’ll preach brothers and sisters. You have an intimate relationship with God, claim it. What all this suggests rightly, and there’s a scholar that I would recommend to you on the parables of Jesus and on this matter of Abba, he’s a very famous German scholar, all his books are in English, how nice. They’re somewhat dated now, so you’ll have to go to a good library to find them. His name is Joachim Jeremias [phonetic 1:19:57]. It looks like Jeremiah with an “s” on the end. Joachim Jeremias [phonetic 1:20:01]. He has a book simply entitled “Abba”, which talks all about this and it’s powerful. He has a wonderful book on the parables of Jesus as well.

Here’s what Jeremias says about the “Abba” language. This is eschatological language. It’s language given to those for whom God was acting in a final way as savior. “In Jesus’ eyes, being a child of God was not a gift of creation, but an eschatological gift of salvation.” Hallelujah! Did you catch that? If you’re not saved, you don’t have the relationship. Being a child of God is not a gift of creation, especially if you’re a fallen creature. It’s a gift of salvation, which gives you the right to call God “Abba”.

As Jeremiah 31:9 suggested, the relationship between God and his people had been broken and they could no longer address God as Father. I’m going to read you that verse from Jeremiah because it’s
important because just shortly thereafter, Jeremiah's the one who sees that it's necessary for us to have a new covenant written on the heart. Where's this prayer language coming from? Where's the Holy Spirit working? In the heart [emphasis 1:21] The covenant is written on the heart. It's inscribed by the Holy Spirit and it allows us to use the covenant name of God, “Abba”.

Jeremiah 31. Let’s just look at it just for a second. Jeremiah is one of those big old prophetic books. Chapter 31, verse 9. This is some of the poetry of the prophet. Listen to this: “Israel will come weeping; they will pray as I bring them back”, he’s talking about the coming of the New Covenant. “I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble.” What does this sound like? Psalm 23, absolutely. Jeremiah is reciting Psalm 23 talking about how God will bring his people back, his lost people back. “They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaiming them in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and he will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’ For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they and they will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion and they they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord.”

And it’s only two chapters after that, that we hear this, Chapter 33. I’m starting with verse 14 of Jeremiah. “‘The days are coming’, declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch”, a natzer as in Nazareth [phonetic 1:23], Nazareth. “I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line and he will do what is just and right in the land. And in those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord Our Righteous Savior.’” Then he goes on to talk about the New Covenant written on the heart that supersedes the old one.

The point of Jeremiah is that unless God starts the New Covenant, unless God goes in and rescue’s God’s people, they will not be in an intimate relationship with God any more and cannot call him as father, and that’s precisely what Jesus came to do.

Let’s turn the page to the New Testament. So much for the context and the background, let’s press on. There are some 40, 40 references to God as Father in the Paul line letters. There are some 500 uses of Phaos, the word God, to refer to God in these same letters. In the letter openings of all Paul’s letters we have the father language, and listen to how he is called. He is always called the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, because it’s that relationship that let’s us into the father relationship. He is called the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore in a derivative sense, our father through Jesus. Look at 2 Corinthians 1:3, look at Ephesians 1:3, look at Colossians 1:3. This is the language of the beginning of the letters. It’s the language of Benedictions, it’s the language of worship. You see, Paul almost never allows the language of Father to stand alone. It’s always coupled with “Our” or with the name of “Jesus”. Notice that Paul himself never calls God “My Father”. Instead he stands with his follow Christians and speaks of “Our Father” because God relates to us as the Body of Christ. God relates to us as a group. Paul speaks of our Father, we pray to our Father, Abba.

Have you noticed then, that even what seems to be private prayer is actually corporate prayer? If you address God as our Father, you are not only standing before the Almighty, you are standing with your brothers and sisters, “Our Father who art in Heaven hallowed be his name”.

Paul does not see his relationship with God the Father is categorically different from ours and, in fact, even Jesus suggests the same. You remember when he rose from the dead and spoke to Mary Magdalene.
What did he tell her to go tell the disciples? “Go tell the brothers I am ascending to our Father and our God”, says John 20. You tell them that. He’s ascending to our Father and our God. By the death and resurrection of Jesus we are now ushered into the intimate relationship with Abba and can say “Our Father”.

Notice that Paul also uses the phrase “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. He does not go around introducing his letters with “the God of Abraham”. No. He says, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” [chuckle 1:27:38]. There is a dramatic shift from the way he would have prayed as a Pharisee and the way he prays as a Christian. And, of course, the reason for the difference is his relationship with Christ.

In short, the father language is both Christologically and eschatologically focused in Paul. It’s not ecclesiastically focused, ecclesiologically focused except maybe in Ephesians. Another words, the father language comes into the discussion because of the change of relationship with God through Christ.

When we reach the fourth Gospel, we have reached the apex of father language in the New Testament for God. Get this - How many chapters in John’s Gospel? 21. There are 121 times God is called Father in 21 chapters in the fourth Gospel. Two that we can add, there are 108 times he is simply called God. There’s a lot of God language in the fourth Gospel. Bottom line, referenced to the first person in the Trinity. So, there is an enormously strong stress in this Gospel on the Son being the one sent by the Father, dependent on the Father and on the oneness of the Son and the Father, such that the one who has seen the Son and seen the Father, ‘cause he’s the spitting image of the Father. He does what the Father does, he has what the Father has, he is what the Father is, he is the agent of the Father. “He who has seen me, has seen the Father.” I am the spitting image of the Father. “He who has rejected me, has rejected the Father”.

As with so many other theological notions, the Gospel of John develops earlier nota ideas amongst Jesus’ followers about God his Father and Jesus his Son. And, what happens in the fourth Gospel is those deep theological implications are teased out. You can see more clearly the nature of the relationship of Father and Son and the nature of our relationship with the Father and the Son.

In the fourth Gospel Jesus is the Word, he’s the agent, he’s the apostle of the Father. He’s the one that Father has sent. Just as Jesus sends us, so the Father has sent Jesus. And who is it that Jesus sends when he goes back to Heaven? The Spirit. The Son is the apostle of the Father, and the Spirit is the agent or apostle of the Son, and we are the agents of the three in one. All God’s children’s [unclear 1:30:37] is agents. Secret agents for the Father.

Matthew 11:27 makes the same thing clear. Jesus says, “No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son and whoever to whom he reveals him.” You can’t get into that intimate relationship with Abba except through the Son, because he’s the only one who knows him. Matthew 11:27.

So what are the revolutionary implications of this language? Well, John 5, spits it all out.

[background music] John 8:42. “If God were your Father, you would love me [end of music 1:31:37] as I came from him.” And when we hear about the fatherhood of God and when you couple that with the language about the Son being the only begotten, it’s hard not to see one of the components of the fatherhood of God having to do with the fact that God is the life giver. If he begat the Son [chuckle 1:31:59], he is the life giver, which brings us to the point about what Jesus says he gives us. Life.
Everlasting life. A life that makes us the sons and daughters of God. A real spiritual life welling up within us which allows us to naturally, frequently, spontaneously, from the heart, pray to God as Abba, our Father.

It is not hard to see why the Church fathers tended to focus on the more exalted discussion of father and son in Paul and in the fourth Gospel. But it needs to be remembered once more that that discussion was set in motion originally by Jesus’ own distinctive Abba language. A language which he passed on to us as he did the possibility of an intimate relationship with God.

Let’s sum up. When we study the relationship of the Father and the Son, if you don’t understand this relationship, you will not understand your relationship with either the Father or the Son, because your relationship with Father and Son depends on the Son. He is the one who gave you this relationship, he is the one who sent you the Spirit so you could be in this relationship, he is the one who enables you to pray without hypocrisy. Abba, Father. We come to the Father through Jesus the Son.

Listen one more time to how Paul describes this in First Timothy. He says this, First Timothy 2, verse 3. I will stop with verse 3. Listen closely. “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved.” Hallelujah! And to come to a knowledge of the truth. Not the favorite verse of Calvinist to preach from. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human who gave himself as a ransom for everyone.” Did you hear that? “Who is the only mediator between God and human beings.” It’s not old Buddha, it’s not Vishnu, it’s not Deepak Chopra, it’s not Muhammad, it’s not Joseph Smith, it’s Jesus.

If there is a mediator who has provided us with the one necessary and sufficient sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world, we should not look for another and we do not need another. God, in his wisdom made it one stop shopping in Jesus. He is the one mediator between God and human kind who can usher us into that relationship. [music starting 1:35] so that we may call the Father, “Abba”.
Chapter 13

Parables (part 2)

Let’s reflect again about the parable. Let me tell you a story. I had just finished teaching in Thailand and Estonia and I was taking the train to St. Petersburg and on to Moscow.

My, om, former student, who is Dean of Moscow Evangelical Seminary, was meeting me in St. Petersburg but they put me in a car with the Cossacks, smoking, drinking, singing all night, you know, that sort of thing and, om, so I asked for a separate car and I got a separate car and so we got to the border of Russia and, uh, these huge women who AK47s got on the train and handed me this entry card for Russia, all in Cyrillic.

Now, I don’t know Cyrillic. She didn’t know any English. I tried my German. I tried my French. Nothing was working. She just pointed to the card and wanted me to fill it out, you know. So I did.

I put my name down and I put down the names of several of my favorite baseball players and, you know, I just made sure I filled in all the slots and signed it at the bottom and this satisfied her but unbeknownst to me when I had been in Thailand, I, I got some kind of terrible flu and high fever and about the time we crossed the Russian border, I was running about 103, 104, you know.

I was just sweating to the oldies, so I got to St. Petersburg, I got off the train. It was -18 degrees with the wind chill. This is February. It went down to about -25. And there’s my friend, Sasha on the platform and I said, “[Straswudga][02:40], Sasha. I am very sick.”

The reason I met him in St. Petersburg was ‘cause we wanted to go to the Hermitage. I’d always wanted to go to this incredible museum with this painting, among other things in it. So he was determined to take me, sick or not, ‘cause then we had to go onto Moscow. We went to the Hermitage with me with this raging fever.

I really was sick and we went around a part of the museum and when we came to this painting, which was like bigger than 10 billboards, I just sat down in a chair like this one across from this painting and I said, “Sasha, you should go see the things that you really wanna see in this museum. I need to just rest.”

And what happened to me, while I was sitting there about 2 hours, resting, I was reflecting on this painting and I was reflecting on my life and I remembered back at a time in 1971 when I was…It was nighttime and I was walking across the campus at Carolina and it was dark. It was a quad I was walking across.

There was just nobody to be seen anywhere and I heard my name called…Just the name Ben, which, of course, in Hebrew, means son. Just Ben. This was at a point in time when I, I really had wandered pretty far away from the church.

I mean, the Vietnam War was raging and all kinds of things were going on and the church was part of the problem, not part of the solution, as far as I was concerned. It was the beginning of God really calling me to a, a personal embracing of the Christian faith for myself. He called me by name.
And I always thought about this story, the story of the prodigal son, the prodigal Ben, ‘cause you see, Ben means son. The line in that parable I love the most is this line. “And when he had come to his right mind, he thought, I will go home.” Now, that’s powerful.

He didn’t get there, because of evangelism or witnessing. He didn’t get there, because he had read the four spiritual laws or his favorite Bible verse. It was just that God brought him to a moment of awareness and called him home.

He realized he had really screwed up and so he rehearses this little speech. ‘Okay, I’ve messed up so bad that I can’t be a member of the household anymore. I’ll just ask for a job as a slave. I mean, I’ve spent all my inheritance. I’ve mass disenfranchised my family and they will have disenfranchised me,’ he assumes. ‘So I’ll just go home and ask for a job on the farm.’

And, then, what happens is that, even when he is far off, his father has been looking for him for so long that when he gets a glimpse of him, he comes running. Now, what are we supposed to get out that? If there is even a glimmer of turning in your life, the Lord is right there to receive you. If there’s even a little spark of a metanoia, a turning around or repentance, God is right there.

And when I look at this painting…I mean, for me, this painting is very emotional. I look at these hands… Now, the hands are, you know, this is a basketball player’s hands. He’s got big hands. The hands are not really in proportion to the rest of the man. And if you look at it, first of all, he’s bald. He shaved his head in repentance.

And look what he’s doing. He’s leaning into his father’s chest like a child. And his father is full attention on him, regardless of the consequences or the criticisms that come with it.

In the gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd and the sheep know my voice. I call them by name. I call them by name.”

In the story of Mary Magdalene, what happens? She’s at the tomb. She hears Jesus’ voice but she doesn’t recognize it until what? Until he called her by name.

Well, I think back to that night in 1971 when he called me by name and that was when I came to my right mind and turned around. The parables portray a God who’s not able to be put into this pigeon hole or that pigeon hole…A large merciful, gracious God, ready forgive…A God who is ready to justify, even the unjustifiable person like the sinner…A God who does unlikely, surprising and shocking things.

And we see this in the church, don’t we? Somebody who was a notorious sinner in town is converted and has this incredibly outsized testimony and the saints of the church who have all their Sunday school pins and etc., and have never done anything dramatically wrong like that, you know, they’re a little put out by the fact that the pastor is giving this person prime time air space in the worship service to give his testimony and they’re going, ‘Well, yeah, I suppose if I had done 40 bad things, I could have a dramatic testimony, too.’

Well, you know, they’re acting just like the elder brother and this parable. Exactly…Exactly like the older brother, as if they had a sense of entitlement. Have you ever run across that in the church? People who have a sense of entitlement? They really didn’t get the memo on grace. They think they’ve done their time here. They should be deserving.

These parables are intended to tease your mind into the act of thought about God. Let’s deal with a couple more that’ll help us understand.
Let's hear the Parable of the Ten Talents. This is Luke 19. “And while they were listening to this, Jesus went on to tell a parable because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear. ‘At once,’ he said, ‘a man of noble worth went off to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and he gave them ten minas.’”

A mina is three months wages. This is a different form of the parable of the talents. We actually have two forms of this and there’s no reason why Jesus couldn’t have told it in various different ways. After all, it’s fiction.

He said, “Put this money to work until I come back.” ‘But his subjects hated this king and sent allegation for him to say, “We don’t want you to be our king.” He was made king, however, and he returned home and then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.’

‘The first one came and said, “Sir, your mina has earned 10 more.” “Well done, good servant,” the master replied. “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.”

Ten cities. Wow.

‘The second came and said, “Sir, your mina has earned five more,” and his master answered, “You take charge of five cities.” Then another servant came and said, “Sir, here is your mina. I have kept it laid aside in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you. You’re a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and you reaped what you did not sow,” and his master replied, “I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant. You know, did you, that I am a hard man taking out what I did not put in and reaping what I did not sow? Why, then, didn’t you put my money on deposit so that when I came back, at least I could’ve collected it with interest?”

‘Then he said to those standing by, “Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.” “Sir,” they said, “he already has ten,” he replied. “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given but as for those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away, but those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here to me and kill them in front of me.”

A little different than the Parable of the Ten Talents, isn’t it? Let’s talk about this parable. What’s it about? Who’s this king that goes away into a far country and then comes back for the moment of accountability? What do you think? It’s not Nero. No.

I think Jesus is talking about himself. And he’s talking about the accountability required of his servants. See, a talent was actually a coin. It is the word from which we get the word ‘talent’ but a talent was actually originally a weight of gold and then it was a coin. So both this parable and the Parable of the Talents is the parable about coins, about what you do with what you have. It’s about what you do with what you have.

George Buttrick says about this parable, “A coin has two sides. On one side, it says, ‘ability’ and on the other side, it says, ‘responsibility’.”

This parable is not about how much you have and it’s certainly not an endorsement of the prosperity gospel. To those who have, more shall be given. This is about accountability for what we do with what we have.

The man with one mina is not expected to have produced the results of the man with ten minas. The man with five minas is not expected to have produced the same results as the man with ten minas. To whom
each is given, responsibility is given that much. To whom more is given, more is required. Let’s think about this for a minute. Okay?

Suppose I were to put three glasses out here on the table. One is four ounce glass. One is an eight ounce glass and one is a twelve ounce glass and I were to fill each of these three glasses with water all the way to the rim. Which of these three glasses is full? All three of them. And if I were to be held accountable for not spilling any of them, I would be held accountable for not spilling twelve ounces, if the twelve ounce glass was given to me and only eight ounces if the eight ounce glass was given to me and only four ounces if the four ounce glass was given to me.

The parable says that the king decided how much to give each one. It didn’t happen because all three servants came and bid on an opportunity to have more. It did not come because somebody took a gift inventory and said, ‘You know, I’d like this spiritual gift. I think I’ll pray for it.’ No, the determination of ability and responsibility came from outside of the servants.

They were simply the servants and they were given what they were given. Now, there’s another dimension to this that you need to understand here. God doesn’t just expect you to mark time with what he has given you. He expects a return even to the person who is only given one talent or mina. He expects a return on his investment.

Now this is not because Jesus wants us to think about our relationship with God and purely mercantile terms. He’s not talking about economics. He’s talking about stewardship of what God has given you.

I’ve actually read some books where they tried to read the parables as if they were actually about eight, First Century Economics. Not so much. No. They’re not about that kind of investment. They’re about the kind of investment that God makes in human beings. To whom more is given, more is most certainly required.

But here’s the other thing. I like what George Buttrick says about this. ‘You can tell the character of a person by what they do when they think no one is watching.’ Let’s say that one more time. ‘You can tell the character of a person by what they do when they think nobody is watching.’

Of course, this is silly as Christians, ‘cause we know God is always watching. This is silly. Why would we not do something in public because other human beings are watching that we would do in private because only God is watching? Now think about that for a minute.

In this story, the king has gone away into a far country. He’s gone for quite a while. He’s not micromanaging. Some people think that God micromanages the lives of his children. Well, you know, that’s part of growing up. It’s called maturing in the faith. The more time goes on, the less God needs to micromanage you, and the more he entrusts you with more and more adult responsibility.

Sometimes we ask ourselves, ‘Well, why hasn’t God given me more to do?’ Maybe he wants to see if you’re going to be faithful in little first. Now the thing that’s also interesting about this parable is, of course, that this parable is not an exact analogy between Jesus and his relationship with his servants now is it? Because this king is what? He’s a hard master. He is a slave driver and at the end, he is a wicked and vengeful king who says, ‘Alright, let’s just slaughter all of my enemies.’

You need to be careful when you are trying to discover the point of analogy between the character of God and the character in some parable. You need to be careful how you look at that. The principle of the parable is that when there is an investment made in you, it’s certainly true that God expects a return and
it would be a terrible mistake for any of us to compare ourselves to anybody else. We’re not supposed to be looking horizontal about this.

Let’s consider another parable about stewardship. Mark 12. Yes, the Parable of the Tenants. That is the one I want. So we go for the Parable of the Talents to the Parable of the Tenants. ‘Jesus then began to speak to them in parables and he said, “A man planted a church called the Vineyard.”’ Just seeing if you’re still awake after lunch.

‘A man planted a vineyard and he put a wall around it and he dug a pit for the wine press and he built a watch tower. He then rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. At harvest time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him and they beat him and they sent him away empty-handed.

He then sent another servant to them. They struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another one and that one, they killed. And he sent many others. Some of them, they beat. Others, they killed. At the end, he had only left one to send, his only son, whom he loved.”

By the way, the phrase, ‘beloved son,’ normally meant in that culture, ‘the only son,’ ‘the unique son,’ ‘the one and the kind, of a kind son.’ Remember the story of Abraham and Isaac? ‘Take your son, your beloved son.’ You could just as well have read the Hebrew as ‘take your son, your only son.’

‘He sent another one. That one, he killed. He had only left one to send, his son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all saying, “They will respect my son.” The tenants said to one another, “Hey, this is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and then we can claim the inheritance.” So they took him and they killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and he will kill those tenants and he will give the vineyard to others. Haven’t you read the passage of scripture, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?” The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes and then the chief priests and the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them, yet they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away.’

Now let’s think about this one for a minute. The parable begins with a dramatic symbolic image from Isaiah. Remember Isaiah?

Let’s consider Isaiah 5. Not Isaiah 6, this time, but Isaiah 5. “The Song of the Vineyard. ‘I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one has a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones. He planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a wine press as well.’

‘And then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.’ ‘Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my min-, vineyard than I have done for it? When I look for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I’m gonna do to my vineyard.’

‘I’ll take away its hedge and it’ll be destroyed. I’ll break down its wall and it will be trampled. I’ll make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, briers and thorns and thistles will grow there. And I will command the clouds never to rain on it again.’ For the vineyard of the Lord almighty is the house of Israel and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. What he looked for from his vineyard was justice. What he saw was bloodshed. He looked for righteousness. What he heard was cries of distress.”

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The vineyard is an image of God’s people going all the way back to the prophetic literature. And the stewards of servants in the vineyard are, of course, images of the leaders of God’s people.

So you, when you get to the end of the parable in Mark 12, what it, does it tell us? It tells us very clearly that they knew…The authorities knew he was thinking against them, because of their treatment of whom? Prophets, teachers, wise men, sages who came to the authorities again and again and said repent, repent or God will judge you.

Now this parable about the vineyard is a parable about repentance or the lack thereof. God kept on sending his messengers to his vineyard. He kept on sending prophets and teachers and kings and priests and sages to his people and they either ignored them or abused them.

Look at the history of the prophets. Jeremiah got off lightly. He was just thrown down a well. Listen. Listen to what the Book of Hebrews says about what happened.

In the Hall of Faith Chapter in Hebrews 11, listen to the story. I’m gonna start with Verse 32. “And what more can I say. I don’t have time to tell you about Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and the prophets who, through faith, conquered kingdoms, administered justice, gained what they promised, shut the mouth of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.” He’s thinking of Elijah.

“There were others so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were sawed into. They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins destitute, persecuted, mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”

Did you wonder why John was out in the desert? Because any time he got to civilization, he was a threat to any authority he came near. And in the end, Herod beheaded him. They were all commended for their faith yet none of them received what had been promised but God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

God sent one prophet, another, a teacher, a sage, a priest, but the Jewish authorities did not want to know. So by the time we get to John the Baptist and Jesus, the message for the Jewish authorities is grim. The son has come. Are they going to treat him any better than any of the rest of the messengers? No. They’re going to treat him worse.

It says that they killed him and they threw him outside the vineyard. Now, this is directly connected to what happens to the temple and the temple authorities.

Jesus connects the dots in Mark 13. What does he say? This temple is going down for the count. And when the temple goes down, the priesthood goes down. The priestly authorities go down. These parables are about the kingdom coming and Jesus going.

These parables are about immediate circumstances in the ministry of Jesus and the way Jesus was and would be treated. They are social commentary on his own day…Powerful social commentary on his own day.

Think again of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, if you will. We’ve told you about Samaritans but what I would want you to notice most about it now is that the person who prompted this parable was whom?
Who asked Jesus, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ Yes. A lawyer…An expert in the Torah. And when anybody asked the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ The real question is, ‘Who is not my neighbor? What’s the limitations?’

He was looking for a loophole. He asked the wrong man. This was the man who said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” which by the way is not in the Old Testament. One of the radically new teachings of Jesus was ‘love your enemies.’ The heart of the law may be loving God and neighbor with whole heart but Jesus was going an extra furlong when he said, ‘love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.’

This parable climaxes in an unacceptable way for a Torah scholar, a Bible expert, because he worked for the priests and the Levites. So he would have been very disappointed with the story that had the priests and Levites passing by on the other side of the road. They were his spiritual heroes, they were his compadres that he worked with. And he would have been really incensed to discover that the person who did the right Jewish thing for the Jewish man lying on the side of the road was a Samaritan. A dirty rotten Samaritan.

So when you get to the end of the parable, it’s not enough that we hear that the Samaritan did a good turn daily and helped this Jew on the way to healing. At the end of the parable, Jesus asks the question. A lawyer had asked, “Who, then, is my neighbor?” Jesus asked, “Which of these persons, then, must behave like a neighbor to the man lying on the side of the road?” And through gritted teeth, the lawyer says, “Well, I guess it was the Samaritan. Phew! Phew! [making spitting sounds] Samaritan.”

And then Jesus really took the knife and stuck it in and said, “Go be like the Samaritan.”

Friends, these are not nice little innocuous stories that we tell our children at bedtime so they will sleep better. These are social commentary on how the kingdom of God is breaking into our midst and breaking down the barriers between Jew and Gentile and Samaritan and male and female and old and young. To build a kingdom with all kinds of people that are, will come to the messy [ending][34:16] banquet.

It’s a vision that the earliest followers of Jesus got another glimpse of at Pentecost. Think about Pentecost for a minute. What happened at Pentecost? You have Jews from all over the world coming to Jerusalem and God-fearers and Proselytes.

Now, it’s not a story about a bunch of Pagans coming to Jerusalem and being saved. It’s a story about Jews, both those who are natives to the holy land and those who came from the Diaspora to the celebration of the Pentecost Feast, plus some gentiles who were God-fearers who attended the synagogue or Proselytes on the way to becoming Jews.

But what the story says, in essence, is that the kingdom is coming and when the Spirit is poured out, even the boundaries of language fall, so that all manner of persons can come to know Jesus Christ and be saved. Still, today, we have not lived up to the full measure of the radical nature of this kingdom teaching, whether it comes to us in the form of sermon by Peter or a parable by Jesus, the message is the same. Prejudice, hatred, racism will not do. It’s not what the kingdom’s about.

But it also comes with a minatory warning, doesn’t it? If they do this to the Master, and crucify him on Golgotha, what should the disciples expect? Jesus did not say, ‘Take up your Bibles and follow me.’ He said, ‘Take up your cross and follow me. If anyone would come after me, let them take up your cross and follow me.’
Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Jesus bid you come, he bid you come and die.” In principle, you have signed over your life to the Lord when you came to the Lord. Why would you expect the world to treat you any better than he was treated?

These parables are powerful. In their original contexts, they were often offensive. I like to say about ministers, they need to have a capacity to comfort the afflicted but they’d better also have a capacity to afflict the comfortable, because Jesus’ parables are not Sesame Street tales. They often afflict the comfortable and make them profoundly uncomfortable.

One of the most famous sermons ever preached in America was preached by Jonathan Edwards. Its title was Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. If you’ve not read this sermon, then you need to read it. It’s a barn burner. It’s a real corker.

I never heard a sermon like this growing up in the Methodist church. Shoot, I never heard a sermon [on] hell growing up in the Methodist church. I heard a lot of other kind of stuff and a lot of it nonsense but I didn’t hear that.

My mother grew up in the Southern Baptist church. She did hear some hell fire sermons. She said, as a little girl, she remembers them vividly because they made the hair on the back of her neck raise up. You know?

In the sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God…when Jonathan Edwards got going and you need to understand, he was not a charismatic speaker, so you gotta picture this man with thick glasses, a long frock coat, a powdered wig, a manuscript this tall, handwritten, being held like this in front of his face and he’s reading this sermon to his congregation.

And on the platform is one of his deacons and he gets to the bit about the spider dangling over the pit of hell and the deacon comes unglued. The deacon gets the point of the sermon. He comes over and grabs Mr. Edwards by the frock coat and says, “Mr. Edwards, Mr. Edwards, I pray thee remember the mercies of God!” Yeah. He came unglued. Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.

These parables are full of both justice and mercy… Both righteousness and compassion. Now you know, we like the nice soft squishy bits...Not so much the righteousness and justice bits.

But let me say to you now that if you have concern or compassion for the oppressed, you will have a concern for righteousness and justice. It has been said, and I agree with this, that one of the essential requirements for doing ministry is the capacity for righteous anger. I mean, sin is destroying our world. Why is it that we would be complacent about that?

Sin is destroying human lives of people we love…Friends, family. Why is it that we would not be rightfully indignant as God is about that? These parables are full of anger at sin but full of love for the sinner. You see, we need to learn how to do what Jesus did, to have that balance of justice and mercy…That balance of righteousness and compassion. It’s a hard balance to strike.
We need to move on to another kind of literature. We could spend a lot more time on some of the 37 Parables, but we’re not going to do that. What we’re going to do now is move on to Paul’s letters and rhetoric. But, in order to get there, we need a little tune-up on the context of Paul.

Here’s Paul, early images, later images of Paul. A little bit about the iconography: when you’re looking at icons, blue is the color of purity. This is why you always see the Virgin Mary in this color blue. This is the symbol of purity, and what you notice about this, is that the purity is on the inside garment, not the outside garment. So, what kind of purity are we talking about? Internal purity.

Now, the second thing you notice is this big, frontal lobe here. Now we, today, might think of that as, “Oh, that means he was a brainiac. He was really intelligent.” No. In the ancient world, this was a symbol of someone who was wise, a person who’s follically challenged, wise.

Then, normally, in the images of Paul, he’s holding something. Here’s a papyrus scroll. Here’s another one over here. This is a sign that he’s in the ten percent of the population that’s literate, can read and write. These are some of the images we have of Paul, both ancient and modern.

Who is Paul? What’s his story? Well, Paul was a teacher. He was a pharisee. He was also a prophet. He was also an apostle. During the course of his life, he went through a whole pile of different religious roles. He even played Clint Eastwood, dragging Christians off to what he thought was justice in Jerusalem, as well. He was a missionary. He was many things.

Let’s talk about the case of characters of the first missionary journey. The first missionary journey is a church-sponsored mission, by the church in Antioch. You will remember what happened. Paul was too hot to handle and too cold to hold, so the Jerusalem church sent him home to Cilicia, after his conversion, right? He was a hot potato.

So, he was sent home to Cilicia, Tarsus, his home town. And who came and got him? It was Barnabas. Barnabas reclaimed him, and brought him to Antioch, where they had a teaching and preaching mission. So, the sending church was the church in Antioch, for the first missionary journey.

Let’s talk about Barnabas for a minute. His real name was Josef. His name was changed to a nickname. Barnabas, Abas. What does Aba mean? Well, if you’re Barnabas, you are the son of the father. Only this is Barnabas. It means, Son of Encouragement, or possibly, Son of Prayer, or maybe just Son of the Father. He’s a Levite. He’s a of a Levitical tribe. He’s a convert from Cyprus, and he belonged to the team of 70 selected disciples of Jesus, according to one tradition. I’m not so sure about that.

What we know about him, however, is that he sold his land to help the poor. Go back and read Acts 5 and 6. By tradition, we are told that he was stoned to death by Jews in Salamis, on his native island of Cyprus, in about A.D. 600. So, that’s kind of the full arc of his story, and we hear more in Acts about their journey.

The third person on the first missionary journey is John Paul. A lot of different images, my personal favorite is, kind of, this one. The young man, nicely coiffed. Here’s the interesting thing. Now, look at his robe. Where is the blue robe? Inside or outside? Outside. Does he have a large frontal lobe, or does he
have more hair than Paul? He’s got more hair than Paul, in this drawing. So, what are we to think? Not as wise, nor as pure, as some of the other saints, according to this image.

Mark’s a Roman name. It’s not a Jewish name. His Jewish name is John, hence, John and Mark. Take your pick, or both. His mother, of the house in Jerusalem, where Christians met, Acts 12. You will remember the famous story about Peter knocking on the door, and road of the servant, and all of that sort of thing. Now, what you need to know about Mark is, he is a kinsman, a cousin of some kind, of Barnabas. And, of course, he later develops an important relationship with Peter. Peter in First Peter 15:13 calls Mark, “my son.” My son. I think it’s probably the case, that that man who runs away naked in the garden of Gethsemane was Mark.

It’s kind of an Alfred Hitchcock motif. Remember how Alfred Hitchcock would put himself into his movies? It would be about a five-second cameo, while he was walking across the street, holding a bass fiddle, or something. This was actually a common motif in ancient documents, that you would put yourself into the story, if you were in the story, in some small way. And I think that young man who ran away, half-naked, was probably Mark.

Peter, however, not Paul, is his mentor, and Barnabas is his cousin. So, by tradition, Mark is the person, of course, who wrote the first Gospel, under the guidance, tutelage and testimony of Timothy. Something else we know about Mark, is according to Second Corinthians 4:11, he’s with Timothy in Ephesus. Now, why is that important? It appears that after the blowup, before the second missionary journey, there was a rapprochement, or reconciliation between Mark and the Pauline Circle. So, it ended happily. It didn’t end like Desperate Housewives, okay?

According to Colossians 4:10 and Philemon verse 24, he was in, it was Paul in Rome, during the first imprisonment, as well. According to tradition, Mark was martyred in A.D. 68 in Alexandria. One of the things that there is a constant refrain about, is that almost all the major apostles were killed off, during the 60’s, if they had not already been dead. Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Luke, et cetera. According to tradition, most of them were killed in the 60’s.

So, here’s the first missionary journey. We’re leaving Antioch. We’re going this way, on the outbound journey. We’re going to Barnabas’ island of Cyprus. We’re going to Salamis, we’re taking the Roman Road around to Paphos, the capital. Then we’re sailing from there up to Penfilia, and we are briefly in Pamphylia, near Perga. Then we’re going for a really long walk through some very mountainous territory, all the way up to Pisidian Antioch. I will explain why in a minute.

Now, Acts 13, 1 through 3 says, “Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria, were Barnabas, Simeon, called Niger, the black man, Lucius from Syreny, Manine, the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas, and Saul.

One day as these men were worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit, said, “Dedicate Barnabas and Saul, for the special work I have for them.” So, after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them, and sent them on their way.

They’re off from Antioch. Barnabas, Saul, John Mark planned the voyage from Antioch. The eldest member of this group is Barnabas, so he plans the first stop. Again, notice it’s not the church in Jerusalem that does this. Who is it? It’s the church at Antioch that sends this mission off.

Now, the Antioch we’re talking about is Syrian Antioch. There are, in fact, eight Antiochs in ancient Turkey. This is Antioch on the Orontes, the far eastern one, on the border of Syria. This was the capital of
the ancient Syrian empire. It’s three hundred miles north, northwest of Jerusalem. And here it is, today. Sparing no expense, you get to see it today. And let me tell you right now, it is a much tinier city than it was in Paul’s day.

In Paul’s day, the estimation is, this was a town of three hundred to four hundred thousand people. Today, maybe 30,000 or 40,000.

Participant: Where would the size have ranked with other cities at that point?

It’s a big city. But it would not be one of the big five. The big five would be Rome, Pergamon, Ephesus, Alexandria, and, okay what’s the other one? Oh, Damascus. Big, but not megalopolis. The reason it was so big is because it was crucial to controlling that whole region. So, it was the capital area for the Romans.

What do we have there today? We have remains of ancient Syrian Antioch. Really, there’s not a lot to see. This is the name of the town today, in Turkey, Antioch. It’s been excavated since the 1930’s. There only thing there, really, to see are two things. There’s the Church of Peter and Paul, carved out of a cliff, it’s a cliff church. It’s a cave church. And there’s some Roman ruins, Aqueduct, Hippodrome. There’s also the Monastery of Simon Stylites, the man who sat up on a pole to demonstrate his piety. Here’s a coin of Antiochus Number 13, the last king of Syria, deposed in 64 B.C., before this part of Syria became part of the Roman Empire.

Here’s the church I’m talking about. You can see it’s carved right out of the rock. This church goes back to, probably the Fourth, or early Fifth Century. It was a cave church, where the Christians met. And then, when Christianity became a licit religion, they built this facing. You know, they had been meeting in a cave, now they’re public, so they have this facing here.

This city was important in Paul’s day, because it was a huge city, in terms of the Jewish colony there. There was a very large population of Jews in Antioch. And, this is one of the reasons why the Judaizers come to Antioch and say to Peter and Paul, “Stop eating with Gentiles. You’re offending all the Jews in town.” You see? So, they were concerned about the witness to the Jews.

Now, we’re going to look at the road, what’s left of it. This is the road from Antioch down to the port, that Paul and Barnabas would have taken. They went down to the seaport of Cilicia, which was the port city for Antioch, and here’s Cilicia today. Only thing left is a little bit of the pier, or the jetty there. But you can get a sense of the coastline, where they would have taken off to go to Cyprus.

And then, they would have gotten in a boat much like this. Not the most stable craft to sail in. Let me put it that way. If you look in the upper left-hand quadrant, that’s actually a First Century mosaic of the kind of boats that we’re talking about. We’re not talking about the giant grain freighters. We’re not talking about a little rowboat, we’re talking about a sailing boat. So, it would have had one, or possibly two sails. Only three oars on each side. That means that you can’t have more than, possibly, six slaves rowing, or maybe even just three, depending on how wide the boat is. It couldn’t have carried more than five or six passengers, max. So, this is a tiny boat in a very big body of water.

Now, here’s some models of First Century boats that Paul would have sailed in. Here’s a single-sail boat, here. You can see the kind of structure it would be. It’s so of a crescent moon shape. And there’s another one, with the prow that’s notably large. This is the way the Greek boats were, with a big prow like that. To give you an image, a mental image of what we’re talking about here.

They went to Cyprus. Cyprus was a Roman province, just like Judea was. It had it’s own government, it had it’s own proconsul, like Pilate was the proconsul of Judea. The most important cities were on the south
coast, not the north. So, they would sail around this way, from Antioch. And they’d land here, and then come around by the road, all the way to here, Paphos, from which they were going to go to Turkey, in due course.

Now, when they get to Salamis, they go to the Jewish synagogue, they preach the Word of God, John Mark is with them, kind of, as an assistant. He’s not doing the preaching. Here’s Salamis today. This is what it looks like now. There is still a Roman forum, there was a very large Jewish population there, by the end of the First Century A.D. However, the Jews were expelled by Hadrian, because of a rumor that they had killed 240,000 Gentiles. I don’t think they killed 240,000 Gentiles on the Island of Cyprus. I’m thinking there weren’t 240,000 Gentiles on the Island of Cyprus. But, you see, I mean, these are the typical hyperbolic reports you have about murder and killing in antiquity, when we’re talking about these kinds of things.

Now, this is what you can see, now. You’ve got a proper Odion, Roman theatre, the half-moon there. You can see the seats here. One of the interesting things about these seats is, that you actually have people’s names carved in, and so they have their own private box seats. You know, the Junea family here, God-fearers sitting here. And yes, it was segregated. The Jews had to sit on one side of the theatre, and you, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

This was the hypocaust. In other words, this was the Roman baths. There are three parts to the Roman baths. There is the frigidarium, the tepidarium, and the caldarium; the cooler waters, the lukewarm waters, from which we get the word tepid, and the caldarium. You can imagine that that’s the hot springs waters.

The way that the Romans did this, with these baths, is really quite fascinating. These are bricks, and what they would do is, these are tiles on the top of the floor. You’re sitting around the rim of the room, here. They would boil water and heat it up, and then the bricks would heat up, and the steam would come up through the tiles, into the room. And you would just sit there and sweat. That’s the caldarium. This is the way you purified yourself in a place like Salamis. But any Roman city would have been like this, Corinth, Philippi, you name it.

This is a mile marker. It’s amazing to me they found a First Century Roman mile marker, but there you have it, telling you, “Okay, Paphos this way, umpteen miles to go. We hear that they preached, and then they headed to the other end of the southern part of the island. They went to Paphos.

Let’s do the reckoning. It’s a 115-mile walk, best case scenario. You skip that little peninsula, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, 115 miles in six days. How’s your walking shoes? It’s kind of tough, isn’t it?

So, it’s Salamis to Tremithousa, is 18, the city, another 24; 24, 16, 22, 11. The last day’s a piece of cake, only 11 miles to walk. These people were tough. Not a lot of flab on these people, okay? These people were tough. This is Paphos, near the Roman capital of Cyprus, and here’s some of the archeological work that’s being done there. They reached Paphos, they met a Jewish sorcerer, named Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus. What are the chances?

This sorcerer had attached himself to a governor named Sergius Paulus. Now, here’s what’s interesting about this story. There’s two interesting things about this. Point Number One: this is where in the story in Acts that Saul’s name changes. I think it’s changed for missionary purposes. You see, the Roman Latin equivalent of Paul’s name would be Paulos. Greek equivalent, too.
Okay, time for a little laugh here. Here’s the Hebrew named Saul. He’s named after the king, right? The Greek literal way to go would be to make his Greek name Saulos, but you know what’s wrong with that? That Greek word means to walk like a prostitute. You don’t want that name.

So, better to go to another Greek name, which is Paulos. But you know what that means? That means “shorty.” So, you know, I like to say that some of these stories and acts are about “Get Shorty,” you know? Paulos, it means “short.” That’s the Greek name.

So, when he meets the governor of Cyprus Sergius Paulus, when he meets him he says, “Well, doggone, we’ve got the same name. How about that? Hail fellow, well met, Paulus. Paulus, this is great.” And he’s well-received. He’s so well-received that he must have gotten a letter of recommendation from this governor. And do you know why I say that? If you go to Pisidian Antioch today, what you discover is that the family of Sergius Paulus owned about half the town.

You want to know why he went all the way to Pisidian Antioch? Two reasons: Paul’s a Roman citizen. He has a letter of recommendation from a Roman governor to go Pisidian Antioch and preach. This is good. Pisidian Antioch, also a Roman colony city. So, there’s this connection. And this is the point in the story where we hear Saul was also called Paul. His name change does not come at the conversion story. It doesn’t come in Acts 9. It comes in Acts 13. It has nothing to do with his conversion. It has to do with his calling and his mission to Gentiles.

Then Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked the sorcerer Bar-Jesus in the eye, and said, “You son of the devil.” You notice what he’s doing here. The guy’s name is Bar-Jesus, but he calls him Bar-devil. Right? “You son of the devil, full of every sort of trickery and villainy, in the name of all that is good, will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord?”

“And now the Lord has laid his hands in punishment, and you have just been struck blind.” Instantly, he fogs up. And when the governor saw what had happened, he believed, and was astonished at what he’d learned about the Lord.

Sergius Paulus, the Roman Proconsul, began to believe, after Saul rebuked the evil sorcerer, Elemus, a.k.a. Bar-Jesus. From now on in the narrative in Act, he’s going to be called Paul. It’s my suggestion that it is Sergius Paulus himself, who encourages them to go to Antioch in the Province of Pisidia, where he had access to some property, and would have had a letter of recommendation to do so.

Now, most of the area Paul visited was referred to by the Romans as the southern province of Galatia. This is the important part. We don’t have any letters from Paul to Cyprus. In fact, we don’t have any letters of Paul, from during the first missionary journey, which was somewhere around 49, 50. The very earliest letters we have from Paul are probably Galatians, and possibly First and Second Thessalonians. These were written between the first and second missionary journeys. So, no letters before or during the first missionary journey.

Acts 13:13 says, “Now Paul and those with him left Paphos by ship for Pamphylia, landed at the port town of Perga, up the coast, heading inland. Here’s the map, give you a little picture here. Here again is Antioch, here is Cyprus, this is where they’re going to land, and look where they’re going to go. They’re going to go all the way up into here. The central mountain region of Turkey. Over here, is Paul’s hometown, near the coast, Tarsus, a good ways from Antioch. You have to go through the Cilician Gates to get there. So, that gives you a little bit of a picture of where they are going.
Here’s a better map, actually, of the ancient and modern cities. Now, this central region, from here down is called Galatia. The problem that you have in dealing with commentaries on Galatians is, that later, the Province of Galatia, the region was what we would call redistricted. And the word Galatia was used to refer to the area up here.

So you will, if you read commentaries on Galatians, some of the scholars are saying, uh, he must have written Galatians after his second missionary journey, when he went further north in Turkey. I’m saying no, it’s just these cities down here that he went to, on his first missionary journey, and they were a part of Galatia.

Pisidian Antioch was in a border region. It was on the border between Phrygia and Galatia. So, the region, that border region, had a particularly spatial name, Galactic Frigea. It sounds very cold. Galactic Frigea. Pisidian Antioch and Galactic Frigea.

Here’s yet another way of looking at what we’re talking about here. A map that shows you Phrygia, and Lycaonia, as well as Galatia.

Alright. Now, the first place he goes is Perga, on the coast. Yet another Roman city, with a stadium and a theatre, a monumental arch, a huge agora. Paul’s missionary strategy is urban. It’s not rural. The only time he’s rural is when he’s either running away, to the next city, or between towns. He’s not interested in being in rural areas. He wants to fish with a large net. He wants to reach urban people.

Here’s what Perga looks like today. You can still see the ruins of the theatre, in the background, and the stadium here, the long hippodrome is right there, in front of you. So, there’s still plenty to see in Perga. This is the agora, this is the marketplace where Paul would have talked. The first place he would go is to the public place, where people would be debating philosophy, or talking about important issues of the day.

An even better picture. Now, this is interesting. If you look here, you see these troughs here, that look like troughs down the middle here? This, at first blush, people thought, “Well, this must be where you tie up your horse, to drink from.” No, you see, the problem is, they didn’t have enough cisterns. So, these are small cisterns, so that you could wash the tiles, wash the house, keep your property clean, keep your business shiny on the front and inside. These are places where you have water. And, it’s also where you’d go to wash. People would go wash publicly in such places.

Eighty thousand people lived in Perga, when Paul got there. So, a good-sized city. Here’s some of the other ruins in Perga that you can see. Now, over here on the right, you can see they had a water problem. How do you know? That’s an aqueduct. So where were they getting their water? From the mountains. They were carting that water all the way down off the mountains, in order to have a city closer to the sea coast that was on flat land. This is a constant problem. You’re going to see it in Pisidian Antioch. They needed water.

So, there John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. This is where the falling out took place. This is where John Mark goes home, and Barnabas and Paul go on to Pisidian Antioch. Now, this is the mountains Paul and Barnabas went over to get to Pisidian Antioch. Are you with me now? And, no, they didn’t have any burka to help them up the mountains. They went up this mountain. Antioch is 80 to 100 miles north of Perga, through those mountains, situated 3,500 feet up. Pisidian Antioch is on top of a mountain. It’s an impressive spot.
So, here’s the trail, from Perga to Antioch. This is when they were at the coast, and they’re taking the trail that goes along Lake Edgerdeer. And we had a wonderful time at Lake Edgerdeer, the last time I did this tour. It was lunchtime, and we stopped to have a fish lunch. Isn’t this beautiful? This is the lake that Paul would have gone by on the way to Pisidian Antioch.

Remember what he says in Second Corinthians? “I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers, and from robbers.” This six-day journey, up into the mountains, was very dangerous and very treacherous in various ways. But when he got to Pisidian Antioch, if he was recommended by Sergius Paulus, look at this. This is in the museum at Pisidian Antioch. This is the person who probably sent him on this wild goose chase up the mountains to Pisidian Antioch. Otherwise it’s hard to know why he didn’t stay by the coast.

We’re now in Pisidian Antioch, and there is just a lot of impressive ruins in Pisidian Antioch. There’s a lot to see. There’s a ruin of a Christian basilica, called St. Paul’s Basilica, there’s a ruin of the synagogue, there’s a ruin of the agora. These are my students standing in the agora. which is enormous. I mean, you can see that this city is way up in the mountains. It’s a huge city. It’s a city that’s got all kinds of massive buildings, and a gigantic agora, bigger than your usual Walmart and Walmart parking lot. It’s huge.

This city was blessed and turned into a Roman colony city by none other than Octavian Gaius Octavius, Caesar Augustus himself. He blessed it to be a Roman colony city. It’s important that we understand that what that means is, is that any time you’re in a Roman colony city, the law of that city is the law of Rome. The people running the city are Romans. The official language in the court is Latin, not Greek. Okay? It’s a Roman colony city.

The people who get favored nation status in such a city are Roman citizens. Which brings me to Paul. Was Paul a Roman citizen? Indeed he was, and he was taking advantage of it by evangelizing cities that were Roman colony cities.

This is the front edge of the synagogue here, you can see this sort of round L area, there. And what happened to this is typical of medieval Christian practice is, they ran the Jews out of town, and they built the basilica on top of the synagogue. Yes, there was a lot of anti-Semitism. But you can see how mountainous this region is. We are way up in the mountains. And yet there’s this good-sized Roman city, called Pisidian Antioch, way up in the mountains.

What happened there? They preached in the synagogue. They were well-received at first. They preached again in the synagogue. They were asked to return. There were converts. This is the first city of Galatia in which Paul has converts. Galatians is written to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and perhaps, Derbe, cities all listed on the first missionary journey by Paul.

Acts 13 says, almost the entire city turned out to hear them preach the Word of the Lord, but when the Jewish leader saw the crowds, they were jealous, so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said. There’s always trouble, so he heads to the next town.

Now, this picture is important, because over here is the aqueduct. Here’s the mountain, up here’s the stream. They built an aqueduct down there, down there, here, all the way into town, just to have a city. Water is always the biggest problem. How do you get the water into the city? It’s a gigantic aqueduct.

They had to go from there to Iconium. They were run out of town. Now, Iconium today is famous for other reasons. It is the Turkish city of Konium. It is the home of the whirling dervishes. Do you know what the whirling dervishes are? They are Sufi mystics, who do this mystical dance, in which they are
caught up in love of God, and have a mystical experience of God by whirling, and whirling, and whirling for over an hour in a row. You know, I would have a mystical experience too, after only ten minutes of whirling like that.

This is where Konium, is the name of the Turkish town, this is an important city in the province of Galatia.

In antiquity, it was renamed during the emperor Claudius’ reign, Claudikonium, instead of Iconium, it was named Claudikonium. And here’s the most interesting bit. According to Iconium tradition, they believed that their city was the first city to emerge, after Noah’s flood. So much is this so, that this town issued coins in the First Century A.D., with a picture of Noah and his wife on them. They thought, “We were first back from the dead, after the flood. Our city goes all the way back to Noah.”

Now, you see what’s interesting about that is this is a Pagan town, right? But they had heard the story of Noah, and they claimed it for themselves. This is very interesting, Pagans interested in Jewish history.

Here’s the whirling dervishes. This is what they look like. That’s their, uh, dancing gear, and it really is incredible to watch them. They began doing this as a way of praising God, danced to praise God, and come into close relationship with God, in the 13th Century. They still do it today. You can go see them do it for a fee. You can watch the performance from the gallery.

When Paul gets to Iconium, and again they go to the synagogue. Again, there’s a problem. In this case, there’s a drastic problem that happens, um, so he’s going to have to move on. The people are divided about the message that he preaches. There’s a mob of Jews and Gentiles, and so, once again, the apostles have to run for their lives.

Now, here’s Lystra. You want to do a good deed for biblical archaeology? How about going and digging that artificial hill called a “tell” there? That’s the city of Lystra. Now this story is fascinating. This city has never been dug. It’s still an agricultural site. Um, the story of this city is really fascinating. And if you want to understand what Acts says, you need to know the story.

Though Lystra was a Roman colony city, it was a very small one. But, the story is, goes like this: these people spoke a lichenean dialect that neither Paul nor Barnabas knew. So, there’s a problem of language. Their major temple, when Paul and Barnabas show up was a temple to Zeus. There are very few Jews in town. We don’t know of any synagogue.

Now, what Acts 14 tells us is, that while Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra, Paul healed a cripple, and he walked. He was listening while Paul preached, Paul noticed him, realized he needed to be healed, and the man jumps to his feet and starts walking. The reason that the audience reacts like it does is because they had a previous history.

It’s a story told, the story of Bacchus and Philemon. It’s told in Ovid’s Metamorphosis. Here’s the story. According to the legend, really the myth, Zeus and Hermes, in human disguise, came to Lystra, in antiquity. And nobody in the town would receive them, except a very elderly couple named Bacchus and Philemon. They welcomed them into the house, entertaining gods, unawares. Right?

But, then at the end of the visit, Zeus and Hermes said, “Well, we appreciate your hospitality, and in order to show you how much we appreciate your hospitality, we’re going to bless you out the wazoo.” So, all of a sudden they go from the penthouse to the outhouse, all of a sudden they go from poverty to wealth. They get a new, palatial mansion, they get massive lands, all kinds of things happen. After that,
the motto of the city was “Never again.” If gods show up at our town, unawares, we’re going to be prepared. We’re going to put on a big party. We’re going to receive them with joy.

Well, what do you think is happening here? You have Barnabas, and you have Paul. Barnabas, the older man with the beard, Paul the messenger. They’re going, “Hermes, the messenger of God. This man was proclaiming a messenger, message about God. And then there was this man healed. And over here is this man standing with a...it’s gotta be Zeus and Hermes. We’re ready this time. We’re ready! Go get the ox. It’s time to sacrifice the ox.”

And the next thing you know, these people think they have two Pagan deities visiting them out of the blue, but they’re not going to be caught short on hospitality this time. And so, of course, then Paul has to disabuse them of the notion when he figures out what they are doing. And when he does, they are not thus pleased to hear that Paul and Barnabas are not Hermes and Zeus.

And so, it goes bad. Because when you refuse hospitality in an honor and shame culture, you’ve shamed them. Not a good thing. But what happens at the end of the story is, persecutors from both Pisidian Antioch and Iconium had followed them all the way to Lystra, and they incite the crowd, saying they’re just Jewish agitators. Paul is stoned and dragged out of the city.

At that point you would think, “You know, Paul, it’s time to go home.” Wouldn’t you think? But, in fact, what do they do? They retrace their steps, back through these cities, to reconfirm the converts. Here’s Derbe, the last town they went to, which is 60 miles from Lystra. There’s really nothing to see here. It’s just a small, little Turkish town today. We’ve identified the site, but that’s all.

We are told that one of the things that happened to Paul in Galatia, is that he had an unspecified illness for a while. Listen to what Paul says. “Surely you remember that I was sick when I was first bringing you the good news. But even though my sickness was revolting to you, you did not spit,” is what the Greek literally says.

The Greek word for spit is “pitooey”, from which we get the word, “pitooey.” It’s an onomatopoetic word. “Even though I was sick, you did not reject me, and turn away from me. No, you took care of me, as though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself.” In fact, Paul says, “You would have plucked out your eyes for me, and given them to me.”

Now here is a clue as about what was wrong with Paul. Let’s think about this for a minutes, okay? Paul is able to travel, he’s able to preach, he’s able to carry on, he’s able to be stoned and bounce back. But he has some kind of problem. What happened to him on Damascus Road? He was blinded.

Now, we are told that he regained some sight. What we’re not told is that he was completely healed. And here, he says, “You would have plucked out your eyes, and given them to me.” Now, that suggests that the problem was an eye problem. And let me tell you how big a problem that was. In The Greco Roman world, the eyes were the windows on the soul. If your eyes were oozy and bad, you had a bad or dark soul.

But there is something else you need to know about this story, to make sense of it. There was a convention then, as there is now, of the casting of the evil eye. Have you ever heard of this? Giving someone the evil eye. Well, this was a widespread belief in antiquity, and even into modernity, in Muslim countries today, that the eyes are not receptors of light, they are projectors of whatever is coming out of your soul.
So, if you are an evil person, and you cast an evil glance on somebody, you can curse them. This is why, by the way, if you go to a devout Muslim country, and you try to take a picture of a Muslim woman, say, baking bread, she’ll go, “La, la, la, la…” to ward off the evil spirit, and the effect of the evil eye.

This belief was very widespread in Paul’s time. So, he’s saying you didn’t receive me as someone who is casting the evil eye on you. In fact, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. You even treated me as though I were a messenger of God. That’s got to refer to Lystra. They thought he was Hermes, the messenger of the gods.

Now, let’s think about this, about Paul having an eye problem. According to Acts, on the second and third missionary journeys, who accompanied Paul for a good part of the time? A doctor, and his name was Luke, that’s right. In fact, Luke is going to be with him right to the end. In the pastoral epistles, at one point, Paul says, “Luke alone is with me.”

And, this is important. Think about this for a minute. At the end of Paul’s letters, he says this, “I’m taking the pen in hand and see with what large letters I write my name. I always write my name this way.” What kind of person needs a large print edition? Paul did. And he used scribes whenever he could, to write down his letters. This is not because he’s not literate.

And there’s more to this story as well. In Second Corinthians, he says, “I knew a man who was caught up into the Third Heaven.” He’s talking about a visionary experience he had. Only, if you go back and read Second Corinthians 11, about his visionary experience, guess what you discover? He doesn’t mention seeing anything when he got there. He said, “I heard unutterable revelations.”

“Three times I besought God after this visionary experience, to take away from me the stake in my flesh. God responded, ‘My power is made perfect in your weakness. My grace is sufficient for you. You’re going to keep that disability.’”

I’m saying he had eye problems. And we have clues about that from his very earliest letter, Galatians. And this is why eventually he needed a doctor traveling with him. I would suggest that maybe the problems started at his conversion, and they carried on with him for the rest of his life. And he was never healed of this problem, which caused him to need help, eventually doctor’s care, as he carried on with his ministry.

Well, finally, they’re going to return. After preaching the good news in Derbe, they go back, bravely, to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They retraced their steps. They’re appointing leaders, or elders in every church as they went. They go all the way back down to the port at Perga, and they sail off, back to Antioch, from Attalia. This is the port at Attalia, where they sailed off from.

This is what they’d done. And you notice that Derbe, it may look close to Tarsus, but you’re going through some really rugged mountains. So, they came this way, from Perga, to Antioch, to Iconium, to Lystra, to Derbe, back to Lystra, back to Iconium, back to Pisidian Antioch, down to here, Antalya, which is right next to Perga, sailed from here around this way, back to Antioch. The first missionary journey.

We have only one letter of Paul written between the first and the second missionary journeys. That would be Galatians. So, which is the earliest letter of Paul? That would be Galatians, after which, First and Second Thessalonians. On arrived there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done, through them. And how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Why have I gone over all of this? I want you to understand that when you’re reading Paul’s letters, they’re not nice little theological tracts. They are historical documents, written to real people, in real
places, that were converted by Paul. And there was no end of arduous activity required for him to get to these places. Never mind convert these people. This was ministry in the rough.

Very rough. Capital “R” rough. Stonings, thrown out of synagogues, lack of sufficient food, and Paul, like the Energizer bunny, took a licking, and kept on ticking. It’s really an incredible story, to say the least.

When we think about the role of Paul, one of the things that becomes clearer and clearer as time goes on, is that we wouldn’t be here this afternoon, if it hadn’t been for him. Humanly speaking, he was the one who broke down the door that let us in. It’s important for us to understand the context in which Paul operated, because it was tumultuous and difficult. It was full of persecution and stoning.

And Paul told us this. Listen to what he says in Second Corinthians. In an honor and shame culture, it was believed to be appropriate to, uh, boast about certain things. Paul chooses to shame his detractors in the church by doing reverse boasting. Boasting about things that people would not boast about.

When talking about his credentials, as opposed to those of the so-called super apostles, he says this, “Whatever anyone else dares to boast about,” this is Second Corinthians 11, beginning with the 21st verse, “I am speaking as a fool. I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? Me, too. Are they Israelites? Me, too. Are they Abraham’s descendants? Me, too. Are they servants of Christ? I’m out of my mind to talk like this, but I am more so. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelleted with stones. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and day in the open sea. I’ve been constantly on the move. I’ve been in danger from the rivers, dangers from the bandits, dangers from my own people, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the country, dangers at sea, dangers from false believers.”

“I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst, and have often gone without food. I’ve been cold and naked, and besides everything else daily, I’ve faced the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is lead into sin, and I do not enter worldly burn? If I must boast, I will boast then of the things that show my weakness.”

And then, he gives the coup de gras. “The God and Father of our Lord, Jesus, who is to be praised forever knows I’m not lying. In Damascus, the governor under King Erectus, and the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I escaped. I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall, and slipped through their hands.”

Now, what we’re talking about here is mock boasting. He is boasting in things that ancient people didn’t boast in. He’s boasting in his weaknesses, his trials, his persecutions, his stonings, his whippings, his suffering the Roman rod on various occasions. And then, the coup de gras is that last story.

Because you see, in the Roman world, there was an award called the Corona Muralis, the wall crown. When a Roman soldier was first up the wall, and into the city, he was the highest honored. It was like having the Purple Heart. It was the highest honored soldier, for breaching the wall and taking the city for Rome.

Paul says, by contrast, “I was the first down the wall in a basket.” I like to call that story “Paul the Basket Case.” What Paul is doing is shaming his detractors, and changing the whole meaning of what is honorable and what is shameful, and what should be boasted about, and what should not be boasted about.
We’ve seen, in the film, some of Paul’s trials and tribulations. But the worst of all of those, really, was having to deal with the concern that his work would not be accepted by the church in Jerusalem. He says, in Galatians, just as clearly as he can, and I take it that he wrote this before the Acts 15 Council, which is depicted there, at the end of the film. He says, “I needed to take my gospel up to Jerusalem, lest I be running in vain.”

He needed the right hand of fellowship from the pillar apostles, Peter, James, and John, and he got it, for his gospel for the Gentiles.

And why do we need all this historical background and context? Because, dear friends, his letters are conversations in context. I don’t know about you, but I get irritated listening to half of a cell phone conversation. It’s like I’ve been suddenly thrust into a phone booth with somebody that I’d rather not be in a phone booth with. You know? You know how these conversations go.

“Hi, Mom. Yeah, I’m teaching, I know. Well, okay. So, have you got it under control? Right now I’m in Columbus. Yes, I love you, Mom. No, I’m not coming home right now, but I do love you. We’ll talk later.” It’s half of a conversation. You have to use your creative imagination to figure out the other half of the conversation.

Paul’s letters are not tracts. They’re not treatises. They are conversations in context. If we’re going to understand them, we need to understand, above all else, their nature. And the nature is this. They are ad hoc documents. Now, what does ad hoc mean? If something is ad hoc, what is it? Literally, it means “to this,” but what is an “ad hoc” something?

Participant: Separate?

Yes, exactly. It’s for a very specific, particular situation. I’m sure if we brought Paul back today, from the dead, and brought him here to the church, he would be very surprised to hear that 2,000 years later, we’re studying his particular remarks, to his particular churches, at those particular times. This is part of an ongoing conversation. And if you don’t know the context of the conversation, it’s easy for you to misinterpret some of the content of the conversation.

That’s the point of looking at the historical, and theological, and literary, and archaeological, and other context. To help us flesh out what he could have meant, and might have meant, in these different situations.

Paul may come across to us as a lone ranger for Christ. But, in fact, he had many co-workers. Not just Barnabas, or Titus, or Timothy, or Priscilla, or Aquila, or Junia, or Phoebe. We could go on. There were lots of co-workers. And the vision he had of all of this was not being a lone ranger for Jesus.

Furthermore, the image of him sort of running breathlessly around the Roman Empire is not quite correct. The reason he left one town, usually, and went to the next, is that he was driven out. What we learned from the second missionary journey is that he spent two and a half years in Ephesus. He spent a year and a half in Corinth, and so on. When it was possible to stay, he stayed longer, to make sure the church was more well-established.

So, what you should not see Paul as, is a sort of Billy Graham evangelist, going from town to town, preaching the word, and moving on. That’s not what he was. He was a church planter. And church planters don’t go for a weekend, and then move on. Unless they absolutely have to. So, when we start thinking about Paul’s ministry, let’s think about it in that kind of context.
Now, some of the things that we need to understand most about Paul’s context is, for example, why is it that in some places, he accepted support and in other places, he made tents, and supported himself. What’s up with that?

Especially when, in the very correspondence with the Corinthians, where he says to the Corinthians, “While I stayed with you, I received support from the Macedonian church,” Second Corinthians 8 and 9. In that very same correspondence, earlier in the correspondence, he says to the Corinthians, “No, I’m not accepting support from you. I worked with my hands when I was in your midst.” He says the same thing in Thessalonica.

What’s going on with this, if we want to understand the scope and the structure of his ministry? Well, let’s talk about some aspects of it that will help us understand this conversation in context. First of all, let’s talk about patronage and clients. A little bit about that will help. Then we’re going to talk about the technical language of money. Sending me on my way. Or, the ministry of giving and receiving. Or, thank you for your support, which has a financial meaning.

What Paul wanted to do was to give the Gospel, without engaging and entangling alliances. That is, he did not want to become somebody’s paid teacher, and become the client of some rich patron. Paul’s problem in Corinth, and perhaps elsewhere, is that there were wealthy Christians who wanted Paul to be their in-house teacher.

Paul says, in First Corinthians 9, “A workman is worthy of his hire.” Paul says in Galatians 6, very clearly, that a teacher deserves to be paid for their work, so they can be freed up to do that work. Is Paul an advocate of what today we would call “tent-making ministry?” No, he’s not, but he doesn’t want to get caught up in the social networks of his day, and become beholden to a patron, and not free to move on when the spirit tells him to go.

So, how is this going to work. Well, first of all, you need to understand about patrons and clients. What happens between patrons and clients is that when you become a client of a patron, you cease to be your own master. You cease to have freedom of mobility. You cease to have freedom of where you’re going to teach, and when. You become the after-dinner speaker for the patron, in his house.

This was a problem in Corinth. Paul says, “I have the right to be paid, and I have the right to refuse to be paid.” In Corinth, it was better to refuse, lest he become entangled, and enmeshed in the social networks that existed. This did not mean that he did not receive support from his other Christians. Very clearly, in Second Corinthians 8 and 9, he tell us that while he was in Corinth, and besides his tent-making work, he also was supported by the Macedonian churches.

Now, you see, the thing about support from a distance is, it doesn’t set up a patron and client relationship, because you’re not there at the beck and call of some patron. You’re in another city.

So, he felt free to accept the support from Macedonia. Even when they gave out of their poverty, says Paul. Out of their lack, and due to a time of persecution, nonetheless they gave. And he was happy to receive it.

Now this phrase he uses several times. “I’m coming to Rome,” he says, “but don’t worry. I’m not going to set up shop there forever,” he says in Romans. “No, I’m hoping to go on to Spain, and what I need from you, is that you send me on my way.” Now, this does not mean, that as Paul is leaving on the Via Appia, they all stand on the side of the road and go, “So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen…”
What “send me on my way” means, is providing me with traveling funds, and the necessary foodstuffs to get to my next destination. It’s a technical phrase, “Sending me on my way.”

There is one church, however, in which Paul had a very unique relationship. A relationship of what he calls, giving and receiving. Which church was that, do you remember? Which letter of Paul has most use of the word “joy?”

Participant: Philippians.

Exactly. And it is in Philippians that we hear about this relationship of giving and receiving. He’s talking about a relationship that could become a reciprocity cycle. The Philippians, while Paul is under house arrest in Rome, have sent support to him. And he’s certainly grateful for it. However, he doesn’t want it to become a reciprocity network.

So, let’s look at this passage that helps us understand the financial context of Paul’s ministry. This is Philippians Four, 10 through 20. “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I’m not saying this because I’m in need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need. I know what it is to have plenty. I’ve learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can endure all things through Him who strengthens me.”

By the way, translation: “I can do all things in Him who strengthen me,” is not a very good translation. Because what he’s talking about his ability to do with or without. Then he says this, “Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the Gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, towards Athens and Corinth, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.”

Paul had a unique financial relationship with the Philippians, and he was perfectly willing to be in that relationship, because it was not a patron-client unequal relationship, but what? A parity relationship. The Philippians got it. They understood that Paul had given them much by giving them the Gospel. And whatever they were sharing back with Paul was not setting up a reciprocity cycle, but was responding to the gift of God’s grace that they had already received.

He said, “When I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me, in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me, and more than once, when I was in need.” So, you sent to me, and more than once, when I was in need. “Not that I desire your gifts. What I desire is that you be credited to your account for them. As for me, I have received full payment, and have more than enough. I’m amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts that you’ve sent.”

“They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God, and my God will meet all your needs, according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

Now, do you hear how careful this statement is? Good on you. You sent me a gift. And I’ve got more than I need. Now if you know the ancient conventions, what he’s saying is, “Don’t send any more.” He’s saying, “The buck stops here.” He’s saying, “Thank you, but let’s not go around again.”

Now, here’s the important part about understanding this. If he had literally said thank you, that always implied, in the reciprocity culture, send me some more. So, what we have is thankless thanks, here. He’s thanking them, without using the technical language for “thank you.” Because why? Because he wants it
to stop where it is. He’s been in a relationship of giving and receiving with them. But now, he’s not only content to be as he is, he’s fully supplied, he says.

What I’m pointing out to you is that the whole language about money and financial support for ministry is part of a larger social context that is not like ours. Indeed, it’s very different from ours. And it’s easy for us to misunderstand these statements. The only time Paul talks about raising money for church, is when he talks about raising money for the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, who are starving. And he mentions this repeatedly.

In Galatians 2, James says, “Remember the poor in Jerusalem.” Paul says, “Which very thing I was eager to do.” In First Corinthians 16, he says, “I urged the church on the first day of the week, to set aside an allotment for the saints in Jerusalem. This is not about a regular collection, Sunday after Sunday. It’s about a special collection for the needy in the church in Jerusalem.

In Second Corinthians 8 and 9, second verse, same as the first, “We’re collecting a collection for the saints in Jerusalem, and the Macedonian churches, Berea, Thessela Nike, Philippi, have all signed up. How ‘bout you Corinthians?”, he says. He puts pressure not to give to him, but to give to the collection in Jerusalem.

Money then, as now, was a slippery subject. How do you raise it? How do you spend it? Should ministers be paid? Paul’s answer to that is, we have a right to be paid, but we have a right to refuse it. It’s the Lord Jesus who set up the principle “a workman is worthy of his hire. If even an ox should be allowed to eat some of the grain it’s threshing out, how much more a minister?” You know, I’ve never thought of ministers as oxes, but okay.

Listen to what Paul says in First Corinthians 9. Starting with the first verse. “Am I need free?”, i.e., I’m not in a patron-client relationship. “Am I not an apostle?” Rhetorical question, implied answer, obviously, yes. “Have I not seen Jesus, my Lord?” That’s what he associates with being an apostle. It’s the requirement. “Are you not a result of my work in the Lord?” Survey says, “Yes.” “Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense to those who sit in judgement of me.”

“Don’t we have the right to food and drink?” What’s the answer to the rhetorical question? “Yes, we have the right to it.” Absolutely. “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles, and the Lord’s brothers, and Sephus?” The first Pope was married. Don’t tell the Catholics. “Or is it only I and Barnabas who don’t have the right to not work for a living?” Again, a rhetorical question that has a clear answer.

“Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the grapes? Who tends the flock and does not drink the milk? Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn’t the law say the same thing, for it’s written in the law of Moses? You don’t muzzle an ox while it’s threshing out the grain. Is it about oxen that God is most concerned? I’m thinking not,” says Paul. “Surely he says this for our benefit, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when farmers plow and thresh, they should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.”

“If we have thrown spiritual feed amongst you, is it too much of a burden, if we reap from you a material harvest? Hint, hint. “If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more, since you’re our converts? But, we do not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ.” So, it’s Paul’s spiritual judgement that for him to receive pay in Corinth.
would imply patronage, and hinder the free proclamation of the Gospel. In that situation, he’s not going to take the money.

It’s not because he has a tent-making ministry principle. It’s because he has the right to refuse. “But if I have not used any of these rights, and by the way, I’m not writing in the hope that you will do this for me, now. This is not an indirect hint, for I would rather die than allow anyone who deprives me of this boast, of offering this to you, Corinthians, free of charge. Woe to me if I don’t preach the Gospel, for if I preach voluntarily, I have a reward. If not, I’m simply discharging a trust committed to me.”

Now, he goes on along this way, but I think I’ve established the principle that he’s trying to convey here. And, it’s an important principle. I’d like to turn, now, to another aspect of it, in Galatians Six, when he is teaching some principles for his converts in Galatia.

Here’s what he said, verse six, Galatians: “Those who receive instruction in the Word should share in all good things with their instructor. To which I say, ‘Amen.’” Where’s the box of chocolates friends? He believes that a teacher should be paid for the work they do. He wants that kind of support to happen. We have this very delicate balancing act, because money is always a tricky business.

On the one hand, the teacher, preacher, apostle has the right to be paid. On the other hand, he has the right to refuse pay. But, if he refuses in the wrong way, he will have done what? He will have shamed them. So, what we have is that nice, little merry-go-round in Philippians Four 10 through 20, where he says, “You know, thank you so much. Your account is fully paid. And it’s great, and we’re glad for this. And I’ve got more than enough, and don’t send any more.”

He’s putting a stop to the possibility of yet another spin cycle called reciprocity. You see, there is this delicate balance between grace and freedom over here, and partnership. Because any time, in antiquity, you enter into a partnership, it is assumed you are entering into a binding reciprocity network.

If you want to think about this in a way that helps you to understand this about Paul, think of the Mafia. Remember “The Godfather?” Don Corleone says, “I want you to do me a favor, after which I will do you a favor, then you will do me another favor, and I will do you a favor. After which, you will do me another favor, or you will sleep with the fish.” Now, this is just good old Mediterranean reciprocity talk.

Where do you think the Mafia started? In the Mediterranean world. Paul is trying to not get trapped into that cycle of scratching the other’s back. It’s what the Turks called “Bakshish,” payback. I want us to think, just a second, Dan, I want us to think, just for a minute. Which is our culture more like, a payback culture, or a grace-based culture? Oh, I think it’s payback, baby. That’s why we keep going to those Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger, et cetera, revenge movies. Clint Eastwood movies.

It has been said that if we offered salvation for $25 a person, there would be a line from Columbus to Cleveland to come get it, right here at this church. But because we give it away for free, people are suspicious of it. The mantra of our culture is, “You don’t get something for nothing.” “You get what you pay for.” This is not a grace-based culture, and if you don’t understand that, you’re going to have a hard time working in this culture, in ministry.

Well, you see, he’s also trying to avoid the snake oil salesman problem. He’s itinerate. He is freely and open about being on the move. He doesn’t want to come to a town, offer magnificent speaking, people say, “Okay, we’re paying him by the word. We’re paying him for his verbiage.” And he just moves on. No, he wants to be clear that he’s serious about planting churches in particular contexts.
And what’s interesting to me about this, is here’s, I think, his strategy. Remember what the Corinthians say. His letters and rhetorically powerful, but his personal presentation, he’s got an ethos problem. There’s some weakness. Now, I think that has to do with his eyes. But I think there’s another factor.

If you look closely at the Greek of that Second Corinthians verse, I think Paul deliberately, in his first oral presentation of the Gospel, avoids hyperbolic rhetoric. He keeps it simple. The letters are more rhetorically powerful. The first presentation is less so. Precisely to avoid the impression that he is trying to wow them with his eloquence, rather than with the substance of the message.

Because, you see, that is a great problem, in a culture that loves eloquence. The danger is, he appears to be yet another paid rhetorician, on the move, going from one town to the next, and he’ll discourse on any subject you please. He’s not committing to any of them. See, this is the danger of being disingenuous.

So, he’s got to do a very careful rhetorical tap-dance. It’s not a problem when he sends a rhetorically powerful letter to them. It becomes a problem of ethos with the first presentation of the Gospel, and he’s especially concerned about this in Rhetoric Central, places like Athens and Corinth. He’s very sensitive to the oral context there, because he doesn’t want to be taken as yet another talking head, who is full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing. That’s a big mistake.

So, he waits until after he has established the relationship with the Corinthians, to let them have it with some really powerful rhetoric in First and Second Corinthians. Uh, remember what he says, “At the outset, I resolve to know nothing amongst you,” except what? Christ in him, crucified. I’m going to give you the straight poop here. I’m going to give you the straight talk.

But we need to understand that this stuff has powerful implications, and so the letters are what the Corinthians say the letters are: the letters are rhetorically powerful, first presentation, not so much, for a variety of reasons. It’s a complex matter. Because he lives in a world context, you’ve got to take into account the function of rhetorical letters in an oral context, as well as the initial oral impressions.

You know what we say, and Paul understood it. First impressions are crucial. So, he wants their hearts to be open to the substance of the Gospel, from the first.
Chapter 15

Paul’s Letters and Rhetoric (part 2)

The problem with English is that there’s only one word for love. It’s love. In Greek, there are at least five or six words for love. So, here’s your review, since these words all show up in Paul. Philos. Philia.

By the way, the name of that City, Philadephia, it means sisterly love. It does not mean brotherly love. In order for the city to be named brotherly love, it would be Philadelphos, not Philadelphia, which is a female ending.

Philos, philia is brotherly or sisterly love. It’s the love between siblings. It’s used in an extended form in Paul to refer to the love between fellow Christians who are brothers and sisters in Christ.

A second word for love is storge. This is the normal word for family or kinship love…The love that exists between parents and children, and children and children, and first cousins and first cousins, and your kinship group. Storge, the family love.

Now, this one, you’ll know. Eros from which we get the word erotic, of course, is physical love. One of the problems we have with the word erotic is we always associate it with lust but eros simply means the physical expression of love. It may mean intercourse but, but it, it’s tactile love.

It doesn’t necessarily have what my granny would’ve called a dirty connotation. I mean, eros is what a husband and wife share in the Greek literature, so not necessarily lust. You wouldn’t necessarily translate this lust. And then, of course, there’s this word, which I’ll give to you in the Greek. Agape.

What seems like ages ago, I talked to you about the different between philos and agape in John 21 when Jesus has his dialogue with Peter. Remember? So, we, we won’t go over that again but what I can say is that this word does not show up much, at all, in Greek literature. It’s very rare.

It’s kind of like the discussion we had about the father language. What was rare, previously, shows up all over the place in the New Testament. Agape becomes the dominant word for love in the New Testament.

The paradigm, of course, is God’s love, an unconditional love. So let’s take this a step further, because sometimes and in some context, people will say to you, ‘This is the Greek representation of covenant love.’ That is a love that God promised to give to those he was in covenant with.

I don’t think that’s actually what agape is, because, for example, in John 3:16, we hear that God so loved the world. That’s not covenant love. He didn’t promise to love the whole world. He promised to love his people. So, you see, I don’t think you can say that agape, in the New Testament, is kind of limited to the love of the elect.

There are actually reformed scholars who argue this. I don’t think it’s right and I think it’s a misreading of Paul, especially. I think it’s unfair to Paul. Paul’s an evangelist. He’s out there spreading the love of God to the world, you know. It’s not just about the love of the elect or the love of those who already love you.

And that, in turn, leads to a further reflection, which is…The question is, what is the relationship between this Hebrew word hesed and agape? This is a Hebrew word that, uh, you need a glottal stop for. It’s
“Hes’ed.” It’s like you’re hacking up a cold, you know. Hesed is the word. This is the word in the King James that is translated loving-kindness over and over again in the Old Testament, loving-kindness.

For what pleases God is if, is that you do justice and loving-kindness and walk humbly with your God. It’s hesed. This word, in some context in the Old Testament, does seem to mean covenant love. It does seem to mean God’s special love for his chosen people and vice versa. Normally, from the divine side down.

Very rarely is hesed said to be a normal attribute of Israel. They’re supposed to but it’s not a descriptor of Israel very often. Amos says they should manifest justice and should manifest loving-kindness but this is an exhortation, not a description. You see the difference?

But it is true that there are places where hesed, in the Old Testament, refers to God’s love that he, when he betrothed himself to a people, this is the love he promised to give. Now having said that, in the Greek Old Testament, the LXX, once in a while but not consistently, hesed is translated agape and this is where I think some reform scholars have gotten the idea, that agape must be a reference to covenant love.

I don’t think it is, in the New Testament. At least, I don’t think it, exclusively, refers to that. So, there’s your love languages. If you’ve never read C. S. Lewis’ nice little book, The Four Languages of Love, you should read it. It’s about these words and it’s a great little word study.

He makes a point that needs to be made. Friends, you need to be able to distinguish the difference between warm fuzzy feelings and love. Now, an awful lot of young people say, ‘we’re in love’ but what’s the real case is that they’re just in heat. It’s the hormones working overtime. It’s not the same thing.

So if we ask the question, what is this agape with, that Paul talks about at length in 1 Corinthians 13? What is this self-sacrificial agape that gives with no thought of return? That gives unconditionally? What should we make of this love?

There are a few things that we ought to say that Paul would say to us. If we did a word study of the word love in Paul, he would the following things. First of all, he would say that, obviously, the paradigm of this love is God in Christ and it’s manifested especially on the cross.

So the essence of this love is self-sacrificial love. It’s not narcissist. It’s not self-indulgent love. It’s a love given with no thought of return. It’s a non-reciprocity love. You’re gonna give it whether anybody returns it or not. It’s a non-reciprocity love. That, in itself, will preach for a long time.

Wanna hear about a non-reciprocity love? Let’s listen for a minute to Hosea 11. “When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt, I called my son but the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed the Baals. They burned incense to the images.”

“Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them, because they refuse to respond in kind. They refuse to repent. Swords will flash and their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates, put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn on me.”

This is the opposite of reciprocating in kind. “Even though they call me God Most High, I will, by no means, exult them. But then, I said, how can I give you up, oh Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like the Zeboyim?”
“My heart turns within me and all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again, for I am God and not a human being. The Holy One amongst you and I will not come against their cities.”

“They will follow the Lord. He will roar like Aslan and when he roars, his children will come trembling from the west, come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria and I will settle them in their homes once more says the Lord.”

Now that’s love. That’s the character of God. It’s a chapter like that from the prophets from which the New Testaments writers like Paul and the beloved disciple get their paradigm and image of what is the character of God like when we say God so loved the world.

This passage is...It’s true about God’s love of his own people. But it tells you something about the character of God, in general. It’s a love that doesn’t give up. It’s a love that doesn’t give out. It’s a love that doesn’t stop trying. It’s a love that does not turn its back on others even when they have turned their back on you. It is agape. It is agape.

For a long time, I pondered why it was in 1 Corinthians 13 that Paul said, “faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is agape.” I thought, ‘what could be better than faith?’ It’s faith through which I was saved. Why is the love the greatest of these three? And then it dawned on me that he, he’s speaking in 1 Corinthians 13, eschatologically.

You see, there’s going to be a day, as he says, when we see si-, face to face. There’s going to be a day when faith becomes sight. There’s going to be a day when hope is realized. But the one quality that you can practice now that endures unto eternity and will be part of your kingdom relationship with God and his people is love.

You are the forever family of God in Christ. We need to get on with loving each other now, because we’re gonna have to do it for an eternity. Faith becomes sight. Hope will be realized. But love endures forever. It’s the one quality of the Christian life that simply is enhanced rather than transmuted into something else when we reach the kingdom. That’s why love is the greatest.

Paul wrote letters. And his letters have a pretty regular characteristic form. If you analyze them as letters, here’s the form. There’s a prescript that involves the opening, the sender, the addressee, greetings, thanksgiving, blessing prayer.

Then there’s the body of the letter, which has an introductory formula. There’s some substance. Usually, there’s an eschatological conclusion. And maybe a travel log, ‘I’m hoping to come see you,’ etc., etc.

And then there’s paraenesis. Paraenesis is the ethical or practical remarks. They tend to come later in the discourse. A good example of this would be Ephesians. Ephesians 1-3, theology. Ephesians 4-6, ethics. Now, it’s not always that clear-cut. A lot of times, he toggles back and forth, but that’s what paraenesis is, is ethical exhortations.

And then you have the closing part of the document, closing greetings or instructions, mentions of a writing process and then maybe a benediction. So you can certainly analyze Paul’s documents as letters but if you have, but at least begun to read New Testament rhetoric, you know that I don’t think that’s the main way you should analyze them.

That would be like analyzing the bones of a corpse and ignoring the rest of the body when you’re trying to do a toxology report. You’re gonna learn a whole lot more from the substance of the corpse than just
the skeleton of the corpse. There are typical opening statements that Paul makes that indicates he’s transitioned from the preliminary bits to the bits that he really needs to emphasize.

So sometimes you’ll have an opening that involves an appeal or a request. ‘I appeal to you for something.’ 1 Corinthians 1:10 would be an example of this. Or you have a disclosure statement. ‘For I want you to know.’ Romans 1:13. 2 Corinthians 1:8. Or you have a joy remark. ‘I rejoice greatly that.’ Or when he’s really put out, ‘I am astonished that!’

Galatians is the only letter of Paul where we find neither a thanksgiving prayer nor a blessing prayer at the outset, nor a benediction, nor a doxology. He is so right royally ticked off with the Galatians that he just starts firing silver bullets right after the prescript. And that tells you something.

I mean, it tells you something about the state of the relationship and how problematic he sees the situation in Galatia that he just skips over the usual niceties and goes right to lambasting them. Sometimes, the transition from the opening of the document to the document itself begins with, ‘I have heard,’ or ‘I hear of,’ which is a polite way to say, ‘Somebody tattled on you,’ and here’s what I’m hearing.

You can find that in several of Paul’s letters. So these are ways to make the transition from the prescript into the body of a letter and these are some of the ways that Paul does this. And you can certainly analyze Paul’s documents according to these kinds of structures. Now, let me tell you the problem with that.

First of all, if you actually take the time to study Paul’s letters and compare of them to other ancient letters, here are some following facts. 1. Paul’s letters are way way longer than ancient letters. There’s almost no exception to that rule.

Let me quote to you an ancient letter written the same year Galatians was written: “[Pobillius[18:47] to his own stowedious greetings, I trust you are well. I sent my servant, Blastus to you to collect the fork sticks for the vineyard. See that he does not loiter as he is apt to do. Send him back straight way to me, valet. Hail and farewell.”

That, a first century letter. It’s practical. It’s to the point. It doesn’t have a long thanksgiving prayer. It doesn’t have a long theological or ethical [hearing][19:26]. It gets right to the point and we’re done. Now, that’s a typical first century letter. Aren’t you glad we don’t have 13 of those in the canon?

Not riveting. We wouldn’t get great long sermons out of letters like that, you know. But that’s a typical first century letter. So right off the bat, I would say to you that it’s not terribly helpful to analyze these documents as letters, comparing them to other letters, because in fact what we have in these documents is much more than a letter. It is actually an address.

It’s an actually a discourse. It’s actually intended to be read orally and out loud to the audience when it arrives at the destination. And since it’s written in scriptive continuum, that is a continuous flow of letters, then it jolly well be, better be read by somebody who already knows the document.

Somebody already knows where the nuances are, where the pauses are, where the emphases are, how to put the emphasis on the right syllable and so on. Into whose hands does Paul entrust these documents? His coworkers, Timothy, Titus, Phoebe, [Anaprilaua][20:48], Aquila, Priscilla. They’re the ones who go and proclaim this document out loud to an audience.

These are oral documents that are meant to be heard and, yes, Paul’s letters do conform, especially at the beginning of the document and the end of the document. He does tend to conform them, somewhat,
the way ancient letters were written, because they’re sent from a distance. He needs to do that. Makes clear he’s not with them, you know.

But here’s where I tell you that ancient letters, if we go back to this for a minute, ancient letters do not end with a benediction. This is the Christian worship element. It’s not a epistolary form. And while I’m at it, thanksgiving prayer, not a regular epistolary form, either. This is the Christian worship element.

So there’s a third thing going on. Not only do you have to reckon with the difference between letter conventions and rhetoric conventions, orality conventions but you’ve gotta throw a third thing into the mix. These are documents meant to be proclaimed in worship and, therefore, they have worship elements in them.

They have prayers in them. They have doxologies in them. They have benedictions in them. Okay? This is a kind of thing that you should not envision as a private correspondence where you put on your glasses and say, ‘Oh, Paul wrote me a private letter. How nice.’ There are no private letters in the 13 of Paul’s correspondence.

Not even the letters to, letter to Philemon is a private letter. It’s written to Philemon and the church that meets in his house. It’s a group correspondence. It’s a group communication. The closest thing to private letters we have are the letters to Timothy and Titus and, yet, they’re in the canon. Now, think about that. Would you want your mail in the canon?

Obviously, somebody, probably named Timothy and Titus, thought that this had a larger relevance to more than just Timothy and Titus and so they are in the canon and we’re reading somebody else’s mail. The documents in the New Testament that are closest to ancient letters are, in fact, 2 John and 3 John.

They are the ones that look most like other ancient letters and they’re about the right length, which is to say short, really short, less than a whole chapter. What we want to do, this morning, and if we possibly can, is we wanna get a fix on those three elements that I’ve just mentioned. The letter form, epistolary conventions, the oral nature of the discourse.

We want to understand the discourse. We wanna understand the substance. I mean, the fact that there is a greeting at the beginning and closing greetings at the end really tells us nothing about the theological and ethical substance of these documents. It’s when we get into the rhetoric and the discourse substance that we’re making some progress as to what the substance of this is.

And we want to take into consideration that we are dealing with documents that were intended to be used in worship. So they have many worship elements in them. In fact, we could study Paul’s letters for the worship elements in them.

Here are the following worship elements. Citations of a creed. We have some credal formulae in the Paul’s letters. References to hems. We have Christological hymns fragments in Paul’s letters. Doxologies or, a, benedictions. By the way, what’s the difference between a doxology and a benediction? A doxology is directed towards God and a benediction is directed towards y’all, the people of God. Right?

We have both of those in Paul’s letters. We have benedictions and we have doxologies. Sometimes we, he breaks into doxology at the end of an important argument. Romans 8. You know? He’s really going to town. He’s waxing eloquent.

You know, “And neither height, nor depth, nor powers, nor principalities, nor things present…” I mean you can Beethoven’s 5th symphony in the background. You know? “Nor things present, nor things to
come, nor anything and all of creation, you know, and he’s just going to town and thanks be to God. Woo boom!

And, you know, and we’re thinking, ‘Okay, we’re done now.’ And then there’s Romans 9:1 and he starts all over again. So what happens is that you have doxological moments in the middle of the discourse. Paul breaks into doxology, because this is a document that’s not an abstract argument to contemplate in the quiet of your study.

This is a discourse with a congregation in worship. It’s part of an act of worship. It’s intended to be part of an act of worship. So we’re gonna look at some of the elements in the discourses that are worship elements and talk about how they function, as well. We’ve got a lot of ground to cover.

Now, there’s some other provisos that I wanna start with. First of all, a lot of the things that are in the New Testament that we call letters, quite a few of ‘em are not letters. They’re just straight up sermons. For example, 1 John, tain’t a letter. It has no epistolary features.

Remember 1 John? I mean, think about it for a minute. There’s no greetings. There’s no names. There’s nothing. This is not a letter. This is just a straight up sermon, period, exclamation point. I mean, listen to this, this is how it begins.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the word of life. The life appeared. We have seen it and testified to it, and we proclaim to you, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen.”

This is all about proclaiming, friends. You know what this is? It’s a Jewish sermon. And it’s a good one, too. It’s a piece of epideictic rhetoric, is what it is and it’s a powerful piece of epideictic rhetoric. And in epideictic rhetoric, you repeat things. You stick to key terms.

You make the main thing the main thing. So one of the reasons in 1 John 1 through 1 John 5, we have some of the same words that he rings the changes on over and over again and the same concepts. He goes over and over again. It’s because it’s a sermon. You know what I was taught in Homiletics? First, you tell ’em what you’re gonna tell ’em. Then you tell ’em. Then you tell ’em what you just told ’em.

One of the three times, it may register. You know? Repetition is the essence of good homiletics. It’s the essence of good homiletics, because people are not always concentrating. They may well be distracted. And they may have well of gotten caught up in love, wonder and praise of God and they’re ignoring the preacher at the moment. This happens, too. Thanks be to God.

So some of the documents in the New Testament are sermons. 1 John is a sermon. James is a sermon. And just like 1 John, James repeats some of the same themes over and over again throughout the discourse. This is not because they had limited mental capacity. It’s a deliberate rhetorical technique.

Repetition aids people to learn, and to even memorize what’s being said in an oral culture. The function of repetition in an oral culture is, first of all, as a trigger for memorization. Let those who have two good ears hear. Another example...I’m just gonna go through the examples. The way you can tell what kind of document it is, or is it, it’s intended to be is by looking at the beginning of the document.

Let’s look at the beginning of Hebrews. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times in various ways but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. Does this sound like
the beginning of a letter? I’m thinking not. You would never guess this was a letter from reading Hebrews 1 or Hebrews 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 or 10 or 11 or 12.

But when you get to Hebrews 13, at the very end, there are some greetings. Now, what does that mean? It’s a sermon sent from a distance. Proclaimed locally when it got there but a sermon sent from a distance. This is a big ole honking long sermon. This is one, a kind of sermon that made Eutychus fall out the window when Paul was preaching. [laughter] It’s one of those kinds of sermons. Okay?

But it’s a sermon. And like all good sermons, the oral form is far richer than just the written text. You know, one of the things that happened to me when I studied John Wesley is, om, the very first teaching job I ever had was teaching the sermons of John Wesley at Duke Divinity School, which was great fun. The problem was that when the students read the verbatim of Wesley’s sermons, they went, “This is dry as dust. Okay, 3 points and a poem. This is boring. You know, this guy, can’t he do any better than that?” So, you know, what I had to do is I had to do dramatic performances of the sermons and then all of a sudden, they went, “Oh, I get it now.”

You see, because the thing is that 33% of communication of sermons is oral. It involves tone of voice. It involves gestures. It involves slowing down and speeding up. It involves throwing in anecdotal illustrations that are not in the text of your sermon. You know. There are lots of things to do. It involves wrapping on the pulpit when you come to an important point.

I mean, there are a lot of, um, features to preaching a sermon that you can’t find just in the text. Now, the good news is that we have these sermons in the original language so what we haven’t lost, in the Greek sermon called Hebrews, is its assonance and alliteration onomatopoeia and rhythm and rhyme. It’s all there if you just know Greek. It’s great.

I want you to listen to the beginning of Hebrews. Hebrews is some of the best rhetoric and, certainly, some of the best Greek in the whole of the New Testament, certainly some of the most eloquent Greek in the whole of the New Testament. Listen to this. He’s gonna start with a bang. [32:14](Paul Eumaris, Ki Paul Utropos Poli, Hothais Lalasi toss patras, intos prophatus.] We’ve got six examples in the first verse of words that start with Pph, Pph, Pph. We’ve got alliteration right on through the first verse.

The second verse, it’s full of assonance and end rhyme. This is very carefully composed and it’s supposed to make a pleasant effect on the hearing, so that people will be well disposed to thinking, ‘Oh, this preacher knows what the heck they’re doing. We’d better listen to him.’ You see, the way eloquence functioned in antiquity is not just showing off your erudition or your vocabulary.

The way eloquence worked in antiquity is it conveyed the message, ‘This is something important. We should listen closely.’ When people get overcome with the exuberance of their verbosity in our casual culture, people say things like, ‘Oh, he’s being stuffy. He’s being hoity-toity. He’s being ‘better than’ and all of that sort of stuff.

Americans don’t tend to like diction that sounds like you’re talking down to them. You know? But, you see, that says more about our casual culture than it says about the real significance of what’s being said. In antiquity, even an uneducated person was a consumer of rhetoric and when he heard eloquence, he wanted to hear more of it.

It’s like the reaction many Americans have to Shakespeare. I mean, they hear some of Shakespeare, and they may not even understand some of the Archæan vocabulary but boy, it sounds good and I’d like to hear more of this. Well, that’s the affect that eloquence had in antiquity. It’s not a matter of form over
substance. It’s not a matter of style over substance. It’s a matter of the incarnation of substance in good form.

See the difference? It’s not fluff instead of substance. It’s elegance. Good ancient rhetoric is powerful in form and also in substance and Hebrews is one of the most powerful theological and ethical discourses in the whole canon. This is not words full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. It is not that. That’s for sure.

So, we have sermons like 1 John. We have sermons like James. We have big ole honking long sermons like Hebrews. What would we say, then, about Paul’s letters? Well, I prefer to call them discourses with epistolary sprinkles. I prefer to call them discourses with an epistolary framework. The right way to say it, is it’s a discourse with an epistolary framework, because it had to be sent at a distance. That, that’s what it is.

And I would draw an analogy with the Book of Revelation. Remember the Book of Revelation? What did I tell you about Revelation? Revelation 2 and 3 is letters. Epistolary element. Revelation 22 has some epistolary closing elements but if you were to tell to tell somebody, “You know the Book of Revelation is a letter,” they’d look at you like you were crazy, ‘cause the vast majority of the document is apocalyptic visions. It’s not a letter.

Neither are Paul’s documents. They are not, primarily, letters. They are, primarily, discourses meant to be heard. Now, the difference between a sermon and a discourse is simply this. A sermon tends to focus on matters ethical. For example, James. There’s a lot of ethics in James. There’s not a heck of a lot of theology. Same with 1 John.

1 John is all about behavior and character. It’s paraenesis more than it is theologizing. There is some theology in there but it’s not the focus. And this is the Jewish tradition. If you had gone to a synagogue in the 1st century AD and listened to a homily, 9 out of the 10 homilies would be ethical or praxis oriented. This is the way you ought to practice bathing in the mikvah. That could be a whole sermon.

Judaism was all about orthopraxy. That was the primary thing. Orthodoxy was a secondary concern. You’re hard pressed to find creeds from ancient Israel. The closest thing you have is the Shema, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, you shall love the Lord your God.” I mean, that’s the closest thing that you have to a credo on monotheism for Judaism.

If you look at the prophets, most of what they’re doing is slamming people, ethically. That’s what’s going on. Even the prophecies are about how God’s going to slam them, ethically, unless they repent. You see? One of the things that’s different about Paul is this huge quantity of theological substance in his documents.

Most ancient sermons were not that way. Paul was not simply longwinded. He was far more theological than most early Jewish preachers and when you look at typical Jewish sermons, James is closer to a typical early Jewish sermon than what we find in Paul’s letters. And there’s a reason for this. Think about this for a minute.

One of the most important things you can do when we’re talking about preaching is know your audience. You know, whenever I go to preach anywhere, I always ask the person who’s invited me, tell me about the audience. I wanna know the audience.

I wanna know first of all how biblically literate, how spiritually mature are they, where are they in their walk with the Lord, what issues are up in the church now, what are you concerned with. I’m gonna give
him 25 questions so that I know the audience better before I walk into that pulpit, because, you see, the thing about a sermon is it’s supposed to be a word on target.

It’s not supposed to be like firing a shotgun, buck shot going in all direction and you hope you hit something. Right? No, it’s supposed to be a word on target. Paul’s discourses are not typical of even ancient Jewish sermons. They are proper rhetorical discourses, because the majority audience is whom? Gentiles who are absolutely enamored with rhetoric who are living in a rhetoric saturated in environment.

They were fanatics for rhetoric the same way American males are often fanatics for football or baseball or basketball and they go around repeating the clichés of their favorite sports commentators. In antiquity, males ran around quoting their favorite rhetoricians. This was not only education. It was entertainment.

You went to see the rhetorician and watched the performance and hear the discourse. It was important for Paul to be able to communicate to the audience in a way that would persuade them. I mean, this is the bottom line. What is it going to take to persuade this audience about Jesus? What is it gonna take?

Paul was a wise man in that regard and, so, his discourses reflect that kind of knowledge and understanding. Even when he’s writing a more personal thing like Philemon. I mean, it’s powerful rhetoric.

Now, what I want to at this moment is start looking at the rhetorical structures in Paul’s letters. I’m gonna talk about and review rhetoric. This material is all in your little book New Testament rhetoric. But, uh, as the rhetoricians said, “Repetition is good.” Repetition is good. Right?

So, first of all, let’s talk about the emotions of a discourse and maybe we’d better talk about the emotional character of the culture first. The emotional character of different subcultures in America varies from one to another. The culture that Paul lived in was the culture where you wore your emotions on your sleeve.

If you wanna get a flavor for this, go spend some time in Italy for a while. It’s still this way. I mean, they’re a passionate about everything from spaghetti to speeding tickets. Is there anything they don’t care about? I don’t think so. It’s always the big thing. You know?

Well, this is the culture that Paul lived in and he knew this perfectly well. So there are a lot of sentences in his letters that have exclamation points after them. They’re loud. “Oh, you idiot, Galatians.” Do not try this with your congregation. They have a different ethos. They have a different MO, emotional character. It’s not gonna work!

You better know your audience. Paul knew perfectly well that emotional appeals were not considered inappropriate arm twisting. Let me say that again. Emotional appeals in Paul’s world were not considered inappropriate arm twisting and he is a master at it. You know, if you wanna learn how to put somebody on a guilt trip, read Philemon. I mean, this is, this is great.

Listen to this. “So if you consider me a partner, welcome Onesimus, the slave, as you would welcome me. And if he’s done anything wrong or owes you anything, well then just charge it to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back. Here’s the IOU. Not to mention that you owe me your very spiritual life.”

I mean, this is emotional arm twisting. It’s okay in this culture. There are some cultures where this is not okay. Let me tell you where this rhetoric really doesn’t work. In the UK. Don’t try this in Durham,
England. This would be way over the top. You need to understand that the old school British are very formal.

J. B. Phillips couldn’t handle it when Paul said, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” You know how he translated that? “Greet one another with a hearty hand shake.” They are emotionally under control! They are aloof and remote and distant. Okay? This is them. They’re like some people from New England.

So what happens with emotional rhetoric when you’re dealing with non-emotional people? It turns them off. It doesn’t turn them on and persuade them. It turns them off. Now, sometimes, the way you convey the emotions is the key thing.

I once heard a avocado salesman in the new Quincy Market in Boston and he was trying hard to sell his product but this is what he sounded like, “Get yo avocados! I know ya love ‘em! Come right on down and get yo avocados! Ya need ‘em today! They’re green! They’re good! They’re fresh!” And unfortunately, the voice and the message were not in sync and people were going, ‘If the avocados are like his voice, I’m so not buying avocados from this townie. [laughter] I am not going there.’

You see, there’s an incongruity between the form and the substance here. You know? I can just imagine a preacher in Boston trying to do that. ‘Don’t ya love Jesus?! Ya need to get down and love Jesus!’ [laughter] This is so not working. The form matters! It needs to comport with the substance! And it needs to be audience-sensitive.

So, a rhetoric of emotional appeals. Ethos, Logos, Pathos. Ethos is the emotion you attend to at the beginning of the discourse. You are establishing rapport with your audience. Ethos is where you establish rapport with the audience. Now how does Paul do that?

One of the reasons ways he does that is he prays for them and he thanks God for them even if he’s not particularly thankful for them on this occasion. For example, 1 Corinthians is a problem solving letter. It just is. It’s a problem solving letter.

Listen to this Thanksgiving prayer. I mean, there are lots of problems in Carth. Listen to this. “I always thank my God, always for you, because of his grace given you in Christ! For in him, you have been enriched in every way with all kinds of speech and all kinds of knowledge.”

Wait a minute. Isn’t he going to be correcting the way they’re using all these kinds of speeches and knowledges and prophecies later in this? Yes, but right now, he’s sucking up to them and saying, ‘It’s so good y’all have got spiritual gifts. I’m really glad about this. You know?’ And they’re all going, ‘That warms the cockles of my heart. I will listen to the rest of this discourse.’

That’s exactly what’s going on here. “I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus, for in him you have been enriched in every way with all kinds of speech and all knowledge. God thus confirming our testimony about Christ amongst you. Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus to be revealed. And he will also keep you firm to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus. God is faithful who is called you into fellowship with his son Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

And they’re all going, ‘Aw, isn’t that special? And I especially like that part about he likes our spiritual gifts. See, he knows that we’ve got those divine gifts. Carry on, Paul. We’ll listen.’ That’s Ethos. You establish rapport with your audience. Now, rapport is not just what you say to them. It’s how you say it. And it also has to do, if you are in a culture that is appearance conscious like my mama.
‘Son, you need to tuck in that shirt. It doesn’t, it’s distracting at, you know, people not gonna pay attention to your message unless you look good.’ Right? That has to do with appearance and it did in antiquity. There’s a hilarious story told by Plutarch about a famous rhetorician who wore a toupee and it was a windy day and he’s, as most rhetoricians did, he’s proclaiming outdoors in the Agora, in the marketplace in Athens and all the sudden, this wind comes along and blows his toupee off as he’s beginning his discourse.

This is what you call having a bad Ethos day. Nobody was gonna take anything he said after that seriously after he looked ridiculous at the beginning of the discourse. Ethos has to do with establishing rapport with the audience. But do you see, here’s the other part of it. It has to do with establishing your authority to speak to the audience.

It’s not just about ‘hail fellow, well met.’ It’s about establishing your authority, so it is not an accident that Paul, at the beginning of his discourses, emphasizes he’s their apostle or he’s a servant of Christ or he’s this or he’s that. It’s not an accident and here’s something that you can track. In letters that begin with Paul saying, ‘I, Paul the apostle,’ there is more of an authority problem.

And letters that begin ‘I, Paul, servant of Christ,’ I don’t have to play the trump card of authority, there’s less of an authority problem, like Philippians. ‘I, Paul, servant of Christ.’ You will notice that he hedges his bets in Romans. In Roman’s, he’s writing to a congregation that’s not his own. He’s writing to a congregation he’s not even visited yet.

So listen to how he begins. “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus but also called to be an apostle.” So what is he going to do? ‘I am the apostle to the Gentiles. I do have authority over you even if that has never dawned on you before but I’m gonna soft soap it. I’m gonna talk about being a servant of Christ first.’

You see, he’s in a delicate situation with the Romans, because he can’t exercise authority over them in the same way he could a group of his own converts, a church that he had planted. It’s not an accident in 1 Corinthians that he says ‘Paul, the apostle. I am your apostle and you, baby, are gonna listen.’

So the beginning part of the speech is to establish rapport but also to establish your authority and right to address ‘em in the fashion that you’re going to address them. Ethos. Logos. The whole middle of the discourse is arguments, acts of persuasion.

Now here’s the thing, even when you’re giving a syllogism, if A, then B. If B, then C. You can give it in a way that’s enthusiastic. You can give it in a way that’s persuasive. Me, trying to be a good rhetorician realizes that 20 hours in 2 and a half days is too much. So I’m trying to inject as much enthusiasm into it as I can, because I happen to know that people respond emotionally to enthusiasm.

Now I happen to also be really enthusiastic about all this material, so that helps. I’m not fanning enthusiasm for this. But the truth of the matter is that the arguments in the middle of a discourse are emotion charged arguments. Some of ‘em are life and death arguments.

“If you get yourself circumcised,” says Paul, “you have cut yourself off. If you cut off that piece of skin, you’ve cut yourself off from Christ.” Now that’s what I call dramatic rhetoric. Bound to get attention of the men more than the women but, you know, powerful.

And then he turns around and says about those who are bewitching you, he said, “For those who are so keen about cutting off of the flesh, I just wish they would let the knife slip.” This is not gonna preach. [laughter] This is not gonna preach. He says this in Galatians 4 but this is not going to preach here. I don’t
expect you to have that verse at the end of Galatians 4 as you’re on your sign outside your church, “We will be preaching on ‘Let the knife slip,’ this week.” [laughter]

It won’t work in our culture. Logos, emotion charged arguments. Here is the meat of the acts of persuasion and then Pathos. The more surface emotions are appealed to at the beginning of the discourse. The deeper emotions are appealed to at the end of the discourse. Rhetoricians are very clear about this.

The deeper emotions, love and hate, jealousy, envy, grief, sorrow, the deeper emotions, vengeance. So, a stewardship sermon, getting to the peroration, could go like this. ‘I was reflecting on that stained glass window just yesterday. Sister Sarah’s father gave that. She was a sweet young girl with leukemia. Yet on the last Sunday she was in church, she gave all of her piggy bank into the offering plate and I was thinking, like the widow’s mite story, what an example that is for all of you. If you loved little Sarah, if you love your church, if you love me, your pastor, then surely you will want to give sacrificially for our budget for the coming year.’

Now, in many contexts, even in America, that would be over the top. That would be emotionally too much and it would be arm twisting and it would be manipulative. It would be manipulative and it would be seen as manipulative. It ain’t manipulative in Paul’s world.

‘If he owes you anything, credit it to my account. I’m writing out my IOU. Did I mention that you owe me your spiritual life?’ Now, that would be manipulative. ‘You owe me the pay back. I’ve done you a favor. Now you gotta do me a favor.’ It’s what it sound like, right? Sounds like the mafia. That’s what it sounds like.

Well, what’s manipulative in one context is in fact normal day-to-day ways you use emotion in Paul’s world and so we have that. The deeper emotions are appealed to at the end of the discourse during the final emotional [hearing][55:24], which is called the peroration, the peroration.

Now that’s just the emotional framework, Ethos, Logos, Pathos. That’s not actually the structure of the arguments. That’s the emotional palate that you’re gonna go through and in a good speech, you’re gonna take ‘em through the whole gamut of emotions. You’re gonna wanna make ‘em laugh. You’re gonna wanna make ‘em cry.

You know, a good rhetorician like Cicero, man, he could get ‘em from one end to the other. Get ‘em angry. Make ‘em happy. You know, a good speech is going to appeal to [inaudible][56:00], ‘cause here’s what you know. If you just appeal to the intellect, you may convince them, intellectually, but not persuade their hearts.

If you just persuade the heart, they’re gonna be some intellectual objections or issues. So the perfect rhetorical discourse is going to appeal to the whole person. Both the mind and the heart. Both the cognitive and the affective. Ancient rhetoricians knew this. Paul knew this. Some modern preachers haven’t got the memo.

They’re far too cerebral and not sufficiently appealing to the affective side of things. Now, let me tell you one thing about teaching and preaching that you need to understand about human psychology in the West. In the West, humor is important. And here’s what humor does. Humor causes people to lower their defenses.

If they can laugh a little bit, then some of those defenses against being some of those protected devices where they’re protecting their heart from having to make some kind of big commitment. Some of that
barrier goes down through a little bit of humor. There’s good humor and there’s bad humor but humor can backfire.

In certain contexts, certain humor doesn’t work. I tried some of my North Carolina jokes the first year I was preaching in England. No laughing. I went, ‘I need more British jokes.’ Humor is important, because it causes people to lower their defenses and then you have an opportunity to reach them for Christ. And so, you know, it’s important that you understand the psychology of preaching and how it works.

I was once taught that a discourse should be like a girl’s dress. It should be long enough to cover the subject but short enough to make it interesting. In regard to talking about yourself, it’s okay to do that some, especially one of the most effective means is self-effacing, sharing, where you share some of your own foibles.

Now let me just say a word of caution about that. It is not good rhetoric to air your dirty laundry every Sunday from the pulpit. This undercuts your Ethos and your authority over and over again. But moments of honesty and clarity, which reveal that you know you are not God’s gift to whoever, right(?) are good. That’s good, because those moments let the audience know that you are not putting yourself up on some pedestal that they could never ascend to.

You can relate to them and their problems. All of that’s good. Yet, Americans are relational people and they need some reassurance that the minister is not sort of thundering from the top of Sinai and become such an unapproachable person that they could never relate to this person. So self-effacing, storytelling is good.

I, I’ll give you an illustration. I was going to Seattle Pacific to lecture in Seattle Pacific University. I had a brand new suit on and I had flown from Lexington to St. Louis and my plane was late leaving Lexington, late getting to St. Louis and I, I had to do one of these O. J. Simpson run through the airport things, you know. If you’re old enough to remember that, then you’re as old as me.

But, in any case, I was running through the airport at 900, I had my ticket in my hand. Right? I’m running. I’m running. I get to the gate and they said, “Oh no. It’s 3 more gates down.” So I’m running some more and running some more and they’re closing the door. They are closing the door.

I said, “Don’t close the door! I’ve got to meet the president of Seattle Pacific and then I gotta speak within 30 minutes after I get there. I have to make this flight.” So, she opened the door back up and I’m running down the corridor and I get to the end of the corridor and there’s this little gap between the end of the corridor and the beginning of the plane and I drop my ticket, somehow miraculously, through that little slit [laughter] onto the tarmac below and my instinctive reaction was to lean over and try to grab it and I ripped the back of my pants wide open.

Stewardess is standing there at the entrant portal to the, to the plane watching this whole charade, you know. So I’m pulling my shirt out, pulling it down over my rear end, ‘cause I wasn’t sure how far the rip went, you know, kind of flinking into the plane like this and I’m thinking, ‘Great, I’ve got the president meeting me at the airport at the end of this next 2 and a half hour flight. What in the world am…I’m gonna have a horrible time when I get there.’

So I’m just praying, ‘Lord, whatever you can do for me. You know, I, I’m okay with being humbled but totally humiliated before the president of Seattle Pacific, I’m not up for that this morning, right?’

So I get there and I get off the plane and I walk off the plane and there’s this young man with a red and black checkered corduroy shirt and blue jeans and a scraggly beard and hair not combed with a sign that
said ‘Witherington.’ Didn’t even spell my name right. I thought, ‘Thank you, Jesus. You brought me a slob to take me to the University. So I can change my clothes first and the president need not know.’

So that was a bad Ethos day but it turned out okay at the end. Telling a story like that about yourself is good because it, it humanizes you. It’s okay to sprinkle that in from time-to-time. It’s kind of like my granny used to put rum in the Tipsy Parson from time-to-time, in the bottom of the cake and every now and again, you’d get this bite and you’d go, “Wooh! What was that?” you know.

It’s okay to sprinkle that in from time-to-time but if you make a regular practice of that, then it, the pulpit seems to become Ben’s confessional and, see, that’s not healthy. Confession should be done in the context of accountability, not just sort of fired off from the pulpit.

I’ll tell you something else you also better not do from a teaching or preaching platform is that you better not button hole a particular member of your church and their problems from the pulpit. If we’re talking about a confidential situation where somebody has a problem, it’s a huge mistake to call them out in front of the congregation, even indirectly, because if you are descriptive enough about what the problem is, there’s gonna be a lot of people in that group who will figure out who the heck you’re talking about real quick and then all hades breaks loose.

It’s a huge, it’s a huge mistake. And you see and the temptation for a minister is, ‘Oh, we’ve got this problem in the church. I’m gonna preach about it.’ See, now that’s the temptation. See, it, that’s a big mistake. That’s what you call need space preaching instead of God-based preaching.

Your preaching needs to come from your time in touch with God and with the Word of God. It needs to be relevant to your congregation but it needs to not be based on the dirty laundry of your congregation. Let the Holy Spirit do the convicting and convincing in regard to people’s dirty laundry. You take the high road and simply preach the Word of God. Attend to the text and the text will exegete them, let me tell you.

The text will do it. You don’t have to help the text along to get the job done. The Word of God will get it done. You’ve got to be very careful about how you address problems in the congregation, especially personal problems. I’m talking about personal problems. I’m not talking about, ‘We ain’t got enough money and we’re gonna have to close the building.’ Yeah, you have to talk to the congregation about those kinds of things. I’m talking about personal problems.
Chapter 16

Principles of Rhetoric

There are three different species of rhetoric. Three different species of rhetoric. Forensic, deliberative and epideictic, and each of these species of rhetoric is intended for a different [inaudible][00:57], a different situation in life.

The forensic rhetoric is the rhetoric of the law court. Deliberative rhetoric is the rhetoric of the democratic assembly, the Ecclesia, and epideictic rhetoric is the rhetoric of funeral orations or public ceremonies, that sort of stuff. It’s ornamental rhetoric. Each type of rhetoric has a different function and a different purpose. Each deals with different situations but the form of the discourse is basically the same in each case.

[inaudible][01:38] The skeletal outline that you follow in doing the preaching, doing the proclaiming, doing the rhetorizing. It’s the same in each case. So the form is flexible, the content is specific. Let’s talk about forensic rhetoric. It is indeed the rhetoric of the law court. It’s the rhetoric of attack and defense.

It was, in the first century A.D., the most common type of rhetoric and let me tell you why. Democracy had had its demise. The rhetoric that arose in the Greek assemblies of Athens and Corinth and elsewhere had long since gone by the wayside because there were no more democracies in the Roman Empire, there was an empire.

Democracy was not encouraged. So the dominant kind of rhetoric which you’re gonna find for example in Quintilian, first century A.D. Latin orator and teacher of rhetoric, is forensic rhetoric. In his institutions of oration, he’s going to be talking about forensic rhetoric because it’s the dominant form of rhetoric people heard, saw or participated in.

And that is because the Roman Empire, up until the time of modern America, was the most litigious society on earth. They had the sue me, sue you blues. I mean, there were just people going to court all the time.

[chuckles]

Dr. Ben: So the rhetoric of the law court was important. Now this is the rhetoric of attack and defense. It’s the rhetoric of prosecution and defending. That’s what it is. The focus, temporal focus, of this rhetoric is on the past. I mean, you’re not very often gonna be prosecuted for something you haven’t yet done.

That doesn’t usually happen. What usually happens at a law court is you are being prosecuted for something you believe to have already done. Right? So the focus of forensic rhetoric is on the past, on your behavior in the past. The goal of forensic rhetoric, if you’re the defense attorney, is to defend someone charged with a crime or to convict someone charged of a crime, if you’re the prosecuting attorney.

Now Paul definitely does use this rhetoric. He uses it in a variety of settings but let me remind you that we don’t have any Paul on letters written to non-Christians. All of his letters are written to Christians. Now I-- I cannot emphasize this enough.
So what his rhetoric would have looked like to a non-Christian audience, the only place you get a clue about that, is there are a few hints in his letters to Christians but we—what we have is speech summaries in Acts of Paul addressing a synagogue audience or the Areopagus or this pagan audience or that pagan audience. So we have some samples in Acts of what the speech—what of—what the rhetoric would have looked like outside of the context of the church by a Christian proclaimer.

And we definitely have some forensic rhetoric. Guess where it shows up? In the trial before Festus and Felix. Forensic rhetoric, it's a courtroom, he is on trial, and the rhetoric of attack in defense is going to be important. And let me just say to you that in forensic rhetoric you honestly need the appeal to the emotions as much as you need anything else.

If you want to see some good rhetoric, watch the summation speeches of Sam Waterston in some of the old episodes of “Law and Order.” He's good. He knows how to bring it home. He knows how to give the peroration. The peroration is when you address the jury or the judge. Right? You make the emotional appeal or the final summation of the evidence and hope to bring it home so that the verdict will be good.

Do we have some forensic rhetoric in Paul's letters? Yes, we do. 2 Corinthians 10-13 is just full of forensic rhetorical techniques. We went over this last night, remember Mark boasting, remember the Mark boasting? “I've had far more trials, far more shipwrecks,” etcetera. These are not the things that you brag about on your tombstone. In an honor and shame culture, these are not far more whippings, far more [inaudible][06:26] the rods, far more stonings, the—these are shameful things. Right?

So what Paul is doing is he is imploding the boasting of his opponents by Mark boasting about his weaknesses. This is a typical forensic technique. It's satire, it's satire, that's what it is. It's supposed to make the audience ashamed of having listened to the improper boasting of others, you see. Or in the law court, make them ashamed of having believed the prosecuting attorney about this poor little old soul that's being prosecuted.

So if you want to see a good example of invective, and satire, and irony, and Mark boasting and the kind of things that you normally do in a forensic argument, look at 2 Corinthians 10-13. You'll get a good taste of the fact that Paul can lay down the lumber if he needs to, you know, he’s perfectly capable of that. Deliberative rhetoric is the rhetoric of the democratic assembly, the Ecclesia.

Now I have a theory. It is just a theory. The question becomes why does Paul call his church meetings in homes Ecclesia? Why does he use this term? There are plenty of other terms he could have used for the community meeting. Why does he pick a word which in places like Corinth or Philippi would instantly resonate with the history of Greece and the whole idea of a democratic assembly?

Well, it's because, dear friends, that the church is seen by Paul as a voluntary society. Now we’re gonna let that sink in for a minute. In the church, you would do far better to persuade people than to try to order them around. You would do far better and Paul says, to Philemon, “Though I could command you, I would rather persuade you.” You see, if you persuade a person, then they freely respond. If you order a person, if you give them an ultimatum, that's not gonna work in a voluntary society.

You know, that's like one Civitan saying to another Civitan, “I am demanding that you make the speech after lunch next week,” and you are going, “I'll go join another Civitan group. I don’t have to put up with this. Who died and left him boss?” Now the church is supposed to work like a voluntary society. It doesn't always work by persuasion but it ought to, and I would just say to you again there is a difference between persuasion and hardcore manipulation. Ministers can be big time manipulators.
They can call in their markers on people that are indebted to them for pastoral counseling. There are so many ways a minister can be an arm-twister and a manipulator, and you know it would be far better if they were just persuaders. But because of the tyranny of the urgent, sometimes persuasion gives way to straight manipulation. We’ve all been hit by the tyranny of the urgent.

Paul is very careful, and he would prefer to use this kind of rhetoric. The dominant rhetoric that you find in Paul’s letters is deliberative, overwhelmingly so. Galatians, deliberative rhetoric; 1 Corinthians, deliberative rhetoric; Romans, deliberative rhetoric; Philippians, deliberative rhetoric; I could go on. Colossians, deliberative rhetoric.

The other dominant form of rhetoric he does, he uses epideictic rhetoric and we’ll get to that next. Deliberative rhetoric is the rhetoric of advice and consent in its original setting in the assembly or imagine congress for a minute. You’re going to debate policy decisions that will result in a change in course in the near future. It’s called policy decisions, called laws.

The rhetoric of advice and consent. It’s the job of the pastor to work for consent amongst the believing and give them good advice to persuade them about their future courses of action. Indeed, it’s intended to help them follow a particular course of action through persuasion and dissuasion. Now Galatians’ basic function, though it has many different flavors of argumentation, basic function of Galatians is to prevent to head off a disaster. The basic function of Galatians is to try to prevent the Galatians from listening to Judaizers and getting them self-circumcised and then having to keep 613 commandments. That’s a lot of commandments.

You notice, I didn’t say, “613 opinions.” I said, “613 commandments.” Paul says, “You really don’t want to go back to Egypt.” Let’s not go there. And so Galatians, all of the arguments in Galatians, both the arguments for and the arguments against, are intended to head off a change in lifestyle amongst the Galatian converts. He doesn’t want them to get themselves circumcised and keep the Mosaic Covenant.

“Stop the train, get off now,” says Paul. “Don’t go there.” Deliberative rhetoric. The focus of deliberative rhetoric, unlike forensic rhetoric, is on the future. The focus of forensic rhetoric is on the past. And that only leaves us with one other kind which is epideictic rhetoric. This is the rhetoric of entertainment and encomiums. Now it can be serious or it can be frivolous. There’s a famous ode of Cicero for the marketplace entertainment, an ode to a flea.

“I think that I shall never see a thing as noble as a flea.” It kind of goes like that, you know, it’s kind of like Ogden Nash. “I never saw a purple cow. I never hope to see one. But all the same, I’d rather see a purple cow than be one.” That’s epideictic rhetoric. It’s the rhetoric of entertainment. It’s a rhetoric of poetry.

It’s also the rhetoric of funeral addresses, and funeral addresses could be important. “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I’m not here to praise Caesar but to bury Caesar. And to honor those who are here, honorable men, Brutus, Cassius, Longinus, as we are all honorable men.” Now this is a funeral oration given by Mark Anthony reproduced in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar which indeed is doing just the opposite of what it says it is doing. He is there to praise the murdered Caesar and he is there to blame Brutus, Cassius and Longinus. He is going to condemn them with faint praise and he is going to resurrect Caesar with greater praise. So that everybody there feels shameful about what happened.

The rhetoric of encomiums, funeral orations can be very important. This is the rhetoric of praise or blame, praise or blame of some person, praise or blame of some subject. As you might imagine, this kind of rhetoric is often very hyperbolic. It’s very flowery, it’s often ornate. It often uses 25 dollar words when 5 dollar words would do. It often results in very long sentences and yes, we certainly have it in Paul.
Ephesians is one honking long example of epideictic rhetoric in praise of the church. Jew and Gentile united in Christ.

It's a powerful piece of rhetoric.

Another good example from Paul of epideictic rhetoric would be 1 Corinthians 13, just this one chapter. You can have a digression. You need to signal the digression but you can have a digression that morphs into another mode of rhetoric. We certainly have that in 1 Corinthians. Paul says at the beginning, “Let me show you a more excellent way.” Now that may not sound like much to you. Let me show you a more excellent, a more praise-worthy manner, but right off the bat that’s signaling he is going into epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame, and so what’s following this is an encomium in praise of real love.

How appropriate, for tomorrow here it is, “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but have not have loved, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but don’t have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possessed to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but have no love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others,” you hear all this language about honor and boasting?

It really is a very clear example of epideictic rhetoric about praising. “Does not dishonor others, it’s not self-seeking, it’s not easily angered.” I like this bit, “It keeps no record of wrongdoing.” That’s a tough one. Now you’ve been married 30 plus years, I’m working on 33, you know, keep no record of wrongdoing, there is this long track record, right? That’s a tough one.

“It’s not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongdoing. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, it always perseveres. Love, agape, not eros, never fails.” So this is not about eros or storge or philia or philios.

Is this text appropriate to preach on at a wedding? To talk about marital love? Not unless what you’re talking about is the love of God that binds these two people together. If you’re talking about ordinary marital love or sex, this is not the text for you. Problem again is English is monolithic when it comes to love.

There’s one word for everything, “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease. Where there are tongues, they will be stilled. Where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, what is in part disappears.” Just a footnote, there are some protestant traditions that think the word perfection there refers to the canon. So that when the canon came, we didn’t need spiritual gifts anymore, particularly speaking in tongues and prophecy.

Uh, no. He’s not talking about the canon and his poor Corinthians could never have understood him to mean the canon of the New Testament. There was no canon of the New Testament. He couldn’t allude to it. It didn’t exist yet. So that’s not what this is about. This is about when the Eskaton comes and the proof of that is what he says here at the end. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became a man, I put childish ways behind me, for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” It’s a wonderful, wonderful ode to love. And it’s not an accident that we’ve recognized that this is one of the most poetic purple passages in all of Paul.
It is. But you see, that’s the way epideictic rhetoric is supposed to be formed. It’s supposed to be the most eloquent of rhetoric. It’s supposed to be the most flowery of rhetoric, the most poetic of rhetoric. And if you read Ephesians in the Greek, you have a 26-line long sentence in the first chapter.

He goes on effervescently in praise of what God has done for the church. It’s the rhetoric of praise but also blame. In a dyadic culture where you have honor, you have shame, where you have praise, you have blame, it’s almost de rigueur that you mention what’s blame-worthy so that they have something, a boundary line to co--- contrast with what’s being praised.

So they know how far to go and how far not to go and that’s right. There is a whole treatise that Paul follows the rules of on inoffensive self praise. It’s an interesting treatise. It’s a rhetorical treatise that Plutarch gives us. And Paul is following it to the letter in 2 Corinthians 10-13. And you remember when he praises all his weakness and his foibles and all of that? That’s called inoffensive self praise.

It’s self praise with the humility out-front. It’s Plutarch’s tract on inoffensive self praise. How to praise yourself without looking arrogant, rude, boastful or stupid? You will notice that Paul doesn’t have any problem with certain kinds of boasting. See, somewhere along the line in Christian history, we got the impression boasting, all bad, eating humble pie, all good. Right?

We need to talk about humility and we will, but let me just say that if Christ is the ultimate example of humility, and he is, what he is an example of is a strong person stepping down and serving others. Humility is not feelings of low self-worth. It’s not poor-mouthing yourself. “Poor little old me. I’m just not capable.” Humility doesn’t have anything to do with those things. Humility is the posture of a strong person who chooses to self-sacrificially serve others. ‘Cause Christ is the example of humility.

So what I’m saying is there is a place for inoffensive boasting. There is a place for inoffensive praise, both of yourself and others. You have to be real about yourself. If God has done a good work in you, why should you call it junk? You see, that’s not humility, that’s offensive self humiliation. That’s a whole different ball game. And it’s not a good thing. Each person is a person of sacred worth created in the image of God and renewed in the image of Christ.

You should get your MO-- ego strength from that. God don’t make no junk and he certainly don’t renew anybody in Christ to be a piece of junk. And therefore, there is such a thing as false humility. You need to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of false humility on the one end of the spectrum and false pride on the other end of the spectrum.

You need to plow a furrow between those two beasts. Blessed is the person who knows themselves for who they are and knows when God has said about their work, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Now if God has said, “Well done, good and faithful servant” about something you’ve done, then should you trash it? No. You should not. So learning inoffensive self praise, it’s a good thing. It’s a good thing. Rhetoric can teach you some of that.

Now let’s talk about the parts of a speech. The beginning of the speech is called the exordium. It begins to make the audience receptive to what follows and favorably dispose towards the preacher-- speaker. So Paul does this in two places, he uses the epistolary prescript sometimes and he uses the thanksgiving prayer sometimes to serve the function of a rhetorical exordium, to set up the discourse that’s going to follow. This is part one of the speech. Part two, the narration. Now I need to tell you that in terms of the structural outline, sometimes the narration will come before the proposition, sometimes it will come after the proposition and that’s okay.
Narration, not always required in a rhetorical speech. The narration is the narration of pertinent facts which produced this discourse, or the necessity for this discourse. It’s like Joe Friday in the old Dragnet series, “Just the facts, ma’am, just the facts.” He’s going to rehearse facts that are relevant to the discourse that follows and that are necessary to make the argument work.

Now sometimes in an epideictic piece of rhetoric, you don’t need to be listing facts. There is no narration in Ephesians. He’s just going to praise all kinds of good things. Hallelujah. But in forensic rhetoric a narration of pertinent facts is required and normally in deliberative rhetoric, there is a narration of relevant facts needed to make an important decision.

Sometimes, in a epideictic encomium or funeral oration, there will be a narration of the accomplishment of the deceased. I mean, you’ve heard funerals like this, right? Uncle Joe, he did X, he did Y. Okay, that’s the narration, the narration of pertinent facts about the life of this person, and that’s a good thing.

So you have the exordium, you have the narration and-- You know, this, if you don’t get everything about the skeletal outline of an ancient discourse, the two parts I really wish you would get the most, to understand Paul’s documents better, are the proposition and the peroration. Exordium, the epistolary prescript, thanksgiving prayer sucking up and then we go right to the proposition. The narration actually comes after the proposition in 1 Corinthians and that’s fine.

Here’s what Paul says, this is the proposition. “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions amongst you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.” What is the aim of this discourse? To build harmony, unity, concordia in a many-splintered church.

We got house church versus house church, one leader versus another leader, we got a mess in Corinth. So the function of all the arguments that follow in 1 Corinthians are to produce unity in the body in Corinth. This is why we have, for example, the extended metaphor about the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12.

This is why we have the epideictic digression on love which binds together whereas hubris tears apart. Love builds up, pride puffs up and so on. All of the arguments in 1 Corinthians are intended to unite the body of Christ in Corinth. This is the proposition. Proposition is the thesis statement that indicates what the author is going to be talking about.

Let’s take some other examples of propositions from Paul. Let’s go to Romans. Now the propositions need to be succinct and to the point. They’re not huge, long things. Listen to this one. This is Romans 1:16, 17, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is from the faithful one to those of faith just as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.” What’s the proposition of this document? “The righteousness of God” and “the righteous shall live by faith.”

That’s what this whole discourse is going to be about. Now the righteousness of God can involve both salvation and wrath, so the very first argument is about the wrath of God against all unrighteousness. Romans 1:18-32. All of the arguments in Romans are about the righteousness of God and this-- the making right of human beings in relationship with God.

You get to Romans 9 and the argument is about, if God is a righteous God, why does it appear He has abandoned His first chosen people? Does He renege on His promises? Paul has to answer that question because God is righteous. And he is going to talk about how God will do right. Righteousness is the
subject of this discourse. So proposition, if you find it, you're well on the way to understanding the discourse.

Now let's take another example, we looked at Romans, we looked at 1 Corinthians, let's take another really good example. How about Galatians? Listen to the end of Galatians 2. Now Galatians has a very long narration. Paul narrates the story of his conversion where he got his apostolic authority, how he met the Jerusalem church leaders, what he did after that. There is a long narration of relevant facts in the beginning of Galatians.

Because he thought that was necessary so they would know that he did not get his gospel from the Jerusalem church. He got it from God. So then he comes to the climax wanting to give the proposition and this is what he says, “We,” this is beginning with verse 15, “who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not set right by observing the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.”

So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be set right by the faithfulness of Christ and not by observing the law. Because by observing the law no one will be set right. But if in seeking to be set right in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also amongst the sinners. Doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? “Me genoito!” Now this is one of the phrases in Paul that is very hard to translate with full force.

A weak version would be, “Absolutely not!” It's closer to, “Hell no.” It's a very strong vituperative phrase. But that won't preach either, you know, don't try that translation from the pulpit, okay? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroy then I really would be a lawbreaker, “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. It’s no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, the life I now live in the body I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if right standing, righteousness, could be had through the law, Christ died for nothing.” Now this is an emphatic, emotional, exclamation point filled proposition statement.

You got your salvation, you got your right standing, you got your righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ not through keeping the Mosaic Law. Hint, hint. You don't need to go keeping it now. The proposition for Galatians for a very polemical discourse. Now I'd like to say something about the difference between polemics and forensic rhetoric.

One of the problems in analyzing ancient rhetoric is mistaking pure polemics for forensics. Yes, lawyers lose-- use polemics. If you've gone to a courtroom trial, you're going to probably hear some polemics, right? People are angry, that's okay. But polemics, rhetoric with the volume turned up can be used in any form of rhetoric. It can be used in deliberative rhetoric, it can be used in epideictic rhetoric, it can be used in forensic rhetoric.

It's not particular choice, particular species of rhetoric. What we have in Galatians is deliberative rhetoric arguing for a verdict, arguing for them to not get themselves circumcised. And he's so in earnest about making sure they don't do that that he uses a lot of polemics. He pulls out all the stops and uses a lot of polemics. But it's not a forensic argument. He is not defending his apostleship. He's not using the rhetoric of attack and defense. He's using deliberative rhetoric with polemics that's a different thing.

Okay, I could look at more propositions, that's enough of the sample. We'll have a chance to look at more. But what follows the proposition or a thesis statement is in the first instance, arguments for your case, the probatio, pro and what is following the probatio is the refutatio, arguments against.
Now I want you to think about the psychology of this. You're trying to convince somebody of something? Make your positive case first. Don't lead with arguments for why not doing something else. I mean, this is just good psychology. You start with the positive and then you do the refutation. In another words you need to build up your case before you tear down other people's case.

Some preaching goes wrong by simply focusing on tearing down other arguments before getting to the main positive point. And then it comes across with too negative a tone. See, the ancient rhetoricians knew this. You attract far more flies with honey than with gall. Why start with the gall? Arguments for, then arguments against. If there are gonna be arguments against, make them later.

Arguments for first, arguments against later. Galatians would be another good example. He is making his arguments for right standing by grace through faith. He is using his positive examples of Abraham and so on. And then only at the end of that point period of argumentation does he get to allegory of Sarah and Hagar. What an allegory it is. Sarah and Hagar would not have recognized themselves in this retelling of the story.

And this is the refutation of what the Judaizers were saying to the Galatians. But he has saved for last because this is what happens when you make a new case for something, right? In church you make a new case for something, there'll be this objection in the back of people's minds but what about-- what about we've never done it like that before? What about X, what about Y? The smart move psychologically is you make your positive case for and then you dismantle the objections.

That's exactly what Paul does. That's his normal mo. That's the way he operates, that's the way ancient rhetoricians operate. Well, after the whole theories of arguments, there is the peroration. The emotional appeal, the appeal to the deeper emotions. Now there is about three different way-- forms a peroration can take.

A peroration can sum up the previous arguments. This is not always true. This is called [inaudible][38.14]. The recapitulation of your major headings, your major topics. So a peroration can simply sum up the major arguments made before that's a normal peroration. But even if you do that, you've still got to appeal to their deeper emotions to embrace the case that you're making. The second kind of peroration is one that focuses just on the last argument you make, because as it turns out this last argument is the most crucial one, it's the climactic one, and so you use the emotional cash value of the peroration to reinforce the last argument. That's the second kind of peroration. The third kind of a peroration is a more general emotional appeal. Appeal to deeper emotions but a more general emotional appeal. Let me give you an example of some perorations. This one you get to sing along with. Now remember Ephesians is the rhetoric of praise and blame. He reserves the blame bit and the warning bit after all of the sweetness and light in Ephesians 1-4.

For when he gets to Ephesians 5 and then he turns to military rhetoric, Chapter 6, the last Chapter. The passage that is the peroration is Ephesians 6 beginning with the 10th verse. It carries onto at least verse 17, 10 through 17. Now the background of this as I imagine it is [inaudible][39.51]. So here's what I need you to do.

[vocalizing]

We need a drum.

[vocalizing]
The emotional appeal with the big music in the background. So here we go. This is your part, I'm gonna get you started but you have to keep going 'cause I'm reading this peroration.

[vocalizing]
And repeat.

[vocalizing]
Okay, are you ready? Here we go. Carry on. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the vows of the devil for our struggle is not with flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark and evil age, against the forces of darkness in the heavenly realms.

Well, you get the point, right? It’s rhetoric with the volume turned up. It’s an emotional appeal and, you know, he’s grabbing your little heart and stopping that sucker flat at the end. It’s he’s just getting you in the gut and saying, “There’s mean gnarly things out there. Put on the full armor of Christ and be prepared to stand.” Now what’s makes this an epideictic peroration is he’s not appealing for them to advance or to attack.

He’s appealing for them to continue to stand in the virtues they already embrace: faith, hope and love, etcetera. He’s not asking them to make a change, he’s asking them to make a stand. And that is so different. This is not justification for starting all kinds of deliverance ministries where you go on the attack against the forces of darkness. That’s not what this says, it says put on your heavy overcoat ‘cause there is some gnarly weather out there. So you can stand and withstand the onslaughts of the powers of darkness.

So this is not about you becoming sort of Batman and taking on the Joker, you know. This is about putting on the full armor of Christ so that you have sufficient protection against the bewitching, the bewildering of the powers of darkness. And the good news is you have sufficient armor. You need to put it on. You need to wear it well and you need to stand. That’s a emotional, peroration epideictic style. The peroration in a deliberative style is gonna look a little more sedate and less emotional. So let’s listen to the peroration in Philippians. Now notice the emotional difference in the tone. This is far more eloquent, less sort of dramatic. Here we go.

Paul says, in Philippians 4 beginning with the 8th verse. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. And whatever you’ve learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice. God of peace be with you all.” You know, that’s just gentle because he doesn’t need to put the hammer down with the Philippians. He doesn’t need to turn the volume up with the Philippians, they already get it. Whatever is noble and pure and good keep thinking about these things and the God of peace will be with you. Now that’s not Ephesians 6, that’s gentle.

It’s a peroration, it appeals to their core values. What are your core values? What are you emotionally attached to in here? What’s really good? It’s still a peroration. It’s a summation of the things he’s been appealing to throughout the discourse and the things that they should recognize and embrace.

All right. Now let me give you one example of the full thing in the form of an epistle, okay. So we’re gonna look at Romans just for a minute to give you a flavor of how this works. We have an epistolary opening in chapters 1, 1 through 7 and this is a rather long epistolary opening. There’s actually a creedal
fragment in verses 3 and 4 of this epistolary opening. So it seems likely that Paul feels like he's got to do more preparation to address an audience that he's never addressed before.

He needs to do more establishing a rapport than he might otherwise have to do with his own converts. So the prescript is longer and then on top of the long prescript 1 through 7, we have this longer wish prayer. We have verses 8 through 10 and that still doesn't bring us to the proposition, then we have a narration of relevant facts.

“I haven’t been able to come see you yet, I’m sorry about that. I’m planning on coming, this is sort of preparatory for that. I’m looking forward to your receiving me and sending me on my way to Spain.” He is priming the pump but he has a lot to tell them. So we’ve read the proposition about the righteousness of God and the right standing of human beings. Romans 1:16 and 17 that leads us to a whole long string of arguments about the righteousness of God

Argument one, the bankruptcy of, and God’s judgment on pagan religious experience. The wrath of God against Gentile wickedness. But just when the Jews and the audience are saying, “Yeah, baby, let those pagans have it. What’s he gonna do? Well, he’s going to critique first.

Judgmental Gentiles, who looked down their noses at Jews in Chapter 2:1-16, and then he’s gonna turn around and censor a censorious Jewish teacher. He’s gonna have a-- what’s called a diatribe, a debate with a Jewish teacher saying, “Who made you special? You know what? Sin is the great leveler.”

“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” Paul is gonna say and therefore Jew and Gentile both need the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. They both need this. So he’s gonna be really careful about this argument. He’s gonna cre-- he’s gonna be an equal opportunity critiquer of Gentiles and Jews. The real reason for his approach of dealing with Gentiles first is A, the congregation is largely Gentile. He says so in Romans 11, I’m talking to you Gentiles, he says.

But, you see, here is the real problem in Rome. The Gentile Christians are not even meeting with the Jewish Christians. They’re not in the same house churches. And in fact, the Jewish Christians have only recently come back to Rome after they were banished by Claudius. He’s got to rehabilitate the Jewish Christians in the eyes of the snobby Gentile Christians. So he’s got to take the Gentile Christians down a peg or two.

He’s got to level the playing field at the foot of the cross, that’s what he’s got to do and that’s what he does. And so to make his case as clear as it can be, we have a second proposition. He’s got to reiterate what’s the main thing here. Because this is gonna be a really long discourse, it’s 16 chapters. So we have an expansion of the proposition and let me read you that now.

This is Romans 3, it will be familiar to you, 21-31. Romans 3:21-31. “But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God,” Ah-ha! What’s the theme of this reemphasis and an expansion of the proposition? Again, the righteousness of God. Here we go again, but now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known to which the law and the prophets simply testify.

This is the righteousness that is given through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe. But there’s no difference between Jew and Gentile. “All have sinned and fallen short the glory of God” and so on. So we have the expansion of the proposition there and then we have a third argument and we have the story that Abraham is the forefather of a universal religion involving both Jew and Gentile. And that he is the original foreshadowing of salvation by grace through faith.
He is the original foreshadowing of right standing through grace, by grace through faith. Now I need to say a couple of things about this argument in Romans 4 just for a minute. This is not about the imputed righteousness of Christ. It's not about exchanging Christ’s righteousness for our lack there of.

If you look at the argument, what Paul says, quoting Genesis 15 and 12 is, Abraham’s faith was credited as Abraham’s righteousness. And by the way, this is not forensic language. It's not the language of the courtroom, it's the language of the ledger, of the CPA, of the accountant, credits and debits, you with me now? Abraham’s faith is credited, reckoned as Abraham’s righteousness.

The exchange is not between Christ’s righteousness and ours, the exchange is between faith of Abraham and righteousness of Abraham. Abraham’s faith is credited as right standing with God. And that’s exactly what he argues about us. Our faith is what establishes our right standing with God. God pardons our sins on the basis of grace through faith. It's not about imputing Christ's righteousness to us. What Paul does say is that the whole basis for our being able to have faith in Christ is the faithfulness of Christ. That is, His death on the cross. Now we’ll see more about that when we look at the Christological hymns this afternoon.

But for now, what I want to say is that there are two components to this. There is the objective basis of our salvation and there's the subjective basis of our salvation. The objective basis of our salvation is the faithfulness of Christ. The subjective basis of our salvation is our faith in Christ. But in other way, the objective basis of our salvation is what Christ did on the cross, not what Moses did in the law. The subjective basis of our salvation is faith in Christ.

So Paul is not talking about just our faith in Christ saving us, he's talking about the faithfulness of Christ saving us. And he uses a particular phrase to indicate this. Now if you were very alert and paying close attention, I translated the proposition statement in Galatians 2 with the phrase “the faithfulness of Christ” and I just translated this bit in regard to the faithfulness of Christ. Here is the Greek, “Pistis Christou.” Literally, this Greek phrase transliterated, Pistis Christou, literally this Greek phrase means “the faith of Christ.” Now that's the literal Greek, the faith of Christ.

The question is, is it an objective genitive or is it a subjective genitive? If it's an objective genitive, it would be faith in Christ. If it's a subjective genitive, then it would be the faith or faithfulness of Christ. In the Greek, there’s no grammatical preference here. A genitive phrase like this could be either subjective or objective. There is no percentages in this. It can be either one.

I'm saying that despite Martin Luther, this phrase should not be translated “faith in Christ” and we have various English translations that do translate it that way. I'm saying that this phrase should be “the faithfulness of Christ” and that is his shorthand for talking about Christ's death on the cross. He was faithful, he said, says Paul in Philippians 2, even unto death on the cross. He was obedient even unto death on the cross. This phrase is about what Christ has done for you. It's not about what you do in relationship to Christ.

And here’s where I want to stress the importance of the objective means of salvation being primary and the subjective means of salvation being secondary. You have been saved by God’s gracious act in Jesus Christ. You have appropriated that salvation through faith. The primary thing is what God has done for you. The primary thing is not how you responded to God. You get the point? Grace is primary, faith is secondary. So the faithfulness of Christ, of Christ on the cross is the objective means of your salvation. Your faith in Christ is the subjective means by which you appropriate the benefits of that salvation. You need them both.
It’s not an either or proposition. You need them both, but one of the great problems in Protestantism is that since the reformation we have so stressed, “You’re saved by faith, you’re saved by faith,” that what that sounds like in a voluntaristic culture and in a democracy like America is that we save ourselves. And this is a huge mistake. Paul would’ve been going, “Oy vey, what are you doing to my Gospel? This is not what I said. Get it right!” I’m saying that there are about seven places in Paul’s letters where sometimes you will have the translation “faith in Christ,” but you ought not to have that translation. The translation ought to be “the faithfulness of Christ.”

And it’s very important that we get that right. I’ll just give you one example and we’ll have a chance to talk more about this. Chapter 3 of Romans verse 22, we’ve just been dealing with this. “This righteousness is given to us through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe.” It does not read “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” That’s redundant. You don’t need to say, to all who believe, to all who believe. You don’t need to say that twice. Now he’s going to talk to both about the objective means of our salvation and the subjective means. So let me read it to you one more time.

Listen up, verse 22 of Romans 3, “This righteousness is given through Pistis Christou, through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to those who believe.” He didn’t leave your faith out. That’s the end of the sentence. The middle and the meat of the sentence is what Jesus has done for you. Pistis Christou, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. That’s one example. I could give you six more. I think it’s a bad translation to translate “Pistis Christou” faith in Jesus Christ. I don’t think it’s helpful. This affects Galatians. Let me go back just for a minute to the proposition in Galatians, word up about Galatians. Listen to Galatians 2 here.

First Adam went wrong. He’s the forefather of universal sin, suffering and death. The last Adam is the origin of universal grace, salvation and life. We have what is called a syncrisis, a rhetorical comparison. This guy compared to this guy. Mano a mano. What were the consequences of this person’s action and what were the consequences of this person’s action? A comparison can be a comparison of two good examples, two bad examples or it can be a comparison by contrast between a bad example and a good example. Which kind of syncrisis is this one? Bad and good. It’s primarily a comparison by contrast, that’s
exactly what Romans 5:12-21 is. And here’s where I say, if you don’t have a concept of corporate identity, you’re not gonna get this.

Let’s consider the concept of federal headship for a minute. Let’s suppose, this morning, in his radio address, President Obama says “We have decided to declare war on Monaco. I’m making an executive order. We’d like to take over all those beach resorts, we’ve got plenty of military hardware, Monaco has no army, it has no navy, barely has a coastguard. I’m thinking this is easy pickings. Let’s go get them.” Now if President Obama declares war on Monaco, are American citizens at war with Monaco, whether they had any choice about it or not? Yes or no?

Yes, they are. The decision of one man, who is the head of state, affects all of those who are a part of the state. That’s federal headship. If you don’t understand that, you’re not going to understand this argument. For Paul says “When Adam sneezed, we all caught cold. When Adam sinned, we all inherited the consequences.” And likewise, when Christ saved, if we are in Him, we get His frequent flier miles. See where I’m going with this. Christ is the head of the body, the body gets the benefits of what comes down from the head.

Christ is Adam gone right, the founder of a new race of people, a third race, neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christian. First Adam, Adam gone wrong, the first Adam made a mistake at a tree. The last Adam set things right on a tree. First Adam, tempted to partake of the tree, the last Adam, tempted to avoid the tree. I can keep going down this road with a nice little allegory about the first and the last Adam and it will preach. This is a syncretism encouraged by Paul himself, a comparison by contrast and he likes it so much that he’s already used it in 1 Corinthians 15.

The first Adam was a human being and he passed on to us humanity. The last Adam is a life-giving spirit, says Paul. And he passed on to us the resurrection power. Hallelujah. I don’t know about you, but I’m tired of being numbered in the race of the first Adam, when I ought to be counted in the race of the last one. And this contrast is powerful. It’s a powerful contrast. Now the similarities need to be taken [ ] into account as well. You have two corporate heads who were real human beings, both of whom had effect on all of their progeny. That’s the only similarity between the first and the last Adam. Otherwise, not so much, otherwise, it’s a contrast. But you do have to have this sense and understanding that we have inherited the sin nature from Adam.

You know the first sentence that Adam spoke to Eve was a palindrome? Did you know that? He said “Madam, I’m Adam,” which is the same forward or backwards. Madam, I’m Adam. Then the fall came. He lost all his poetry and hip hop sense. When Paul has introduced the argument about the first and the last Adam, he is trying to set up the discussion in Romans 6 and Romans 7, leading to the climax in Romans 8.

If you don’t understand what’s going on in Romans 5, you’re not going to understand Romans 6 and 7, because Romans 7 is going to be a description of all those who are in Adam and not in Christ. And Romans 8 is going to be a description of all those who are in Christ and no longer in Adam. That’s where this is going. Now it’s easier to see the latter part. Romans 8:1 “There is now no condemnation for all those who are in Christ Jesus.” Because, why? The law of the spirit of life has set you free from being in that first Adam. You ain’t in that first Adam anymore, stop giving him too much street cred. “Just stop,” says Paul.

So Romans 7 is a Christian description of life in the first Adam. And at the heart of that description is that you may know better, but you can’t do better. You may know the good, but you can’t do the good because
you are in the bondage of sin. Life outside Christ is bondage to sin. Life in Christ, for freedom, Christ has set you free. Why would you want to go back to slavery? Romans 7 is not a description of the Christian life. I'm sorry, Martin Luther, but no. Romans 7 is not even the description of a backsliding Christian life. Of any Christian it must be said, greater is He who is in you than any of these temptations and forces in the world. Of every Christian it must be said, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 10, “No temptation has overcome you that is not common to humanity such that with the temptation God will provide an adequate means of escape. You have no excuses for your sin.”

You have freedom in Christ. Roman 7 is not about the Christian life. The Christian is not at the same time the old Adam and the new Adam as if they were chained together in some schizophrenic cage match. The Christian used to be in the old Adam and is now in the new Adam. You’re no longer in bondage. Now I want to show you another powerful rhetorical device in Romans 7 just for a minute. And if you don’t know rhetoric, you’re gonna totally miss this, which by the way, Martin Luther didn’t like rhetoric. Melanchthon, his Lutheran buddy, did a whole commentary on Romans based on rhetoric. Luther, not so much. You know, he was an Augustinian and he-- Luther had some problems. He had issues. Shall we just say he had issues? And he reacted strongly against a lot of what he had been taught.

Listen to this, this is a personification, or called in rhetoric an impersonation. Now listen closely. In order to get this, you need to hear the two verses that precede this impersonation. “So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ that you might belong to another to Him who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God. For when we were controlled by our flesh [inaudible], the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us so they bore fruit for death.” Notice the verb “were”. He’s talking about the past of the Christians, not the present of the Christians.

“But now,” he always-- he often does this contrast what we were and then now, right? “But now by dying to what once bound us, we have been released.” He doesn’t say we may be released, we could be released, we hope to be released. Like Mandela when he walked off Robins Island, when he came off Robins Island, he was released. “We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” It could hardly be clearer. We have been freed from the flesh and we have been freed from obeying the Mosaic Law. We ain’t there, no more, no more. The Spirit has set us free. That’s the Christian condition.

Now he’s going to describe, listen closely to the story of Adam told in the first person. The “I” here is Adam and he makes the right rhetorical signals so the audience would know that, because only 2 minutes before you had Romans 5:12-21. Remember, this is being heard. They heard Romans 5:12-21 before they got to Romans 7, 2 minutes later. This is what they heard. “What shall we say then? Is the law sinful? Well, of course not. Nevertheless, I would not have known sin for what it is hadn’t it been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had said ‘Thou shall not covet.’” Here you need to know a little bit about early Jewish debate.

The rabbis debated, what was the commandment from amongst the ten that God gave to Adam? They assumed it had to be one of the Ten Commandments. God wouldn’t have given Adam a commandment that wasn’t one of the Ten Commandments. It had to be one of the big ten. They all agreed that the commandment given to Adam was some form of the commandment “thou shall not covet.” You need to know early Judaism to know this. That’s part of the argument, okay? So where I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said to me, “you shall not covet,” but sin seizing the
opportunity afforded by the commandment, who is the only person who was given the one commandment? That would be Adam.

And sin is the personification for the snake. So let me re-read this little allegory substituting the word snake for sin. But snake seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetousness. For apart from the law, snake was dead. But once I was alive apart from the law. Now who is the only person who existed before there were any commandments? Again, that’s Adam. He says “Once I was alive before the law.” That’s Adam. Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came to me, the snake sprang into action and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

What was the wages of sin? What was Adam told were the wages of sin? Death. “For sin,” the snake, “seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment deceived me.” This word just in. Everywhere Paul uses the word “deceived,” he’s always talking about the Genesis story. Whether he’s talking about Adam or Eve, the word “deceived” only comes up in the Pauline Epistles when he’s thinking of that aboriginal story. “For sin seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment deceived me and through the commandment put me to death. So then the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteousness and good.” But the good thing was used to kill me. This is a re-telling of the story of the first Adam. The rest of the chapter is the tale of woe about all those who are in and remain in the first Adam.

Now we get down towards the end of that chapter and it’s right to raise the question at the end of Romans 7. Okay, he’s talking about people outside of Christ, but is he talking about a particular group of people outside of the Christ because they seem to know the law? This has led some people to say “Oh, he’s talking about Jews in the bondage to sin outside of Christ.” Which is possible, but you have to remember Romans 2. In Romans 2, what does Paul say about the Gentile? The law was written where? On the heart of the Gentile which is just a cipher for the mind. It’s one and the same thing in Paul’s theological vocabulary.

So this could be simply a general reference to all those outside of Christ who are fallen. Yes, they know better but can they do better? No. Because their will is still in the bondage to sin. Romans 7 is not about the Christian life. It’s about the pre-Christian life from a Christian point of view. Paul is telling the tale from an outsider’s point of view, from a Christian point of view. So we have the argument about grace and sin and the law that goes on all the way through chapter 7. And then finally, we get to the good news.

Life in the Spirit, now life in Christ in glory and a concluding doxological praise. Powerful, very powerful. And at that point, lots of people have been prepared to say “Hallelujah, Amen.” It’s amazing how many people who preached the Romans never get past Romans 8. This was not Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ problem. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the famous pulpitarian in London, preached for 7 straight years on Romans, starting with the first verse and working his way to the last verse of chapter 16. And he produced, you know, six volumes of sermons on Romans. That’s what you call the inchworm approach. Little by little, piece by piece, day by day, hour by hour, thought by thought, passage by passage, you know, there were members of his congregation who must have been saying “I’m not going to live long to hear the end of this, long enough to hear the end of this sermon.” That’s what you call expository preaching.

Now all of that Romans 1 through 8 is the probatio, right? The argument for his case. What has he got to do in Romans 9 through 11? He’s got to turn around and make the argument against. And it’s an
argument against the Gentiles who want to say God has replaced His first chosen people with us. It’s so good to be me. I am now God’s chosen, frozen person. So what he’s got to do is he’s got to deconstruct the theology of hubris of Gentile Christians in Rome. And you need to understand that he’s fighting against the severe Roman undercurrent of anti-Semitism. Romans did not like Jews. Romans thought Jews were contemptible. They thought that the idea of having only one God was ridiculous, you know. “What a lack of imagination! What a limited perspective! We believe in pluralism.” Hmm, where have you read this argument before?

You could learn a lot from the Romans and their arguments for pluralism when it comes to religion. You could see what Paul was up against. So what has to happen in Romans 9 through 11 is he’s got to take them down a peg or two. He’s got to tell the Gentile Christians, first of all, God has not reneged on His promises to Israel. Second, He’s not done with them yet. And thirdly, you were grafted in to the olive tree of the people of God as wild olive branches. And I do mean wild. And God who grafted them in can just as easily lop you right back off. He’s gonna argue in Romans 11.

And he says “And God can re-graft then the original branches.” And that’s where this argument is going, because at the end of Romans 11 he’s going to argue that “in the same manner, by grace through faith, that you have become part of the body of Christ, so God will graft the Jews back in by grace through faith, by the mercies of God when Christ returns. And so all Israel will be saved,” he says in Romans 11:25. So in his view God’s not done with the Jews yet. But their future is not independent of the church. It’s in Christ. That’s where this argument is going. He is taking the Gentiles down a peg by saying God’s not through with the Jews. And by the way, the only way you got saved was by grafting-- re-grafting into the Jewish Messiah and the Jewish family tree, if you will. So he’s got to take them down a peg.

Now as if that weren’t enough, I mean 11 chapters of Romans, who’s not ready for him to stop now, right? As if that were not enough, he’s going, “I have a few ethical remarks to add here.” So now we get to the paraenesis, don’t we? We get to Romans 12 through 15 where he’s going argue for a unifying practice and religion for Gentiles and Jews in Christ. He’s gonna talk about true worship and true love in 12:1-21, he’s gonna talk about a uniform witness to the world by respecting governing authorities, paying your debts, paying your taxes. A timely message that you should offer if you are preaching right before April 15.

And then he’s going to talk about not being judgmental of other Christians who are maybe weaker in faith or don’t have the same views about the Sabbath or food laws as you do. He’s talking about Jewish Christians. He’s saying, you Gentile Christians, you need to stop judging the Jewish Christians because they happen to still be keeping a Sabbath or keeping food laws. It’s none of your business. You need to love them as brothers and sisters in Christ and accept them. And then we have the concluding doxology in the end of our units and then you have this whopping, long letter of greetings. At the end, he’s gonna greet every single Jewish Christian he knows in Rome and a few of the Gentile Christians he knows in Rome, and the impression that you get is that there are now a lot of Jewish Christians he knows in Rome, not the least of which are Priscilla and Aquila and Junia and he’s sending Phoebe their way and so on and so on. This is Paul’s masterpiece.

It’s a discourse that he had to do carefully because he’s not addressing his own converts. Therefore, he has to be a little gentler and he has to be more persuasive, because he can’t assume they’re going to accept these arguments if he goes, “I am your apostle.” So he has to take an approach that is called in record, in rhetorician books, “insinuatio,” from which we get the word “insinuation”. What is an insinuation? It’s when you imply something, right. The rhetorical technique of insinuatio is that there is a bone of contention you’ve got to deal with. But you’re only going to imply something about that at the beginning
of your oration, which you're gonna save it for way into the discourse to actually deal with the bone of contention.

Romans 9 through 11 is dealing with the bone of contention. Romans 14 and 15 is dealing with the practical implications of the bone of contention of Gentiles not being reconciled to Jewish Christians in Rome. He’s trying to deal with all of those problems, a powerful rhetorical discourse. And then we have a peroration in Romans 15:14-21. It’s a recapitulation, it’s an [inaudible] [1.21.25], it’s a recapitulation. So let me just read for you this wonderful peroration in Romans.

Paul says this, “I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, you’re filled with knowledge, you’re competent to instruct one another. Yet, I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I glory in Christ Jesus and my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God, by what I have said and done by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, which by the way, is Yugoslavia, the west coast of what is north of Greece. “I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.” Now if that’s not boasting I don’t know what it is. “I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ and it has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not build on someone else’s foundation, rather as the Scriptures say in Isaiah, ‘Those who were not told about him will see. And those who have not heard will understand.’ This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.” It’s a nice, quiet peroration. It reiterates some of the themes that have come before, especially from the first chapter.
Chapter 17

Christological Hymns

The following lecture is provided by Biblical Training. The speaker is Dr. Ben Witherington. More information is available at www.BiblicalTraining.org.

I. Worship elements in Paul’s letters.

We have been talking about the structures of the epistles. We have been talking about the structures in the epistles, the rhetorical structures. What I want to do now is deal with one aspect of some of the worship elements I was talking to you about that you find in Paul’s letters.

We could analyze if we wanted to the following elements that show up in Paul’s discourses. There are prayers, there are benedictions and doxologies, there are hymns and there are creedal statements. We could analyze all of those and these are part of what is going into these discourses. What we are going to focus on now is some of the hymnic material. I am going to talk in general about Christian hymns, Christological hymns.

A. Hymns.

The place to start this discussion is in Ephesians 5. So let me read to you a couple of verses from Ephesians 5. This is what Paul says in Ephesians 5:18: “Don’t get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled by the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.” There are several aspects of that which are interesting. But first I want you to notice the taxonomy, “psalms,” “humnos,” and then spiritual songs. Three different kinds of music. “psalms” is of the course the Psalms. The Psalms are songs. Psalm means a song, the Hebrew is “mismor.” The Book of Psalms is the book of songs, it’s the hymn book of God’s Old Testament people. By the way, it is not the prayer book, it’s the hymn book. Now some of the songs are prayers, but they are songs. When we are thinking about early Christianity, all of the early followers of Jesus were Jews. So quite naturally, we’re talking about Christian worship. There are going to be elements of Jewish worship that come right over into early Jewish-Christian worship because this is what they know and these are the things that they know; in addition to which in synagogue worship, beside all of this in synagogue worship, you would also have a homily based on some sacred text. So if you want to talk about synagogue worship that looks like this, well it’s a homily on some sacred text and there might also be an offering of some kind. So basic synagogue worship goes right over into Christian worship in the context of a household. Christians continued to sing the psalms, just as Jews had done for centuries before. This is why the two most used books of the Old Testament that are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament are Isaiah and The Psalms. The Psalms is the second most frequently quoted Old Testament book. Why? Well for one thing, the Jewish Christians knew it. They sang it all the time. Psalms, they sang. So Paul says to his Christians in Ephesus – this is in Asia, not in the Holy Land – he says “Speak to one another, sing to one another in psalms, in hymns and in spiritual songs.” Now there is some debate about that third one. Does spiritual songs mean spiritual songs, or does it mean songs prompted impromptu by the Holy Spirit? Some people have thought that it is talking about what I would call jazz improvisation. The Spirit prompts you to sing a song on the spot to the Lord. That is entirely
possible. But that third category then would refer to something that is more spontaneous, whereas both 
psalms and hymns would have pre-existing texts that you were singing.

So, three kinds of material; and what is interesting to me is that he does not simply say, “Sing this in your 
heart to the Lord and that is where you should do this because the Lord knows you can’t sing out loud.”

No, what he says is “Speak or sing to one another psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and make 
melody in your heart unto the Lord.” So, here is where I say that singing has both a vertical focus – sing 
unto the Lord a new song – but it also has a horizontal purpose. It has a pedagogical purpose. People are 
supposed to sing to one another and therefore learn from what they are singing. As a good Methodist I 
am just amening this because as Charles Wesley says, “Theology is more often caught than taught”. The 
best way to get them to catch it is to put it in the lyrics of a hymn and sing it, then they will be reciting it, 
singing their little tunes, and this is a good thing.

What we have here and what we want to focus on is not the psalms that Christians used to use. I could 
point to several of those that were used for Christological reflection. Psalm 2 clearly is one, Psalm 110:1, 
“You are a priest after the order of Melchizedek.” There are several psalms that were very frequently used 
by Christians. What we want to actually look at is their new Christian hymns. We are going to look at 
several and I am not going to just limit myself to Paul. I am going to look at samples that are in Paul’s 
letters, one sample from the book of Hebrews and also one sample from the Gospel of John.


How do we know that this was a song, since what we have in the Greek New Testament is just yet more 
Greek words. We do not have a footnote that says, “Sing this according to the Led Zeppelin tune, ‘Black 
Dog’” It doesn’t say that. How do we know they are songs? There are several ways. This is where you are 
going to have to trust the Greek scholars if you don’t know Greek. The form of these Christological 
hymns is poetic and it stands out from its larger context. For example Paul is going along in a normal 
narrative form in Philippians 2 and he says, “Have this mind in yourself that was in Christ Jesus”, and then 
he says, “who” and all of a sudden we’re off and running with a poetic ode of some kind. This was a 
Christian hymn.

The second way we know this is something that is different from the narrative theology is that these 
Christological hymns all have the same pattern, a V pattern. The Christological hymns have a V pattern. 
Let me show you what I mean. The V pattern is this: The Son of God pre-existing. He did various things 
that have to do with the creation of the universe. He took on human form and took on an earthly 
existence. He humbled himself even unto death on the cross. Because of this, God highly exalted him. He 
went back to the heavenly existence. A V pattern. All of these Christological hymns have this V pattern. 
So we know something is up here. There is a definite form with poetic utterance and there is something 
else going on. Most of these hymns have at least two stanzas, the downward slope stanza and the upward 
slope stanza. Sometimes we have more than two stanzas. We certainly have more than two stanzas in 
John 1; but again, the basic form and the basic character of these things is the same. And the signal that 
you have gone into the hymn is actually the Greek word “hos,” who, it begins with “who” which is not 
really necessary in the sense of continuing the sentence that was going before: “Have this mind in 
yourself that was in Christ Jesus”, you could have stopped there. Instead we have the “who being in very 
nature God” and you are off into the hymn.

So here is the hymn. Let me read it for you first, then we’re going to unpack it. “Who being in the form of 
God”. You could equally well translate the Greek, “Being in very nature God”. The word here for form is,
“morphe.” What does the word, metamorphosis mean? Change from one form to another. So a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. “morphe” does not just mean the outward form of something. I mean, when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, it is not just that he looked like a caterpillar and then he looked like a butterfly. There was a metaphysical change to him, right? So when we hear that Christ is in the “morphe” of God, it does not just mean he appeared to be God, it means he has the very nature of God. And that is why I really prefer the old RSV translation and the NIV and other translations who say, “Who being in very nature God” did not consider having equality with God something to take advantage of, but stripped himself, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, or you could certainly translate this, “slave”, it is the same word. The word here is “doulos,” slave, servant, being born in the likeness of a human being, being found in appearance like a human being. “He humbled himself, being obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross”. We are going down, down, down, down, down and the nadir of the V in this hymn is death on the cross. From the highest heights to the lowest depths.

When I was growing up in North Carolina in High Point, back in the dawn of time when the earth was still cooling, they used to have elevator operators. Are any of you old enough to remember elevator operators? Well, Charlie was my favorite. He worked at Althermer’s, a department store in downtown High Point. He had this wonderful burgundy uniform with gold buttons and the big hat with leather bill, black, black spit shined shoes, and he had a voice like Charlton Heston. My mom loved to shop and I hated it. So when she went to Althermer’s is I would ride the elevator. I’m five, this is a big trip. I’m never going to get on a NASA moon rocket, so ride the elevator, right? But what I loved was Charlie. He would announce every floor. He would run the whole thing. There was sort of a lever that he worked, going up and down on this old elevator. We would get to the top floor and then he would say, “Fifth floor, furniture, accessories, going down. Fourth floor, ladies’ lingerie and other unmentionables. Third floor, kitchen items, knick-knack and brick-a-brack. Second floor, toys. You sure you don’t want to get off here, Ben? First floor, china. Bargain basement, leftovers, resale items.” I would just go up and down with Charlie. “Going up. Going down.” I always think about that when I think of the Christological hymns because this is talking about divine condescension to the nth degree. He not only condescended to become a human being, he became a slave among human beings. And he not only condescended to be a slave amongst human beings, the lowest of the low, he accepted a slave’s death on a cross. How low can you go? It has been said about our Lord Jesus Christ that he lifts us up by getting underneath us and lifting us up. No-one was beneath his dignity.

This is the first half of the hymn. Then you turn the page. You have the upward V here. The Greek here is actually “therefore” and any time you see the word “therefore” you need to ask, “what is it there for?”. “Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name in order that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bend, those in heaven, on earth, under earth and all tongues confess publicly that Jesus Christ is Lord unto the glory of God the Father.” Let’s unpack this. Christological hymn. Down, down, down, down, down, up, up, up, up, up. There is a V pattern. Let’s talk about some particulars. Being in very nature God, he did not consider having equality with God, which is something he had, something to take advantage of. You can’t reject taking advantage of something that you don’t have. So it is very clear from what Paul is saying here, he wants to say that the Son of God is God, in very nature, God. He has all of the advantages of God, but he chose before he became a human being, not to take advantage of his heavenly frequent flyer miles. He chose not to take advantage of all of the divine perks, but instead to empty or strip himself. This word is “kenosis.” What you have to ask is, what did he empty himself of? There has to be something he stripped himself of. It is not himself, he remained himself. What did he strip himself of? My suggestion would be, his divine prerogatives, his divine
privileges: Omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence the omnis. This was necessary for him to become truly a human being, a human being limited in time, space, knowledge and power. These are the basic human limitations. Jesus did not have to take on the limitation of sin, why not? Because sin is not a limitation that God created us having at the beginning. Now we see another reason why he is the last Adam. Adam was born before the fall, he did not have a sin nature, he was not created that way. But did Adam have limitations of time, space, knowledge and power? Yes he did. These are the limitations that Christ took on in order to be truly and fully human. As I have said to you before, and I will reiterate now, what you need to understand about this is that Jesus had to be fully human in order to not only be our paradigm, but in order to truly die on the cross. If atonement could not be made without the death on the cross, then we have a problem. So, he stripped himself. He limited himself. This means that his life was not a charade. When somebody touches and he says, “Who touched me?” he doesn’t mean, “I know it’s really Suzy with bronze hair and blue eyes, she’s 5 ft 2 in and weighs 115 and her doctors haven’t helped her very much.” No, when he says, “Who touched me?” he means – wait for it – “Who touched me?” His life is not a game, it is not a charade, it is a normal human life. When he says about the second coming, “Of that day or hour nobody knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son, only the Father knows” he means – wait for it – nobody knows, including “moi” [me]. Did he have access to such knowledge? Of course he did. The point is, he limited himself to what he could know as a human being, to what he could do as a spirit empowered human being and so on. Without experiencing human fallenness he is Adam gone right. The first Adam is Adam gone wrong. So how does he perform his miracles? By the power of the Holy Spirit. He says so: “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, you will know the kingdom is coming in your midst”. He performs his miracles by the Spirit of God. How does he resist temptation? He does not say to the Devil, “I’m blowing you off, I’m God, God can’t be tempted, ergo I can’t be tempted, leave”. Nope, he quotes the Word of God and he relies on the Spirit of God, the two resources that we have. “kenosis” is real. He emptied himself of taking advantage of his divine prerogatives and he maintained that limitation all the way to death. After death, not so much. After death, God has highly exalted him and given him a name that is above all names. The name that is above all names is not Jesus. He already had that name. He did not get that name at resurrection. The name that is above all names is the name of God. It is “kyrios,” Lord, that is the name above all names. Jesus assumes the role of Lord at the resurrection. This is why the earliest Christian confession was, “Jesus is the risen Lord.” He assumes the role of risen Lord – wait for it – at the resurrection and thereafter. So he is given the name that is above all names, the divine name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bend in heaven, on earth, under earth and all confess, what? That Jesus, the name he already had, is the Lord. That is the point. What is different about the Christian confession is Jesus is the Lord. Saying Jesus is the Christ, the Jews would debate you about that. He might be, he might not be. We all believe that there is going to be a Christ; but to say Jesus is the Lord, now that is heresy. That is saying that the Messiah is divine, and early Jews were not looking for a divine Messiah, any more than they were looking for a crucified Messiah. They were looking for a king like David, a spirit-empowered king like David, only without David’s moral defects. That would be the Messiah, you see. This is not the king Jesus chose to be.

So we have this Christological hymn. One more aspect of this hymn that I want to stress to you is this whole verb here: He emptied himself. And another form, he humbled himself, it is a verbal action. It is not a character description, it is a verbal action. He humbled himself. Do you notice how the verbs are active verbs here? He did not consider, he stripped himself, he took the form, these were all decisions
made by the Son of God. He did not think, he acted this way, he took this form, he was found in appearance like a human being, he humbled himself even unto death on the cross.

Let’s talk about “humbled himself”. The word is “tapeinophrosune.” This is a participial form. It means to be base-minded. It means to act in a slavish fashion. Think about this culture. Thirty to forty percent of the workforce in any given place in the Roman Empire was slaves. And who were the people who were supposed to behave like slaves? Slaves. And this was not considered admirable behavior for anybody else. Nobody was campaigning to become a slave. I just can’t wait to be a slave! So much easier, I don’t have to make decisions in life anymore. Just follow the master, work for him. That is not the way it was. The actual translation, the way we translate it as “humbled himself” does not give you the pejorative sense that this phrase normally has. It normally means “to act in a base or slavish way”. This is not something a master should ever do. It is not something a patrician should ever do. It is not something a freedman or a freedwoman should ever do. They have been set free from acting that way. So when we hear Jesus say, “I did not come to be served, but to serve”, that is, to be a slave, “and to give my life in a slave fashion as a ransom for the many”, you need to understand the shocking character of this language. We kind of gussy it up by using the translation “servant”, but we could just as well translate this word, “slave”.

Now we are getting to the point where it is really interesting. How unconditional is your service to the Lord? Let me put it to you another way. Do you realize that you don’t have any rights? And we live in a culture that stands on the principle that we all have rights, equal rights. Do you realize that when you became a Christian, you gave up your rights? Have this mind in yourself, which was also in Christ Jesus when he decided to become a slave. Emulate him. Humble yourself. Don’t stand on your rights. You were made to serve somebody. That is what it means to be re-created in the image of Christ. That is why the phrase “servant leadership” is not supposed to be an oxymoron. You are meant to serve somebody.

This is a powerful hymn and it is counterintuitive and it is countercultural. You see, that culture, like our culture, everybody wanted to be what? upwardly mobile, not downwardly mobile, upwardly mobile. Slaves wanted to become freedmen. Freedmen wanted to become citizens. Citizens wanted to become patricians. Patricians wanted to become senators. Senators wanted to become emperors. This was an upwardly mobile society. Jesus says the way up is the way down. Down leads to up. But the thing that is so striking about this is, all of these active verbs here. If you turn the page, the second half of the hymn is all passive verbs. That is why God has highly exalted him and God gave him the name that is above all names. This is about what God did for him. Jesus did not raise himself from the dead. Jesus did not exalt himself. God exalted him. God gave him the name, the Lord. Now this should be a lesson in glory for us. We are not called to be glory grabbers. We are called to be glory givers. Let God do the exalting. Let God be the glorifier. It is your job to serve, to step down. Leave the results in God’s hands. As I told you last time, it doesn’t matter in this life who gets the credit. What matters is who gets the cure. Have this mind in yourself that was in Christ Jesus. It is a powerful Christological hymn.


Let’s look at the next one, Colossian 1:15-20. Once again, it begins with “hos,” who. Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn. I do not like this translation. I would prefer, preeminent over all creation. One of the reasons I would prefer it is, it is probably the better interpretation of the Greek, and also it undercuts what the Jehovah’s Witnesses want to do with this verse, which is to suggest that Christ was yet just another creature.
“...who is the image of the invisible God” first over all of creation because in him were created all things in the heavens, on the earth, the seen, the unseen, whether thrones or dominions or sovereignties or powers. All of these, by the way, are names for ranks of angels. If you were wondering what these are, these are Jewish names for ranks of angels. Everything created through him was also created for him. Now here is a corker. He not only was there, creating the universe, it was created for him. You were created for him. The whale was created for him. The beautiful oak tree was created for him. The sun was created for him. Hallelujah! It was all created for him. Everything created through him was also created for him. And he is before everything and everything coheres in him and he is the head of the body, the church. This is by no means all. This Christological hymn is going to focus more on his role as creator. Do you see that? This Christological hymn in Colossians 1:15 is going to focus more on what he did up there before he came down here, his role in creation. What is interesting about all of this is that these very same things that are being said of the Son of God here, had previously been said of God’s wisdom. God’s wisdom was there with God in the beginning of creation and aided him in creating the universe. So the attributes of God’s wisdom are now applied to a person, the Son of God. That is what is going on here. He is before everything and look at this, he is the superglue that holds it all together, everything that makes sense and coheres in him. You want the hermeneutical key to life? You want the hermeneutical key to all of creation? You want to make sense of all of creation’s mysteries? The pre-existent Son of God who made it all, there it is right there.

You can really get wrapped up in this when you start thinking about it. We could be sitting right here and if those linen curtains weren’t there, we could watch the snowflakes hit the window and each of those snowflakes has a different, beautiful pattern. Think about this. God is infinitely creative and he wants us to understand that beauty and truth and goodness and love were meant to be seen as cohering with one another. Because all of that is true of God and it was meant to be true of his creation, when you see beauty out of place, not connected with truth and goodness and love, you know something is wrong. The writer of Proverbs says, “A beautiful immoral person, to what shall I compare it? It is like a diamond ring on the snout of a pig.” There could be hardly a worse criticism from a Jew of beauty out of place. Have you thought about that? Fallenness means the dysfunction of beauty and truth and love and goodness. The things that cohere in God and were intended to cohere in creation have become disjointed. It is powerful.

That is part 1. Here is part 2. “…who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, in order that he might take precedence in all things because in him is pleased to dwell all of the “pleroma,” the fullness, of God. And through him is reconciled everything for him, making peace through the blood of his cross, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” This V pattern is just a little bit different. Yes, we still have the pre-existent, earthly existence thing. But there is something else going on here. He is pre-eminent in creation. Here he is pre-eminent in resurrection. So the first half of the Christological hymn is about his role in creation. The second half is about his role in new creation, resurrection. Do you see what is going on here? First creation, new creation, he is pre-eminent in creation. He is pre-eminent in new creation because he was the firstborn from the dead. There is something else going on here too. We have already heard him mention some of the ranks of angels and here we hear all the “pleroma” is in him. What is being said is that all of the Godness that is not found in the Father is found in the Son. There is not a little bit of Godness in the angels. There is not a little bit of Godness in creation. There is a little bit of Godness in human beings. He is the one full manifestation of the divine nature who ever came to earth. There are no other manifestations of the divine nature that ever came to earth. Then there is the emphasis on the work of the cross. Through him is reconciled everything for him, making peace through the blood of his cross, reconciliation of whether things on earth or in heaven. Maybe you never thought about this, but guess
who else needed redemption besides human beings, the angels, the fallen angels needed redemption. What we are hearing is the theology of the cross that says that Jesus atoned for the sins of not only the whole human world, but of the universe. It is a cosmic Christology. He atoned for the sins of the universe. Here is where I say to you in the twenty-first century, that if we ever do find other human beings or other creatures on other planets, these verses are immediately relevant because they are telling us that Jesus paid it all wherever they came from and whatever they have done wrong. He won’t have to go visit other planets. He won’t have to go see other peoples. He has already taken care of the sin problem for the universe.

Listen to this third bit. This is very brief and if we are doing the V thing, notice that it does not do the pre-existence run-up. It simply starts with “who was revealed in flesh”. But this verb implies he pre-existed. Do you see what I am saying? “Revealed” means he already existed, but did not appear on earth yet, “who was revealed in the flesh.” Then it skips right to the resurrection, “vindicated by the spirit”. He is on the way up, isn’t he? “seen by angels”. We are going up, right? And as Jesus ascends, what happens after the ascension? He sends the Spirit, and then what happens? “proclaimed among the nations, believed in throughout the world, glorified throughout and taken up in glory”. It begins with the incarnation, quickly turns to the resurrection and then it focuses on the post-existence of Christ, the upward slant of the V. Some of these are partial, some of them are fuller patterns, but they are all partaking of this pattern.


The next one is detailed. Like the one in Colossians, this author is especially concerned about the downward slope of the V and what Christ did as he pre-existed. What is really interesting about this one, Hebrews 1:2b-4 is that it actually gives us the conclusion before it gives us the V pattern, “whom God appointed heir of all things”, we are talking about Christ “through whom also God made the universe, who is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact stamp of God’s being, upholding all things by his powerful word, having made purification for sins, he sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels as he has, he has inherited a more excellent name in comparison to them.” Where did we hear about him inheriting a name after the resurrection? Which other Christological hymn? Philippians 2. He was given a name. Same here. It is possible the author of this had read Philippians. He was inheriting a more excellent name in comparison. The focus is on his pre-existent role. God made the eons through the Son. The Son was the radiance of God’s glory. The Son was the exact representation of God’s being. He is upholding all things by his powerful word. Ephesians talks about this some more and what I would want to say about it is, you may have thought that the universe is held together by entropy. This author says, not so much. The universe is not falling apart, because of the divine word. It isn’t going to fall apart until God says it is going to fall apart, until the Son says it is going to fall apart. It is upheld by his word, his powerful word. The one line in this whole Christological hymn that deals with his earthly existence really is this one: “having made purification for sins.” This language is priestly language. How is Christ portrayed in the Book of Hebrews? As the heavenly high priest. So this foreshadows that right in the prologue to Hebrews, this powerful sermon,”having made purification for sins, he sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels as he has, he has inherited a more excellent name.” One of the agendas of the first chapter of Hebrews is to make clear that Christ was not, never was, never will be, a mere angel. He is of a higher order of being than angels. Why is this important? It has a lot of theological ramifications. For example the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament that is not Jesus, that is – wait for it – the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament. It is the big dog angel of God who is the messenger of God,
who represents God. It is God’s Fed-Ex boy, that is who it is, it is not the Son of God. Why not? The Son of God is of a higher order of being than angels and the author of Hebrews goes at great length to make clear, he is no mere angel and he never was. So those three angels that visited Abraham, remember them? They were – wait for it – angels. That was not the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They were representatives of God, God’s messengers, angels.

Our author says, “Having become as much better than the angels as he has, he inherited a more excellent name.” One of the things that we need to understand about the incarnation is that there was no incarnation before the incarnation. All of those angels and mysterious figures in the Old Testament are angels and mysterious figures in the Old Testament. The way to understand them is that they are part of God’s heavenly court. You can see this in Job 1 and 2. Who else is a member of God’s heavenly court? “ho satan,” The adversary, the prosecuting attorney, the prosecuting angel. “Let me go try your servant Job. We’ll see how he does after that.” The devil is an angel in the heavenly court. He is the prosecuting attorney, he is the tester of brethren.

The second part of this hymn comes after having made purification for sins and so we have the upward panel of it, the upward part of the V. He sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high. He has a name more excellent than the angels’ names. So the Son of God is the Son of God. We are told two things about him that are exact quotations of what had been said about wisdom and the wisdom of Solomon. In the wisdom of Solomon it is said about wisdom, “Wisdom is the very radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” I want to talk to you just a minute about this Greek word. Suppose I were to translate the word, “He was the reflection of God’s glory”. What is the difference between radiating God’s glory and reflecting God’s glory? This word implies that the divine essence, God’s glory, the divine presence, is in him, so that he radiates it, he does not merely perfectly reflect it as in a mirror. He has the divine living presence of God, the glory, the Shekinah glory in him and he radiates it. This word is very interesting. This word, which is translated “the exact representation”, you could translate as “the very stamp of his being”. The image is here is of a signet ring and wax. So what happens when the signet ring with the image of the king on it, is stamped in wax? The exact image of the king is in the wax. So what we are saying is that the exact image of God is stamped in the image of the Son. He is the spitting image of the Father, would be another way to put it. That is what our author is saying here.


“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing came to be. In him was life and this life was the light of humankind. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.” This is an interesting thing. It starts in this beautiful, poetic form with echoes of Genesis 1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”, it echoes that. What is interesting about the Christological hymn here is that it introduces the whole Gospel and so, in order for it to introduce the whole Gospel, what does it have to do? It has to stop here. So this Christological hymn focuses entirely on what? the pre-existence of the logos and his taking on flesh. It is only the downward slope of the V that you are going to hinge on because in essence, the whole Gospel of John is going to be the unpacking of the earthly existence part of the story. But when we get towards the end of the story, what does Jesus keep saying? It is necessary that I go back up to the Father. The key to understanding who Jesus is in this Gospel is to know where he really came from, his origin and where he is really going. The V pattern. So here the V pattern, the downward slope of the V pattern is used to introduce the Gospel. “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made. Without him nothing came to be. In him was life, this life was the light of humankind. The light shines in the darkness, the darkness does not overcome it.” This Greek verb here could either be translated as “overcome” or “understood”. In view of the fact that darkness in this Gospel is not just an emblem of the absence of light, but antagonism towards the light, I think the better translation is “overcome”. The darkness has not overcome it.

If you want to see a powerful representation of this whole light and dark imagery put into fictional story form, just read The Lord of the Rings. There we have the battle between darkness and light very, very clearly, and it is a death struggle. And the darkness is in great danger of overcoming the light. And the saddest words that happen in that wonderful drama is, “He has fallen into darkness”. That is the essence of it. What do you say about a lost person? They have fallen into darkness and they cannot see their way out. They cannot see clearly. They are blind.

The third part of the Christological hymn goes like this: “He was in the world and though the world was made by him, the world did not recognize him. To his own he came, yet his own did not receive him, but all those who did accept him, he empowered to become children of God.” Then there is an explanatory sort of parenthesis here about how you become children of God, which is really not part of the hymn. What is interesting about 12b and 13 in the Greek is it goes back into prose. We were at poetry up to here and then all of a sudden we have a parenthetical prose insertion, to explain how you become a child of God.

Then, part 4: “And the Word became flesh.” I actually prefer the translation, “And the Word took on flesh”. The reason is, the Word did not turn into flesh and cease to be the Word. He was still the Word. The Son of God did not become flesh and cease to be the Son of God. So a much better translation here would be, “And the Word took on flesh and tabernacled amongst us.” This verb really does mean “tabernacle”, the image of the Old Testament tabernacle. What was in the tabernacle? The living presence of God. “The Word took on flesh and tabernacled amongst us” because the Word is God. “And we beheld his glory, glory of the only begotten Son of the father, full of grace and truth.” It is a powerful Christological hymn, but it is entirely on his pre-existence and his incarnation because then we are going to hear the story of the life of Jesus. This hymn is used to introduce the Gospel itself. What we have looked at then, is not psalms nor spiritual songs, but “humnos,” from which we get the English word, “hymns”, which is a great direct transliteration from the Greek, from “humnos” to “hymn.” An exalted song with a Christological focus.

Let’s ask, what questions do you have about this powerful, powerful Christological V pattern and the series of hymns it prompted? I have one comment for you to stir up your thoughts, and it is this. These are not like some modern praise songs that kind of go, “yippy, yippy Jesus, yippy, yippy Jesus, hoorah, hoorah”. These hymns have profound theological content that you have to reflect on. You cannot take it all in on one sitting in these Christological hymns. So, what does it tell you about these earliest Christians, that they were composing these as their greatest hits? They were profound reflectors on the theological meaning of the Christ and the Christ event. And we would do well to emulate them, and sometimes we do. One of my very favorite contemporary praise songs is “In Christ Alone”. That really actually is the pattern again. Think about it. It is a modern representation of the V pattern, plus one more. It tells about his return. That is the other aspect that is interesting about these, is there is not a focus on his return in these hymns. There is a focus on his coming and his returning to God on high, but these earliest Christological hymns do not yet reflect on his return, which is very interesting. That kind of reflection took place apparently in other contexts.
II. Pastoral Epistles.

Now we are going to have a chance to see a little bit more of this brave Paul and his missionary work, to give us a better context for understanding Paul. Paul’s road from Caesarea to Rome was a bumpy one. As you know, he went over a sea. He ended up at Rome almost two full years later, after this occasion. This happened I would guess about 58, 59 AD. He was taken to Rome, he was put under house arrest. He was there for two years and he appears to have been released, because there were no definite charges made by Festus against Paul, and because his tormentors did not spend the money it would have cost to go all the way to Rome to accuse him because as a Roman citizen he had a right to trial. He could not be executed without clear charges and his accuser had to appear in person before the emperor to make that good. So it is likely that somewhere around 62 he was released from prison, and what we see in the pastoral epistles is that he had continuous ministry, but that he did not go on to Spain as had been his original intent. He went back east because there was trouble in Greece, there was trouble in Macedonia. There was trouble in Asia, there was trouble in Galatia. Where was there not trouble? There was trouble in Crete, there was trouble in Cyprus.

When we catch up again with Paul in the pastoral epistles more time has gone by and something really horrible has happened, the fire in Rome, and Nero is looking for scapegoats. This time he is going to appear before the emperor and this time the emperor has something against Christians. He may have been in Mamertine prison when the pastoral epistles were written. Clearly he does not think he is going to escape.

Here are some of his final words, given to his beloved coworker Timothy: “In the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge. Preach the word, Timothy; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears long to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who long for his appearing.” He goes on to say this, beginning with the 16th verse: “At my first defense, no one came to support me, in fact everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood by my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And for the moment I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

I have fought the good fight. I have run the good race. I have kept the faith. The story of Paul ends in death, but it does not end in tragedy. Now that may seem a contradiction in terms to our culture, for our culture has a different set of temples, they are hospitals. And it has a different set of priests, they are doctors. And it has a different religion that says that this life is all there is; so at all cost and in every way, let it be propped up, for this life is all there is. It is not a philosophy Paul would subscribe to. He considered it an honor to die for the sake of Jesus Christ and the sake of his Gospel. He knew that there would be some who would support him as he went. At one point in these pastoral epistles he says, “Luke alone is with me”. It is my theory that we have these letters at all because of Luke. I believe that Luke
wrote down these letters for Paul, for he was in a place where he could not write and he could not see, in a hole in the ground, on the way to the final act of his defense before Nero himself. Then, according to Christian tradition, he was beheaded, which was the right of Roman citizens, not crucified. This probably took place somewhere around 65, 66, 67 AD before the fall of Jerusalem. I am sure that he had plenty of time to reflect in Mamertine Prison about his end and what he had accomplished or not accomplished in his ministry. But he need not have worried. He need not have worried.

III. 2 Peter.

Writing near the very end of the first century AD, probably the latest document in the New Testament in 2 Peter is a conglomeration of material from Jude, material from Peter and material from the final editor of this document, whoever it was. Towards the end of this document our author says this, chapter 3:14 ff: “Dear friends, since you are looking forward to all of this, make every effort to be found spotless and blameless and at peace with God. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, to which we all say ‘Amen’. Which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other Scriptures, to their destruction.’” This was written perhaps half of a generation after the death of Paul, somewhere in the 80s or 90s AD. And what we hear about Paul’s letters are, they are still addressing the church. They have been collected into a bundle and they should be treated with the same reverence as the other Scriptures, which is probably a reference to the Old Testament. Paul would have been surprised that the earliest Christian documents had been canonized even before the end of the first century, or at least treated as the sacred text of Christendom.

None of us know the impact we have on other lives, though occasionally we get glimpses. Every now and again I have a student that comes back to me and says, “Dr. Witherington, do you remember that lecture you gave in 1904. You know, it changed my life and here I am before you, to tell you.” We do not know the impact we have. The truth of the matter is that it is our job to sow the seed in faith and trust that the Lord of the harvest can bring it to fruition. It is our job to fight the good fight, to run the full race of Christendom unto death and to keep the faith. This is what Paul would have us do. I have to confess I have a soft place for Paul in my heart. Jesus is my idol, my God, but Paul is my hero, for he is just a mortal man and he has his flaws, but he did not give up. Even when he did not do it perfectly, he did not give up. He left the results in God’s hands.

When you think about your ministry, don’t measure yourself by looking to the right or the left. You are playing to an audience of One and the only voice that matters is the one who says, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Receive the kingdom.” Our world is full of various ways to measure success. I don’t think God measures it anything like the way we do. Adoniram Judson didn’t think so, either, nor did Jim Elliott and his wife, Elizabeth Elliott, who was my teacher at Gordon Conwell. Jim and Elizabeth were missionaries to the Auca Indians in South America along with six other people. They were young, they were enthusiastic and yes, they made a movie about them called “The End of the Spear”. Elizabeth was a truly remarkable woman. You probably know the story, that Jim was martyred by the Auca Indians. He had plenty of chances not to go back to them; but after a furlough, at which time during the furlough, he was interviewed by a newspaper reporter who said, “Don’t you know these people are violent? They could have you for lunch tomorrow.” This is what Jim said: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” This life is going to go, friends, sooner or later. My word to you about this body and this life is, we’re all terminal. And I don’t mean to dreary about that, but it’s true. Since we
know that it is true and since we know in Whom we believe, that he gives everlasting life, we should live our life with the freedom of the Gospel and in service to Christ, even if it results in our life ending in this body sooner rather than later. What a way to go!

To me, the most remarkable part of the story is not just that Jim was killed. The most remarkable part of the story is that his wife, Elizabeth and those other Christians stayed, even though their husbands had been killed. They stayed until the Aucas became Christians. It was not enough to plant the seed, it needed to be watered. And it was not enough to water the seed they needed to understand the sacrifice that Jim and those other brothers had made who were killed for the sake of the Gospel.

Not long ago in Florida at a Franklin Graham crusade there was a special testimony. It was the chief of the tribe of the Auca Indians. He stood up in front of that congregation, some 60 thousand strong, plus television folks, and he said: “Formerly I lived badly, badly. But when I learned that Mr. Jim had died for me because his Savior had died for him, I realized I needed to live for this Savior for whom he had died. “ So he gave his testimony. “The blood of the martyrs” said Tertullian, “is seed for the church”.

Death is not something for us to fear, for it is in the hands of God. And if our risen Lord can overcome it, so can we. We are the resurrection people, after all. Which side of death do you live in the shadow of, this side, or the side that reflects the sun of the Son, who rose from the grave? I’m saying to you, God’s “yes” for life is louder than death’s “no”.

One of the things about Christianity that I love the most is that we are not in denial about the reality of suffering and sin and sorrow and death and disease and decay. What we are saying is what Corrie Ten Boom said: “No pit is to deep that God’s power of resurrection is not deeper still”. Think about that. This is not a denial of death. We’re not Mary Baker Eddy followers. We don’t deny disease, decay and death. What we are saying is, that greater than the powers of darkness is the power of light. Greater than the powers of death is the power of life. Greater than the powers of wickedness is the power of good. And in the end, God will triumph over all. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. This is what Paul lived for and this is what Paul died for. This is what Jim Elliott lived for and this is what Jim Elliott died for. It is a Gospel that takes the world as it is and says, “But here is something better than this world and God has seen to it in Jesus Christ.”

IV. Historical, Not Just Faith.

Some people look at the Christian Gospel and say, “Well, it’s all just a matter of faith, isn’t it?” My answer to that is, “No, it’s not.” For ours is a historical religion. As Paul says, “If Christ is not raised, our faith is in vain.” We are not the most enviable people on earth, we are the most pitiable people on earth. But Christ has been raised from the dead and he was seen for 40 days and beyond by many people, including Paul himself. Paul had to suffer constant reproach, “but you weren’t there, but you didn’t see him before the ascension.” Have you ever thought about that? He says, “I was as one untimely born”. He had a vision of the exalted Christ on the road to Damascus and he said, “I saw the risen Lord”. It was hard for the Jerusalem Christians to accept. When they saw the end of Jesus, they saw him disappear in the air. They thought, “That’s the end of that”. Not quite. Here is the moral to that story. Just when you think God is finished doing miracles, there are always some more, there are always some more, and it changes the lives of people like Saul and you and me. I have fought the good fight, I have run the good race and I have finished the course, a New Testament introduction.

What we have done in this class is to survey the different kinds of literature we have in the New Testament. We have studied the Gospels and their genre. We have studied the epistles and their genre. We
have studied sermons. We have studied the revelation. We have studied the structures of these
documents, the structures in these documents. We have discussed matters profound and mundane. We
have looked at theology and ethics. We have just dipped the tip of our tongues into the great reservoir of
The New Testament. My hope is that you have gotten a foretaste of glory divine. My hope is that this
drink will simply make you thirsty for more. Jesus said, “The water that I give will well up in you unto
everlasting life and will provide an infinite reservoir of faith and hope and love and truth.” In Jesus’
name.

If you study the Gospels in their original context and the letters in their original context and Revelation in
its original context one of the things that becomes clear is the audiences that they shared this with are no
more diverse, no more cynical, no more difficult, no more hardhearted, no more sinful than ours. Or, put
the other way around, we don’t have a tougher job than they did. In fact, we have an easier one. For we
already have this and they did not. And we have the encouragement of our Savior himself, who said,
“Thomas, you have believed because you have seen. More blessed are those who have not seen and yet
believe”. He was talking of a faith like yours, brothers and sisters. Think of that. You have a greater faith
than those who have seen and believed on the basis of what they have seen. Someday you will see, eye to
eye, face to face, nose to nose. Someday you will know as you are known. Someday faith will become
sight, hope will be realized and love will abound. In the meantime, study to find yourself approved.
Prepare yourself for ministry. Go back and read the letters Paul wrote at the end to Timothy and Titus.
Put yourself in the shoes of Timothy and Titus and hear and heed the exhortations. If you will do that,
you will find encouragement. If a Timothy, who is timid, can do it; if a Titus, who is too tight, can do it, so
can we. God is not finished with us yet.

Sometimes when students study The New Testament, they come to me and they say, “You know, it’s just
not the same anymore.” My question for them is is the Holy Spirit at work today somehow less powerful
than the Holy Spirit back then? The answer is, no. We do not have Holy Spirit “lite—less filling, tastes
great.” Has Jesus Christ lost his unction to function? I’m thinking not. He is still the same today, just as yesterday, for he is the same yesterday, today and forever. Has the Father stopped loving us? The answer is, no, he has not. If you have the Father and the Son and the Spirit
on your side, that is not only the testimony of three witnesses, that is a majority and you are alright.

John Wesley in his charge to his ministers said this: “Some of the things that God will call you to will be
according to your inclinations and you will do it readily. Some will be completely against your
inclinations and you will do it anyway. Some things that God will call you to will enhance your own
understanding of the faith and you will grow. Some things that God will call you to will be difficult to
endure or understand and you won’t know why. Some things that God will call you to in ministry will
suit you and your family to a tee and some of them will cause trial and tribulation. Before you took up
your cross and follow Jesus, you already knew that the cross is heavy to bear and the way to Golgotha is
difficult to follow”. “Understand about ministry, then, “said John Wesley, “that you are called
unconditionally, to serve the Lord Jesus Christ” . When Jessie Lee, the Methodist preacher asked Frances
Asbury, “What bounty will you give me for riding my horse into the snows of Ohio?” Francis Asbury
said, “Grace here and glory hereafter”. He did not say, “Salary now and pension later”. Let me put it to
you this way: The eternal rewards are far better than the temporal ones. But then, you should be serving
the One who has called you and counting it all a blessing and a privilege to do it.

When I was last in Africa, I was teaching at Wesley College in Praetoria and a man from Zambia came to
me. He said, “You must come”. The harvest is ready for the taking. Fields are ripe for the gleaning, I was
deeply tempted to do it. There was just one little problem. My wife and my children were in America and they had not gotten the memo about going to Zambia. One of the things that I would say to all of us who are married is, that when God calls someone to a ministry, he does not call him alone. He calls him with his family to do it. That is one of the criteria you need to use in evaluating whether a call is from God, or not. There needs to be unity in the family about what is going to happen. It is not a unilateral call, it is the call of a family to serve the Lord. Like Aquila and Priscilla, like the household of Stephanas and other households along the way. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Those are words worth living by and words worth dying for.