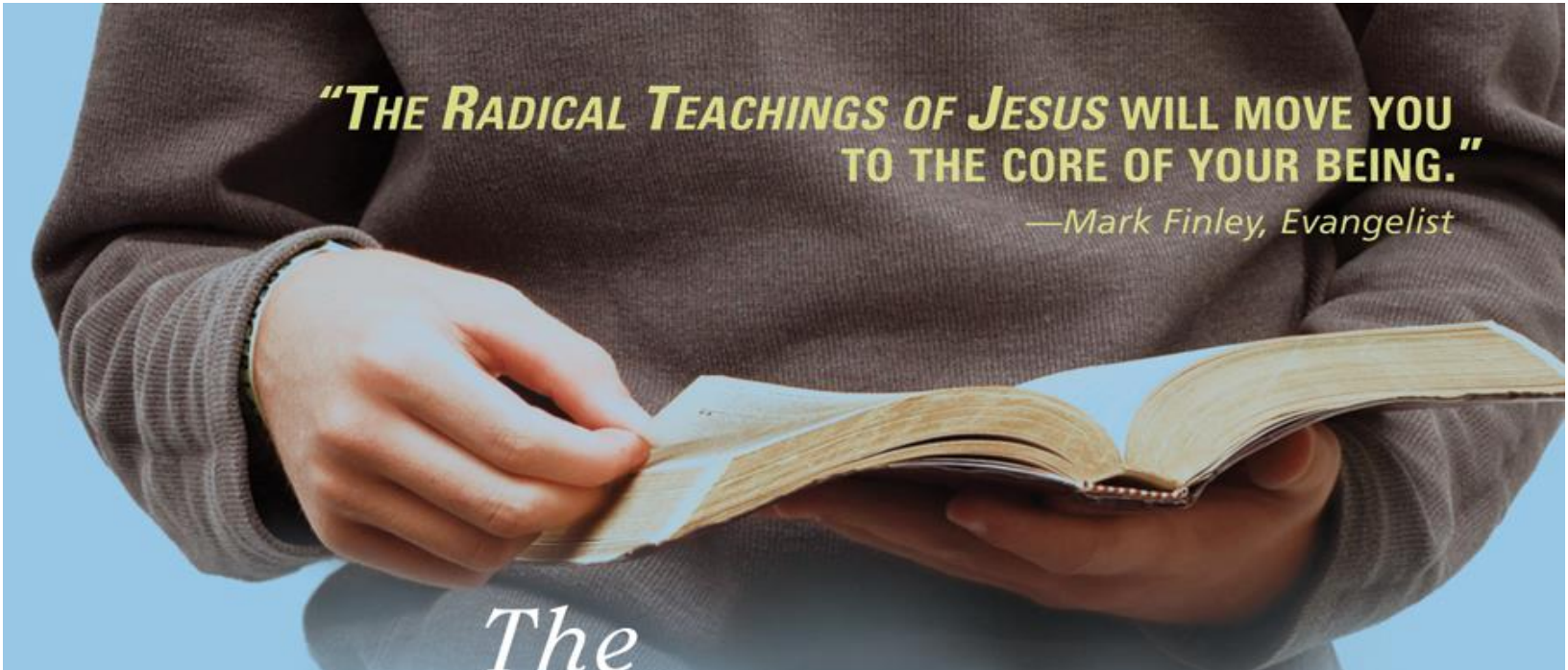
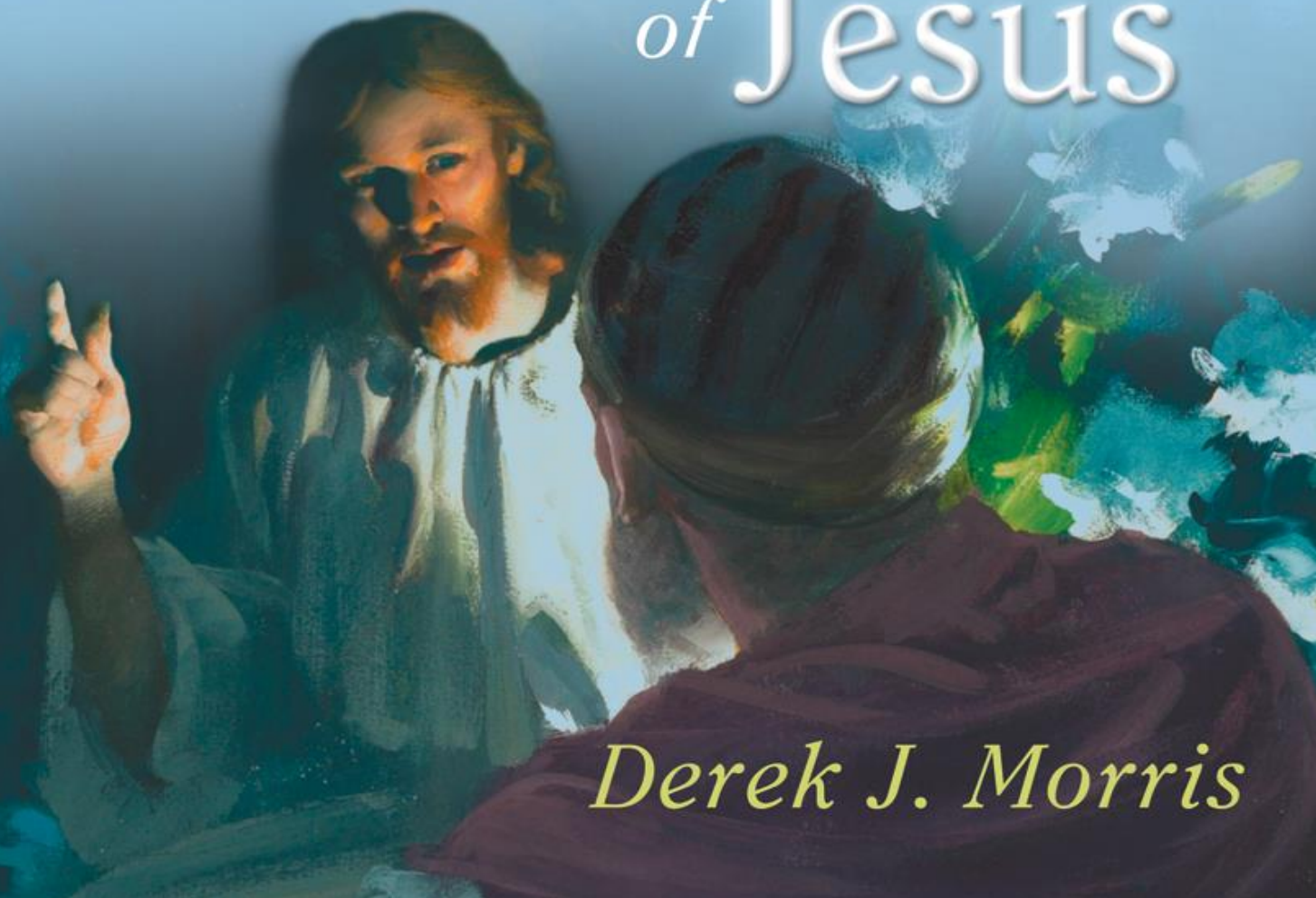


*"THE RADICAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS WILL MOVE YOU
TO THE CORE OF YOUR BEING."*

—Mark Finley, Evangelist



The
Radical
Teachings
of Jesus



Derek J. Morris

The Radical Teachings of Jesus

Derek J. Morris

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Introduction

- Chapter 1 What Jesus taught about Himself**
- Radical Claims of Jesus
 - What His Followers Said
 - Authenticity of John's Testimony
 - The Testimony of Saul
 - The Testimony of Peter and John
 - The Testimony of Evil Spirits
 - The Testimony of Will
- Chapter 2 What Jesus taught about the Scriptures**
- Scripture Discounted as Myth
 - The Word of God
 - Old Testament Stories
 - Moses and King David
 - Defense Against the Enemy
 - Defense Lessons
 - Testimony about Jesus Christ
 - Challenge
- Chapter 3 What Jesus taught about salvation**
- Jesus Teaches Nicodemus
 - Fiery Serpents
 - Serpent on a Pole
 - Lifted Up
 - The Rich Young Ruler
 - Zacchaeus
 - Prophets and Apostles
 - Baptism and the Gift
- Chapter 4 What Jesus taught about His return**
- The Good News
 - The Bad News
 - The Most Important News
 - Wild Fires
- Chapter 5 What Jesus taught about the Sabbath**
- The Ten Commandments
 - Two "Problems"
 - Jesus and the Sabbath
 - Sabbath Made for Man
 - Blessing My Neighbor
 - Overturning the Traditions
 - Man at the Pool of Bethesda
 - A Crippled Woman
 - Man with a Withered Hand
 - Lies in the Garden

-The Creator's Gift

Chapter 6 What Jesus taught about the judgment

- A Day of Judgment
- Good News
- More Good News
- The Best News
- Death to Life
- Too Good to Be True?

Chapter 7 What Jesus taught about death

- Rich Man and Lazarus
- Another Lazarus
- The Silence of Lazarus
- Paul's Teaching on Death
- Jesus Holds the Keys
- What Happens to the Unrepentant?
- Reunion

Chapter 8 What Jesus taught about His church

- Whose Church?
- Called Out
- My* Church
- This Rock
- Binding and Loosing
- Prevailing

Acknowledgments

I want to express my appreciation to the numerous individuals who have provided encouragement and assistance in the development of this book:

To Mark and Teenie Finley, Todd Gessele, Gene Heinrich, Paul Johnson, Diane Levy, Dan Serns, Sue Walden, Larry Witzel and the team in Vancouver, WA, who provided the context for this manuscript to be born.

To Eve Parker, and Nancy Vasquez—who provided invaluable feedback in the shaping and editing of the manuscript.

To my beloved wife, Bodil—who has always encouraged me to fix my eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, and to boldly proclaim the radical teachings of Jesus.

Each of these individuals, along with others unnamed, encouraged me to sit at the feet of Jesus, listen carefully to His radical teachings, and share what I have learned with others.

Most of all, I want to thank Jesus, my Savior and Lord. I am fully persuaded that Jesus is all He claimed to be—Son of God, Messiah, Savior of the world, and soon coming King! I echo the testimony of the great prophet John the Baptist: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God!”

Introduction

We are currently in the midst of an amazing miracle of God! Since the publication of *The Radical Prayer* in 2008, more than 40,000 copies have already been printed. *The Radical Prayer* has been translated into numerous languages, and thousands of study groups have been launched across North America and around the world using *The Radical Prayer* DVD series.¹ But that is just the beginning.

Since I personally responded to the appeal of Jesus, crying out to the Lord of the harvest to throw me out into His harvest, God has been working in miraculous ways in my own life. In the spring of 2009, I was thrown out to Vancouver, Washington, to conduct a citywide series of meetings on *The Radical Teachings of Jesus*. The presentations stretched me to the limit—I felt like a lamb, just like Jesus had foretold! In spite of some radical challenges, I learned to radically depend upon the Lord of the harvest. The result? I returned with radical joy, not only because I saw with my own eyes that the harvest truly is great, but also because I experienced the joy of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord in a deep and personal way.

This book is the result of that miracle. It is my prayer that as you join me on a journey, exploring *The Radical Teachings of Jesus*, your own life will be transformed.

¹ To learn more about *The Radical Prayer*, go to www.TheRadicalPrayer.com.

Chapter 1

What Jesus taught about Himself

Have you heard the latest “news” about Jesus? Some say that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and fathered a child. Others assert that Judas was the real hero in the Gospel story. If you haven’t studied the story of Jesus for yourself, you could easily be led astray. What did Jesus have to say about Himself and are His radical claims true?

Radical Claims of Jesus

Jesus was bold in His declarations about Himself. The apostle John remembered and recorded those radical claims:

•“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).¹

•“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

•“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

•“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25–26).

•“Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58).

•“My Father has been working until now and I have been working” (John 5:17).

•“He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Radical claims indeed! The renowned Christian apologist C. S. Lewis was right when he asserted that Jesus didn’t give us the option to recognize Him as merely a great moral teacher. Jesus was either a lunatic, totally out of touch with reality, a malicious deceiver intent on leading others astray, *or* He was and is who He claimed to be—the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God.

Jesus left us with no doubt about whom He believed Himself to be: “I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). Of course, *anyone* can make outrageous claims like that. There is probably someone in your city right now that claims to be the Messiah. How do we know the radical claims of Jesus are true? To find an answer to that question, we must begin with the testimony of the early followers of Jesus.

What His Followers Said

John the Baptist was one of the first to testify about Jesus. When he saw Jesus coming to the river Jordan to be baptized, he cried out, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). After baptizing Jesus, John the Baptist gave this startling testimony: “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. . . . And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32, 34). The testimony of John the Baptist was clear: he boldly declared that Jesus was the Son of God!

A godly woman named Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus, gave her testimony about Jesus. Martha and her siblings, Mary and Lazarus, were close friends of Jesus. They knew Him well and loved Him. Martha gave this confession as she conversed with Jesus near the grave of her brother Lazarus: “I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (John 11:27).

Even skeptics experienced a radical change in their lives when they had a personal encounter with Jesus. When Nathanael’s friend Philip said he had found the Messiah, a teacher from Nazareth, Nathanael replied, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” But when Nathanael met Jesus face to face, he was convicted that Jesus was no ordinary man, and certainly not a lunatic or a malicious deceiver. Here is Nathanael’s testimony: “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49).

Thomas was another skeptic who became a disciple of Jesus. After the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas struggled to believe that Jesus was actually raised from the dead. When Thomas eventually met the risen Christ, when he saw Jesus with his own eyes and touched Him with his own hands, he exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

You may have noticed that all the radical claims of Jesus cited above and all the testimonies about Jesus are taken from the Gospel of John. One of the first disciples of Jesus, John, son of Zebedee, wrote his Gospel with the specific purpose of convincing people about who Jesus was. He gave this testimony at the conclusion of his Gospel: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book; *but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30–31, emphasis added).

Authenticity of John’s testimony

John’s Gospel gives such a sophisticated picture of Jesus that many liberal scholars question its authenticity. They suggest that the Gospel of John must have evolved over a century or more, and propose that it was written late 2nd century AD, long after John’s death. They say the Gospel of John may contain a few fragments of true tradition, but in its present form it is not an authentic testimony from the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20).

However, an archeological discovery in the 20th century provided evidence reaffirming a late 1st century date for the writing of the Gospel of John, thus supporting its authenticity as the work of the aged apostle John. In 1920, a collection of papyri was purchased in Egypt and added to the Rylands Library in England. One papyrus fragment from that collection was translated and first published in 1935. It became known as the Rylands Papyrus 457, or P52. Paleographers—scholars who specialize in dating documents based on writing styles—were excited to date this ancient papyrus as early 2nd century, perhaps around AD 125. On it was a portion of the Gospel of John. Already published in codex form rather than a conventional scroll, the evidence clearly pointed to a late 1st century date for the writing of John’s Gospel, just as Christians had believed through the centuries. I am convinced the discovery of that ancient papyrus was divinely directed to strengthen the faith of Christians and to affirm the authenticity of John’s testimony.

Perhaps you are wondering what was written on that papyrus fragment. It was portions of John 18:31–33 on one side and portions of John 18:37–38 on the reverse side. “Then Pilate said to them, ‘You take Him and judge Him according to your law.’ Therefore the Jews said to him, ‘It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,’ that the

saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke signifying by what death He would die. Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’” (John 18:31–33).

On the reverse side of the fragment we find additional portions of this conversation between Pilate and Jesus. “Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all’” (John 18:37–38).

What a remarkable testimony, recorded on an ancient papyrus! “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice!” We all have the power to choose the one to whom we are going to listen. There are distractions and fanciful fabrications all around us. There always have been. It’s part of the great controversy between good and evil. But God has provided compelling evidence that the testimonies about Jesus are reliable and the radical claims of Jesus are true!

The Testimony of Saul

One of the most compelling testimonies regarding the truth about Jesus comes from Saul of Tarsus who was once a fierce and ruthless enemy of Jesus and all who followed Him. Saul, later called Paul, gave this confession before King Agrippa: “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:9–11).

Saul was a witness at the stoning of Stephen, one of the followers of Jesus. That execution was indelibly imprinted on Saul’s memory and the convictions generated by Stephen’s death would be with Saul forever. Stephen had just given a powerful testimony about Jesus Christ before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. The author of the book of Acts records “when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at

him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, 'Look! I see the heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:54–60).

Not long after this, Saul was on his way to Damascus with letters from the High Priest in Jerusalem. His intention was to arrest any followers of Jesus he found there and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. But God had other plans. "As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting . . .'" (Acts 9:3–5).

That encounter with the risen Christ changed the course of Saul's life. Saul the persecutor became Paul the devoted follower of Jesus. He began to boldly declare that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. He healed the sick and cast out demons in Jesus' name, just like the other apostles, and he joyfully looked forward to "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

The Testimony of Peter and John

Peter and John also gave a bold testimony about Jesus when they were on their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. As they approached the city gate called Beautiful, they saw a crippled man begging there. "Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.' So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and

immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him” (Acts 3:1–10).

The people who witnessed this remarkable miracle were astonished! When Peter saw the reaction of the crowd, he said: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before” (Acts 3:12–20). Peter’s testimony, both in words and actions, boldly confirmed that the radical claims of Jesus were true! Jesus is the Christ, the Holy One!

The Testimony of Evil Spirits

During the ministry of Jesus, evil spirits also confirmed the radical claims that Jesus made about Himself. On one occasion, when Jesus was speaking in the synagogue in Capernaum, a demon-possessed man cried out, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). Jesus did not challenge the evil spirit’s testimony but simply rebuked him saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him” (Mark 1:25). Mark records that after the unclean spirit had convulsed the demon-possessed man and cried out with a loud voice, the evil spirit came out of him. “Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He

commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.’ And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee” (Mark 1:27–28).

The book of Acts records many stories of people being set free from the control of evil spirits by the power of Jesus’ name. In the city of Philippi, a young demon-possessed girl followed Paul and Barnabas, crying out, “These men are the servants of the Most High God who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). While her testimony confirmed the radical claims that Jesus had made about Himself, Paul realized that this constant verbal harassment was more of a distraction than help. So Paul confronted the evil spirit: “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18). The evil spirit could not resist the power of Jesus’ name and was compelled to leave!

These stories confirm that Jesus was no ordinary man, and he was certainly not a lunatic or a malicious deceiver. Because Jesus was and is all that He claimed to be there is incredible power in the name of Jesus! But I must warn you it’s not enough to know *about* Jesus. You need to know Jesus personally if you expect to experience His power in your life.

A story recorded in Acts 19:13–16 illustrates this very point. Some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to cast out evil spirits in the name of Jesus even though they did not believe in Jesus themselves. When seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, tried to perform an exorcism “in the name of Jesus”, the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” (Acts 19:15) Then the demon-possessed man leaped on them, overpowered them, and beat them, so that they ran out of that house naked and bleeding.

That startling story ought to convince you that it is not enough to know *about* Jesus. You need a personal relationship with Him. When you are personally connected to Jesus you will find healing and freedom like you’ve never known before.

But all these testimonies are from long ago. What about the 21st century? Do we see evidence even today that the radical claims of Jesus are true? Yes! In fact, the transformation of lives continues to be the greatest evidence that the radical claims of Jesus are true! No life will be changed for the better by fanciful fabrications that undermine the truth about Jesus; however when you meet Jesus Christ personally, even today, your life will be transformed. Let the scoffers mock. Let the critics ridicule. They cannot save you. They cannot heal you. They

cannot set you free. Only Jesus can do that.

The Testimony of Will

In the fall of 2008 I had the privilege of conducting a series of meetings in Orlando, Florida, with internationally known evangelist Mark Finley. We saw many miracles of transformed lives by the power of Jesus during those meetings. I remember one young man named Will who was 25 years old. He had dropped out of high school at age 16 and his life was going nowhere. In fact, he had been an alcoholic for the past seven years. The first night he came to the meetings he was experiencing a hangover; he said the only reason he attended the meeting was because his mom dragged him there! As Will began hearing the truth about Jesus night after night, his life was radically transformed. He has been sober since that life-changing encounter with Jesus and he is an active witness for the One who delivered him from the bondage of sin and saved him by His grace. Will's story is repeated over and over again in the lives of young and old who experience a personal life changing encounter with Jesus.

Jesus still invites people today, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29). Jesus can give you rest for your soul because He is no ordinary man. He isn't just a great moral teacher; He certainly isn't a deluded lunatic or a malicious deceiver. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Do you need rest for your soul? Are you looking for freedom from the chains that bind you? The good news is that Jesus can make you whole. Jesus can set you free. He will give you peace. He will give you rest for your soul. No fanciful fabrication could ever do that.

Chapter 2

What Jesus taught about the Scriptures

According to an article I downloaded from the American Humanist Association, I am a deluded fool. The author of the article, the president of a local chapter of the American Humanist Association, would probably label me “a promoter of deceptive and destructive teachings.” In an article entitled “Some Reasons Why Humanists Reject the Bible” the author makes this bold assertion:

“Humanists reject the claim that the Bible is the word of God. They are convinced the book was written solely by humans in an ignorant, superstitious, and cruel age. They believe that because the writers of the Bible lived in an unenlightened era, the book contains many errors and harmful teachings.”²

Perhaps even more troubling than the statement of this humanist is the fact that even some *Christians* are losing confidence in the Scriptures. Many Christian theologians have embraced a methodology where “critical reason decides what is reality in the Bible, and what cannot be reality.”³

Scripture Discounted as Myth

The Scriptures are being demythologized—elements viewed as myth are being discarded. Many are abandoning the Genesis creation account as unscientific. Miracles are reinterpreted based on what seems reasonable to the reader. Some of you have probably heard the “rational” explanation for the feeding of the 5,000 by Jesus.⁴ According to those who adopt a critical approach to the Scriptures, it is irrational to believe Jesus could feed 5000 men, plus women and children, with 5 loaves and 2 fish. They say what really happened was this: everyone actually had food with them, but no one wanted to share it. When the young lad demonstrated a willingness to share his lunch with Jesus, the hearts of the people were touched, and they all shared their food with each other. Isn’t that a miracle? The miracle of love!

Well, I believe love *is* a miracle. But that’s *not* what the Bible says happened. The crowd didn’t want to honor the little boy for his generous spirit. They wanted to make *Jesus* king. Even the enemies of Jesus could not deny the supernatural signs and wonders He performed. Yet today, many try to explain them away or discard them as myths. They do not believe the testimony of Scripture is reliable.

So what is the truth about the Scriptures, and how should we respond to this erosion of confidence in them? If we choose to base our convictions on current popular opinion, we're in serious trouble. Let me suggest that it would be wise to carefully consider what Jesus taught about the Scriptures.

The Word of God

Jesus taught that the Scriptures are more than a helpful collection of religious ideas. They are more than words of human beings *about* God. The Scriptures *are* the inspired Word of God. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He responded to Satan's temptations by quoting from the Scriptures. He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3).

How do we receive that word which proceeds from the mouth of God? Through the oral and written testimony of the prophets. That is the radical teaching that Jesus shared with His disciples, one of whom wrote later, "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19–21).

Old Testament Stories

Jesus accepted the testimony of the Scriptures by faith as the Word of God. He had undoubtedly heard the story of the young prophet Jeremiah. The Lord called Jeremiah to be a prophet and Jeremiah responded, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth" (Jeremiah 1:6).

But the Lord said to Jeremiah, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:7–8). Then the Lord touched the young prophet's mouth and said, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9).

For Jesus, the testimony of prophets like Jeremiah was much more than helpful religious counsel—it was the Word of God, transmitted through a human instrument.

Many unbelievers, and sadly even some Christians, do not accept the early chapters of the book of Genesis as reliable history, but Jesus accepted those Scriptures as the reliable Word of God. Jesus said, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’” (Matthew 19:4). Jesus also spoke of the blood of righteous Abel (Matthew 23:35) and the days of Noah when “Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27).

Why did Jesus believe those events really happened? He couldn’t prove their historicity based on human logic or reason. Rather, Jesus accepted the Scriptures by faith as the reliable Word of God. That’s why He could recount the story of Jonah being in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights as a historical fact. It doesn’t make sense to human reason. From a human perspective, the story of Jonah sounds like a preposterous fish story. Jesus accepted the story by faith as a historical fact because it was recorded in the Scriptures.⁵

Moses and King David

Palestinian revisionists and biblical minimalists say Bible characters like Moses and King David never existed. They are simply a fabrication of those who desire to promote a Zionist agenda. Jesus, on the other hand, believed in the historicity of Moses and of King David. Jesus spoke of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14), and He also spoke of King David, quoting the words of David recorded in Psalm 110 as being spoken “by the Holy Spirit” (Mark 12:36).

Jesus believed and taught that the Scriptures were more than just human words about God. The Scriptures were and are the inspired Word of God, filled with the wisdom of God and the power of God. May it be said of us, as the apostle Paul said of believers of the Greek city of Thessalonica, “We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Defense Against the Enemy

A second important truth Jesus taught about the Scriptures is that they are a defense against the enemy. When Jesus went into the wilderness after His baptism, He was attacked by Satan. Jesus responded to every temptation with the Word of God. When tempted to turn stones into bread, Jesus said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not

live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3).

When tempted to presume upon the mercy of God, Jesus replied, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God’” (Matthew 4:7, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16). Again, when Jesus was tempted to bow down and worship Satan with the deceptive promise that the whole world would be given to Him, Jesus replied, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matthew 4:10, quoting Deuteronomy 6:13).

How was Jesus able to respond to each temptation with the Word of God? Did He have a scroll or two hidden under His cloak? No. Jesus believed the Scriptures were the Word of God, so He hid God’s Word in His heart. He took time to memorize and internalize the Word of God. Then, when the enemy attacked, Jesus had a defense against him. Jesus demonstrated in this encounter with Satan the truth of the Word of God recorded in Ephesians 6:17: “the sword of the Spirit. . . is the word of God.”

The Greek noun translated “word” both in Matthew 4:4⁶ and Ephesians 6:17⁷ is not the common word **logos**.⁸ Rather, it is the Greek noun **rhēma**, which implies a specific word or saying. When He was attacked by Satan, Jesus didn’t just hold up the Bible, or a Bible scroll like some kind of lucky charm and say, “The Bible, the Bible, the Bible.” No, Jesus responded to the attacks of Satan with *specific* words from the Scriptures.

So why are the Scriptures a defense against the enemy? Because Satan is a liar and a deceiver, but the Word of God is truth. So when Satan comes to you and says, “You’re a sinner. You’re a loser. You might as well just give up and be damned,” the Word of God tells you the truth: “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse from *all* unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, emphasis added). The truth of the Word of God dispels Satan’s lie.

When Satan comes to you and tries to intimidate you and fill you with fear, the Word of God tells you the truth: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

When Satan tries to discourage you because the path ahead seems uncertain, the Word of God tells you the truth: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye” (Psalm 32:8).

Defense Lessons

The Word of God is a defense against the enemy. I remember an incident that happened when I was about 10 years old that confirmed this radical teaching of Jesus. I lived about a mile from the campus of Newbold College, a small Christian college in the village of Binfield, England. It was a Friday evening, and I had gone to a vespers program at the church. I'm not sure why I was allowed to walk home by myself. It seems a little dangerous in retrospect but we lived less than a mile from the campus, down a country road. On my way home, as I was passing the ruins of an old building, I heard a blood-curdling scream. I was terrified! Even as a ten-year-old, I clearly saw this situation as an attempt by the enemy to intimidate me. But then something amazing happened. The words of Psalm 23 came to my mind. I had memorized Psalm 23 as a young child and I embraced those words, not simply as the words of David but as the Word of God.

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” As I repeated that psalm, God's Word became to me “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17). The Lord kept me in perfect peace as my mind was focused on Him (Isaiah 26:3). That promise was true the day the prophet wrote it down and it is still true today! I learned that dark night more than 40 years ago, and I have learned many times since then, that the Scriptures *are* a defense against the enemy.

Some years ago I got a phone call asking if I could come and pray a blessing of God over someone's house. Apparently, a lady named Glenda⁹ had recently been widowed, and the superstition of her culture taught that the departed spirit of her dead husband would come to visit the house for 40 days after his death. About a week after her husband's death, Glenda began to hear rapping sounds in the part of the house where her husband had died. Glenda was an educated woman. She had a PhD in nutritional science and was a competent professional, but she didn't know how to handle this supernatural phenomenon. As I prepared to go to Glenda's house, I was impressed to take one of my wife's Scripture song CDs with me—Wells of Salvation. I encouraged Glenda to play this CD in her home and to hide the Word of God contained in the songs in her heart. The next morning I got an excited call from Glenda. “The rapping is gone!” The evil spirit harassing Glenda had been expelled from her house by the power of the Word of God!

Jesus was the Word of God made flesh and His Word is still a defense against the enemy. In fact, I propose to you that we need the Word of God as a defense against the enemy more now than at any other time in the history

of our world. We are living in troubled times. We are seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy of John in the book of Revelation that “the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Revelation 12:12).

One of the best ways to hide God’s Word in your heart is through Scripture songs. My wife and I sing them for family worship as a way of hiding God’s Word in our hearts. We believe, like Jesus, that the Scriptures are the Word of God and a defense against the enemy, and we encourage you to hide God’s Word in your heart.

Testimony about Jesus Christ

It is possible, however, to memorize a few important truths from the Scriptures, and miss their most important truth. Religious leaders in Jesus’ day thought they could find life by knowing the Scriptures. They became experts in what the Scriptures said. Tragically, in their lifelong quest for biblical knowledge, they missed the whole purpose of the Scriptures. Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40).

What a bold claim! Jesus said, “The Scriptures are a testimony about Me!” That’s the third important truth Jesus taught about the Scriptures. When the risen Jesus gave a Bible study to the two disciples He met on the road to Emmaus, Luke records that “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). What a Bible study that must have been!

The purpose for reading the Scriptures is not just to gain more information. It is not even to gain more information about Jesus. Satan and those angels who followed him in his rebellion have lots of Bible knowledge and lots of information about Jesus. Many of those who will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven are well informed about Jesus Christ. Jesus says the reason we should study the Scriptures is to know Him personally and have life.

The apostle John tells us that he wrote his Gospel for that very reason. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30–31). The Scriptures give us a picture of Jesus, and we read them that we might do more than know *about* Jesus. We want

have an intimate relationship with Him, to know Him whom to know is life eternal (John 17:3).

Jesus taught that the Scriptures are the Word of God, they are a defense against the enemy, and they are a testimony about Him. We may never have answers to all our questions, but we're not saved by having all the answers. We are saved by knowing Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Once we have a personal, saving relationship with Jesus, we will be ready to listen attentively to the radical teachings of Jesus, and we will desire to live in harmony with all Jesus taught.

Chapter 3

What Jesus taught about salvation

You probably received the same e-mail that showed up in my inbox some months ago. It recorded the results of a biblical knowledge test supposedly given to several elementary school children. Their answers, some of which appear below, reveal some rather confused ideas about the Bible:

- Noah’s wife was Joan of Ark.
- Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night.
- Moses went to the top of Mt. Cyanide to get the Ten Commandments.
- The seventh commandment is “Thou shalt not admit adultery.”
- Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol.
- Solomon had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
- Samson defeated the Philistines with the axe of the apostles.
- The epistles were the wives of the apostles.

This e-mail is probably a humorous hoax but it illustrates a troublesome trend in our culture. We are rapidly becoming a biblically illiterate society, with our children growing up knowing less and less about the great stories of the Bible. It’s sad because knowing these stories helps us to understand the important teachings of the Bible, which in turn enables us to learn valuable lessons for our own lives today.¹⁰

The passage of Scripture we will study now is a case in point. In chapter 1 we discovered the radical claims that Jesus made about Himself. In chapter 2, we examined the radical teaching of Jesus about the Scriptures. Now, we’re going to consider what Jesus taught about salvation.

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a leader of the Jews and a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. He came to talk to Jesus one night. Nicodemus was personally convicted that Jesus was a teacher sent from God but was not quite ready to declare himself an open follower of Jesus. During the course of their conversation, Jesus shared with Nicodemus a radical teaching about salvation: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must

the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:14–17).

The story Jesus was referring to happened more than 1400 years earlier while the children of Israel were on their way to the Promised Land. We find this significant Bible story in the Old Testament book of Numbers. Aaron, the brother of Moses, had just died. The children of Israel were making a lengthy detour around the territory of the Edomites, and they were complaining against God again.

“Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread’” (Numbers 21:4–5).

The children of Israel were focusing on their difficulties rather than focusing on their Deliverer. Even the blessings of God, including the daily manna which God had provided for them, were a cause for complaint. “Our soul loathes this worthless bread,” they brashly complained.

Fiery Serpents

The very next verse presents a picture that is troubling to many people. “So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died” (Numbers 21:6). A person could easily create a horrible picture of God from just that one verse—a mean-spirited, vindictive Deity who zaps people when they step out of line. But is that an accurate description of the character of God? Not if you believe the words of Jesus, who said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). Jesus told us, “God so loved the world. . .” (John 3:16). So what’s happening here in Numbers 21:6?

Moses had recently reminded the children of Israel that the Lord had led them “through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water” (Deuteronomy 8:15). Dangers and difficulties were all around them but the Lord had provided for them. He had given them food in the form of manna, water from the Rock, and protected them from the fiery serpents and scorpions. But then they complained against God and against Moses. “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to

die in the wilderness?” (Numbers 21:5).

The unspoken message was clear. “We wish we weren’t Your people. We wish You would just leave us alone.” God honored their request. He allowed them to face life and death without Him. As a natural consequence of their willful separation from God, those same fiery serpents from which He had graciously protected them during their long desert journey bit the people. Can you imagine the ensuing panic within the camp of Israel? There they were out in the middle of a hostile desert, with nowhere to hide. Even if they somehow managed to survive through the day without receiving a venomous bite, they still had to face the greater uncertainty of making it through the night unscathed. Loud cries were heard all around the camp as more and still more were bitten by these fiery serpents. Many people perished.

We don’t know how long the complaining lasted, but the children of Israel finally came to their senses and sent representatives to talk with Moses. “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that he take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people” (Numbers 21:7).

Serpent on a Pole

The Lord replied to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live” (Numbers 21:8). It didn’t seem to make any sense at all. How could looking at a replica of the “problem” provide a “solution?” The Lord was asking the children of Israel to reaffirm their commitment to Him as their God through a simple act of obedience. They were invited to just do what the Lord asked them to do.

“So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Numbers 21:9). It was a look of faith, a look of dependence, trusting the Lord to be faithful to His promise—and all who looked lived.

I now imagine another cry going up in the camp. Not a cry of death, but a cry of life. Instead of a cry of despair, a cry of hope, “The LORD has told us to look at the bronze serpent and we will live. Look and live! Look and live!”

Undoubtedly there were some who saw no sense either in God’s instructions or the invitation. So instead

of looking towards God's provision, they looked away, and consequently died in their rebellion. There were some repentant sinners who had the courage to believe the Word of God. They had courage to do what God asked them to do. In a simple act of faith, perhaps with the assistance of those around them, they made their way to the center of the camp. They looked in faith at the bronze serpent, in simple obedience to the Word of God, and lived!

Lifted Up

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." What did He mean by that? On another occasion, Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:28–29).

But we still haven't answered the question: What is this "lifting up" of the Son of Man that must happen? Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostle John added this inspired commentary: "This He said, signifying by what death He would die" (John 12:33).

Notice carefully the words of Jesus. "Even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up." Why? Because the death of Jesus on the cross is not just something tacked on to the Gospel story. It is, rather, at the very center of God's saving activity. That's why the apostle Paul declared, "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14), and "I have determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Jesus declared, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved*" (John 3:14–17 emphasis added).

When people look to Jesus in faith, they find life—abundant life, life in all its fullness, everlasting life. The

cry needs to go out, just as it did in the camp of Israel: not a cry of death, but a cry of life; not a cry of despair, but a cry of hope. Look to the provision God has made. Look to Jesus in faith, and live!

The Rich Young Ruler

Unfortunately, there will always be some who reject this gracious offer. Just like those who chose not to look at the bronze snake, there were some even during the ministry of Jesus who rejected salvation. Luke records the story of a certain ruler who came to Jesus: “Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 18:18).

That’s a strange question, but it reveals a great deal about the rich young ruler. First, notice what he called Jesus: “Good Teacher.” It’s a polite title, but it reveals a lack of commitment on the part of the speaker. Some called Jesus “Master.” Others called Him “Lord.” This young man simply addresses Him as “Teacher,” perhaps throwing in the word “Good” in order to earn some favor.

But Jesus was not impressed. “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Luke 18:19). In other words, “Are you willing to recognize Me for who I am? I am indeed the One who alone can be called good.”

Something else tells us a great deal about this ruler. He asked: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” You can’t *do* anything to “inherit” something. Inheritance comes because of who you are. You don’t *do* anything to inherit eternal life—it’s a gift to those who have a relationship with Jesus, to those who look to Him in faith. If anything gets in the way of our relationship with Jesus, whether it’s our skepticism, our pride, or our possessions, whatever it is . . . we need to let it go, and choose to look to Jesus in faith and live. Unfortunately, the rich young ruler couldn’t let go of his possessions, and, sadly, we never hear of him again.

Zacchaeus

The response of another rich man is quite different: “Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of

short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’ Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’” (Luke 19:1–10).

Jericho undoubtedly had many local tax collectors due to its strategic location on a trade route, and Zacchaeus was the *chief* tax collector. He probably wore a luxurious Babylonian robe, and sandals made of the finest leather. Yet none of his fine attire mattered as he climbed up that sycamore tree. Just like the young ruler, Zacchaeus was a rich man seeking to speak with Jesus, but that’s where the similarities end. Instead of calling Jesus “Good Teacher,” Zacchaeus called Him “Lord.” Instead of turning away sorrowfully, Zacchaeus received Jesus joyfully. Instead of hoarding his money, Zacchaeus gave it away. “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19:8).

Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house.” Why? Because Zacchaeus gave half of what he owned to the poor? No. Why then? Because he demonstrated humility by restoring fourfold to anyone he had wronged? No. His actions were just evidence of his salvation. Salvation came to Zacchaeus and his household because he looked to Jesus in faith. He received Jesus joyfully. He called Jesus “Lord.” “Today,” Jesus said, “salvation has come to this house because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Jesus accomplished His mission of seeking and saving the lost by being lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. The prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32).

Not everyone will choose to look to Jesus and live. Everyone will be drawn to the perfect demonstration of the Father's love but some will choose to deliberately turn away and die in their sins. Each one of us has a decision to make, one way or the other, and whoever chooses to look to Jesus in faith will live.

Prophets and Apostles

God provided testimonies from prophets and apostles regarding the mission of Jesus the Messiah. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah gave this prophecy: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5–6).

John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and declared, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The apostle Peter, an eyewitness of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, gave this testimony: "Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:23–24).

Once Saul of Tarsus was fully convinced Jesus was the Christ, his own life was transformed, and he wrote these words to the followers of Jesus in Rome: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Saul, later called the apostle Paul, knew what he was talking about. He had been an enemy of Jesus, persecuting His followers. In a letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

That's why Paul rejoiced when he wrote these words to the Christians in Rome: "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'" (Romans 10:9–13).

Baptism and the Gift

How do we publicly confess our acceptance of Jesus as our personal Savior? The answer is very clear both in the teachings and in the example of Jesus. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved,” (Mark 16:16) and “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is both a confession of our sin and a confession that we have accepted Jesus as our Savior. When Jesus came to be baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, John tried to prevent Him by saying, “I need to be baptized by You and are You coming to me?” (Matthew 3:14). Jesus had no sin to confess. Jesus did not need a Savior. John was right about that, but notice the response of Jesus: “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

Jesus was setting an example for all those who would follow in His steps. That’s why Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

God has a special gift for each person who is baptized as a confession of Jesus as Savior. Look again at Acts 2:38. “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the *gift* of the Holy Spirit.”

That’s exactly what happened to Jesus when He was baptized. “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:16–17).

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him. God so loves the world—and that includes you—that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

So let the cry go out throughout the camp. Let the cry go out throughout the church. Let the cry go out throughout your city. Let the cry go out throughout the world. Not a cry of death, but a cry of life. Not a cry of despair, but a cry of hope. Jesus, the Son of Man, has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Look to Jesus

in faith and live.

Chapter 4

What Jesus taught about His return

Our family has moved from one house to another more times than any of us would like to remember. We all agree that moving is an incredible amount of work. However, one of the benefits of moving is that you sometimes rediscover precious treasures—things that have been “lost” for years are “found.”

My wife and I came across one such treasure while packing for a move a few years ago. This treasure happened to be on a cassette tape. I know that doesn’t sound like much of a treasure—especially since cassette tapes are now obsolete. Yet, to our family that cassette tape was worth its weight in gold. That’s because on that cassette tape was a recording of our two sons, Christopher and Jonathan, when they were young boys. They were singing a song that Christopher had learned in Kindergarten. Here are the words to the song:

One day I’ll look up and see Jesus coming down for me,
Sitting on a cloud so white with His holy angels bright.
O then, I will shout and sing, “Glory! Glory! Glory!”
He has come our heavenly King, “Glory! Glory! Glory!”

Whether our sons realized it or not, they were sharing the radical teaching of Jesus regarding His return in glory. The second coming of Jesus is one of the most precious truths of the whole Bible. This radical teaching of Jesus causes many people to say, “Glory! Glory! Glory!” Yet this truth Jesus taught also challenges a lot of strange ideas that people have about His return—how He will come back to this earth, what it will be like, or whether He’ll even come at all. As we consider the radical teaching of Jesus about His return, I have divided our study into three parts: the good news, the bad news, and the most important news.

The Good News

First, the good news: The return of Jesus in glory is *certain*. This is something worth remembering. When

Jesus spoke to His disciples in the upper room, He said, “Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again* and receive you to myself that where I am there you may be also” (John 14:1–3, emphasis added). The Greek verb translated “I will come” might literally be translated “I *am* coming again.” The futuristic present tense implies that His return is as certain as if it were *already happening!*

In another conversation with His disciples, just days before His crucifixion, Jesus said, “For as lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also *will* the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:27, emphasis added). The glorious return of Jesus, like lightning flashing from the east to the west, *will* happen. His second coming in glory is certain.

“Then the sign of the Son of Man *will appear* in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they *will see* the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30, emphasis added). The return of Jesus is certain and it will be highly visible—like lightning flashing from the east to the west. The apostle John reinforces this truth: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7).

The Lord Jesus gave the apostle Paul a special revelation regarding his return in glory, recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17: “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Because His return in glory is certain, Jesus gave this counsel to His followers: “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man *is coming* at an hour when you do not expect Him” (Matthew 24:44, emphasis added). There is nothing tentative about the radical teaching of Jesus regarding His return. His visible, audible, and dramatic return is certain. The Son of Man *is coming*, and that’s good news.

For several years, my wife worked as a nurse practitioner in an OB/GYN practice. During that time, she interacted with a lot of pregnant women, most of whom didn’t know the exact day their babies would be delivered.

Some of them didn't even know they were pregnant when they came in for their first check-up. As the weeks and months of the pregnancy progressed, it became more and more evident a baby was on its way. People could see the signs and they knew that the coming of the baby was certain.

Jesus tells us, "My return is certain. You can see the signs." We can read about the signs of Christ's return in glory in Matthew 24:4-13: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these things are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved." The final sign that Jesus mentions that points to His return is already being fulfilled. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

According to Jesus, while no one knows the day or the hour of His return, we can know that the day of His return in glory is approaching. We can know His return is certain. That, my friend, is good news.

The Bad News

But there is also some bad news that Jesus taught regarding His return in glory. Many of the professed followers of Jesus *will not be ready* for His coming. Jesus spoke a parable about a wedding to illustrate this. "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (Matthew 25:1-4).

This wedding represents the certain return of Jesus. All ten virgins were waiting for the coming of the

bridegroom. All ten had lamps, and all ten had oil in their lamps. All of them had, at some point, received the anointing of God's Spirit.

“But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:5–13).

In this parable, fifty percent of the professed followers of Jesus were *not ready* for His return. In the parable that follows—the parable of the talents—thirty-three percent of the servants were *not ready*. While I don't think Jesus was trying to give us a true, measurable percentage, one lesson is startlingly clear: not all who profess to be followers of Jesus will be ready for His return in glory. That, my friend, is bad news.

I heard a story some time ago about three men who were standing with some suitcases on the platform of a train station. They were so engrossed in conversation that they seemed oblivious to anything happening around them. After a few minutes, the train pulled into the station. Passengers disembarked. New passengers boarded the train but none of the three men seemed to notice. They simply continued their intense conversation. Finally the whistle blew, and the train began to move. Immediately, there was a flurry of activity on the platform. Two of the men grabbed suitcases and began running toward the train. The train started picking up speed. The two men ran as fast as they could, tossed the suitcases in through an open door and barely managed to jump on board as the train left the station.

The third man who had remained motionless on the platform, stared at the departing train, then suddenly burst into laughter. The stationmaster, who had observed the whole situation, couldn't contain his curiosity. He walked over to the laughing stranger and said, “Sir, I'm puzzled. I watched this whole scenario unfold. I saw your two companions running for the train. I watched as they barely got on board before the train pulled out of the station. Then I saw you standing here, and all of a sudden, you started laughing. I just don't understand. What's so

funny?” The laughing stranger composed himself, looked at the station master and said, “I can understand that the situation didn’t look very humorous to you, sir. But you see, those two men came to say goodbye to *me*. I was the one who was supposed to get on the train!”

Those three men became so distracted that in the end none of them ended up in the right place. Two men caught a train they weren’t supposed to catch, and the intended traveler was still standing on the platform. The story generally makes people smile, but I think you would agree it’s no laughing matter to think about people not being ready for the return of Jesus. Not when it could be someone you love who might “miss the train.” I think it would be a tragedy for *anyone* to be left “standing on the platform” when Jesus comes; yet many of those who call Jesus “Lord” *will* miss the train bound for glory. This is bad news, indeed.

The Most Important News

We’ve seen that Jesus taught His return is certain, but that not all who claim His name will be ready for the event. So what’s the most important news Jesus taught about His return? Jesus wants *you* to be ready . . . He wants *all of us* to be ready. We find this radical teaching in the same portion of Scripture, beginning with Matthew 24:36, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” Notice, the question is not *whether* Jesus will return. The question is *when*. To this question, Jesus gave the following response: “Only the Father knows.”

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:37–42).

Many people wonder about this passage. Some say there will be a time when those who are righteous will be “raptured” to heaven, leaving many behind to have a “second chance” to make the decision to follow Christ. Yet this idea is a dangerous deception. Based on this idea, it could be tempting to say, “I’ll just wait for the really good people to be taken, and then I’ll get my life together so I can be saved, too.” Yet, if we closely examine the radical

teaching of Jesus about His return, we will discover that a secret rapture of the saints giving others a second chance for salvation is *not* what Jesus said would happen.

Jesus compared His coming to the days of Noah. The people living at the time of the flood had been warned by Noah for 120 years, yet were still surprised by it. They continued on with normal living until the day Noah entered the ark, and *did not know* until the flood came and *took them all away*. It is clear from this radical teaching that those who were “taken away” were those who were *not* ready, those who perished.

The picture gets even clearer when we look at the parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke. “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and *destroyed them all*. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and *destroyed them all*” (Luke 17:26–29, emphasis added). There is no second chance for those who are left behind. They are destroyed, just as it happened with those of Noah’s generation and Lot’s generation. Only a few were *left* and saved, while all the rest were *taken away* and destroyed.

Yet the whole point of Jesus’ teaching of His return in Matthew 24 is found in verse 44: “Therefore, you also *be ready*, . . .” He *is* coming. The return of Jesus in glory is *certain*. Although the time is unknown, the most important news is this: Jesus wants you to be ready.

Wild Fires

When we lived in the mountains of southern California, we became accustomed to the wild fires which occur during the dry summer months. One summer a wild fire came within half a mile of our house. It was a fascinating sight. The fire swept up the south side of the ridge, right over the top, and was on its way down to where we lived. The firefighters were well prepared with their fire engines strategically positioned. Air support came in the form of small twin-engine planes, helicopters, and a huge plane that dropped fire retardant.

While I stood outside, gawking at the pyrotechnic display, my wife was busy in the house. She gathered up all our important papers. She carried out 15-20 family photo albums and put them in the trunk of the car. She packed a change of clothes for everyone. While I was sight-seeing, my wife was preparing. I was preoccupied. She

was ready.

It is so easy to be preoccupied with unimportant things. Pyrotechnic displays, flashing lights, and helicopter stunts capture our attention and distract us from essential daily preparation for the return of Jesus. I think most people really want to be ready. Yet we've read that many of Jesus' professed followers will *not* be ready. So how do we go about *being* ready?

The answer is found in the parable of the ten virgins. To those who were not ready, Jesus said, "I do not know you" (Matthew 25:12). If those who don't know Jesus are *not* ready, then the way to *be* ready is to *know* Jesus. That is why Jesus prayed, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Life is found in knowing Jesus. "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11–12).

If you want to follow the counsel of Jesus to *be ready*, then you need to make sure that you know Him, and He knows you. The wise virgins maintained the relationship, keeping a "steady flame in the lamp." The foolish virgins had an experience of knowing God in the past, but they allowed the "flame" of the relationship to be extinguished. So, if I am going to *be ready* today, then I need to know Jesus, *today* and for every *today* to come.

Of course, this leads to the question, How can I know I have a right relationship with Jesus? Is there a way to be sure? The answer is Yes. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). A relationship with Jesus will be manifested in loving obedience to His commands.

It is easy to misinterpret this teaching of Jesus. He is not saying we are saved because of the works we do. If that were the case, none of us could have hope. Put very simply, if you have Jesus, you have life, and when you have Jesus, you will do the things He says *because you love Him*.

A relationship with Jesus Christ is a life-changing experience. If you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, you have everlasting life. You *are ready* for His certain return in glory. That's the most important news of all, because Jesus *wants* you to be ready. He wants you to experience what's spoken of in the rest of the song my son Christopher learned in Kindergarten:

Gabriel will His trumpet blow, wake the sleeping ones below

They in beauty shall arise to see Jesus in the skies.

O then, I will shout and sing, “Glory! Glory! Glory!”

He has come, our heavenly King. “Glory! Glory! Glory!”

Jesus wants *you* to be ready for that day! He wants you to join in the chorus that shouts, “Glory! Glory! Glory!” If you want to be ready on *that day*, then be ready *today*. Trust Jesus our your Savior today.

Chapter 5

What Jesus taught about the Sabbath

How would you respond if I were to tell you, “I decided to do away with the 6th commandment?” “That’s ridiculous!” you might say. “You can’t just do away with one of the Ten Commandments.”

What if I told you I was part of a very large and influential group of people who had actually made that decision? You’d most likely respond, “That doesn’t make any difference. No person, or group of people, has the authority to change the commandments of God.”

You would be absolutely correct, and Jesus would agree with you. Jesus always honored His Father’s commandments. He said, “I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). He also gave this rebuke to the religious leaders of His day: “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?” (Matthew 15:3).

I’m sure Jesus would say much the same thing today to those who seek to discard one of the commandments of God and replace it with human tradition.

The Ten Commandments

God prefaces the Ten Commandments with these words: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out

of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:1).

- “You shall have no other gods before Me.
- You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;
- You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.
- You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work; you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
- Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet your neighbor’s house, you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (Exodus 20:2–17).

I’m certain God wants us to remember all ten commandments, but it’s interesting to me that only one of them begins with the word **Remember**. “*Remember* the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Could it be God knew that someone or some group would claim to have the authority to do away with one of the commandments? Many Christians say the Sabbath doesn’t have to be remembered any more. They say the Sabbath

commandment is no longer applicable for New Testament Christians. I believe many of them are sincere. They raise two questions about the Sabbath I think we should examine.

Two Questions

The first question involves the instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples. Some point out that after His resurrection, Jesus never specifically instructed His disciples to continue to observe the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. On the other hand, it can also be said that after His resurrection, Jesus never instructed His disciples to *stop* observing the Sabbath, either. So, basing our acceptance or rejection of the Sabbath on what Jesus *didn't* say doesn't seem like a very solid platform to stand on.

The second question arises from an incident where Jesus quoted from the commandments. Perhaps you remember the story of the rich young ruler, recorded in Luke 18:18–23. Some point out that in His conversation with the rich young ruler Jesus failed to quote the fourth commandment along with the others; therefore, they infer, it is no longer necessary to “remember” the Sabbath. As part of His conversation with a rich young ruler, Jesus said, “You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and your mother” (Luke 18:20).

Jesus quoted the 7th commandment, the 6th commandment, the 8th commandment, the 9th commandment, and the 5th commandment, in that order. Can this text be used to prove that Jesus no longer expected New Testament Christians to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy? Hardly. While it's true Jesus doesn't quote the 4th commandment, neither does He quote

- the 1st commandment : “You shall have no other gods before Me.”
- the 2nd commandment : “You shall not make for yourself a carved image.”
- the 3rd commandment : “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”
- the 10th commandment: “You shall not covet.”

If we work on the logic that only the ones Jesus quoted are binding, we would also have to do away with the other commandments Jesus omitted. Would it be sound logic to argue that none of those commandments are binding either? On the contrary, Jesus Himself said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). So the question is, then, what would Jesus want us to know

about the commandment that begins with “remember,” and how did He relate to it in His life?

Jesus and the Sabbath

What *did* Jesus teach about the Sabbath? There is no doubt Jesus honored the Sabbath during His earthly life. Luke recorded, “As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read” (Luke 4:16). Jesus *remembered* the fourth commandment Sabbath regularly. It was His normal habit to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Jesus also expected His followers to remember the Sabbath day. He made that clear when He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem: “And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath” (Matthew 24:20).

In fact, Jesus sought to help people understand the true meaning of the Sabbath. The religious leaders of His day had mutilated the Sabbath by surrounding it with a myriad of man-made rules and regulations. Under those rules, the Sabbath had become a burden to the people, and Jesus longed for them to rediscover the true meaning of God’s holy day. His radical teaching about the Sabbath also challenges us to discover the true meaning of this great commandment of God.

Sabbath Made for Man

I have no doubt the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day had good intentions when they made all the extra rules and regulations on how to keep the Sabbath. They wanted to protect the edges of the Sabbath and make certain it was observed properly. But instead of preserving the Sabbath, they turned it into something God never intended it to be. They made God’s holy day a burden, and when they saw the disciples of Jesus plucking heads of grain as they walked through a grain field on the Sabbath, the Pharisees said, “They are breaking the Sabbath. That’s not allowed! According to our man-made supplements to the fourth commandment, that’s a transgression.”

Jesus responded, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Jesus could speak with authority on this subject because He was Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). The apostle John tells us, speaking by the Holy Spirit, that all things were made by the Word, the same Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:3, 14). The eternal Son of God, the Word who came into the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, was the One who created the Sabbath as the concluding act of His creative work. “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all

the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:1–3).

The Son of God created the Sabbath, blessed it, and sanctified it. That’s why He could claim, “Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). According to Jesus Himself, the Sabbath was made for man. God intends the Sabbath to be a time of *blessing*, not a burden.

For six days we labor and do all our work, and if it were not for the blessing of the Sabbath, many of us would probably work seven days a week! We *need* the Sabbath. It is not an additional obligation that complicates our already hectic lives—it’s a blessing!

- We need the Sabbath as a time of blessing to remember who we are and who God is.
- We need the Sabbath to remember there is more to our past than cosmic coincidences.
- We need the Sabbath to remember there is more to our present than making a living.
- We need the Sabbath to remember there is more to our future than retirement.

The Sabbath is not only a time of blessing for us as individuals. The Sabbath is also a time of blessing as we allow God to bless others through us. Jesus said, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day” (Matthew 12:12). That seems like a strange comment, until you realize the Pharisees even saw works of kindness and mercy on the Sabbath as a transgression of the Sabbath commandment. But Jesus said, “No, the Sabbath was made for man, it is *lawful* to do good on the Sabbath.” If you see someone in need, there is no better time to let God bless that person through you than on the Sabbath day.

Blessing My Neighbor

I remember one Sabbath I returned home from church to our house in Wescoesville, Pennsylvania, and saw my neighbor Michael Henry standing in front of his car, looking under the hood. That’s usually a sign there’s a problem! If the car isn’t working, people look under the hood even if they have no idea what they’re looking for! So I called out to him, “What’s the problem, Mike?”

“Oh,” he said, “It’s my battery. It’s dead!” I stopped my car, went into my garage, got my jumper cables, jumped back into my car, and drove over into his driveway. Within a few minutes, we had hooked up the jumper

cables, and his car was running.

As I waved goodbye, he said, “I really appreciate your help. I wasn’t going to ask you for assistance because I know it’s your Sabbath.” I appreciated his sensitivity. If he had asked me to remodel his bathroom, I’d have suggested rescheduling. But he was in trouble. He needed help, and I was happy to lend a hand because the Sabbath is a time of blessing. It’s a time when we *are* blessed, and it’s also a time when we can extend blessing to those around us. So bless someone each Sabbath day. Visit someone in the hospital. Invite someone who is lonely to take a walk with your family. Share your lunch with someone, and do so knowing you are experiencing the true meaning of the Sabbath. It is a time of blessing, just as Jesus taught.

Overturing the Traditions

Jesus taught that the Sabbath is not only a time of blessing but also a time for healing. As we read the gospel record, we discover that Jesus intentionally healed people on the Sabbath day. He knew His actions would arouse opposition from the religious leaders. He knew they would accuse Him of being a Sabbath-breaker. He could have waited until another day, but Jesus could not allow the truth about the Sabbath to be distorted by man-made traditions. He wanted people to know the Sabbath is a time of blessing *and* a time for healing.

Man at the Pool of Bethesda

The apostle John records a story of a healing on the Sabbath: “After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath” (John 5:1–9).

What a remarkable story! Why do you think Jesus asked this man to take his sleeping mat with him? Can you imagine what that mat smelled like? I probably would have said, “Just get up and walk. Forget about the sleeping mat.” But Jesus said, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” Why do you think Jesus gave those instructions?

We find the answer in John 5:9: “That day was the Sabbath.” Jesus was deliberately drawing attention to this healing. He knew the religious leaders would criticize Him, and the criticism came almost immediately. “The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, ‘It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed’” (John 5:10). They totally missed this opportunity to praise the name of the Lord. This man had been a paralytic for 38 years, and now was made whole, but the religious leaders completely missed that. All they could see was a transgression of their Sabbath regulations.

Jesus performed this miracle in spite of their opposition. He healed this man on the Sabbath day in spite of the criticism He would receive. Why? Because Jesus could not tolerate a distorted view of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was given by God as a blessing, not a burden. It is a time of blessing and healing.

A Crippled Woman

Let’s consider a second miracle Jesus intentionally performed on the Sabbath day. The story is recorded in Luke 13:10–17.

“Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’ And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.’ The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite!’ Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?’ And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.”

Jesus was willing to take the criticism for the healing. He said, “You don’t understand; that’s what the

Sabbath is for!” In this story we learn from the example of Jesus that it is not only lawful to do good on the Sabbath day; it is also lawful to heal on the Sabbath day—in fact, the Sabbath is a time when healing *ought* to occur. There’s no better time than the Sabbath to be made whole. That’s a radical teaching of Jesus.

Man with a Withered Hand

On another occasion, Jesus entered a synagogue on the Sabbath day and noticed a man who had a withered hand. The story is recorded in the Gospel of Mark. If you read between the lines, it looks like a set-up. The religious leaders had actually placed this man in the congregation as a trap for Jesus. “So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Step forward.’ Then He said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they kept silent. And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other” (Mark 3:2–6).

These religious leaders were oblivious to the true meaning of the Sabbath. They were so caught up in their man-made regulations that they plotted against the Son of God, first to catch Him in breaking their distorted view of the Sabbath, and then to *kill* Him for doing so. No wonder Jesus was “grieved by the hardness of their hearts.”

What a tragedy! But it’s also a tragedy if *we* miss the true meaning of the Sabbath. We could also fall into the trap of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy just because “it’s the right thing to do,” just to fulfill some legalistic obligation. Or we could fail to remember the Sabbath at all, believing the man-made tradition that the Sabbath no longer needs to be kept.

The radical teaching of Jesus about the Sabbath is clear. The Sabbath is a time of blessing and healing. Then why have so many people, even Christians, forgotten the very day God told us to “remember?” Jesus explained how Satan’s deception began with these words: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Lies in the Garden

What lies did Satan tell our first parents in the Garden of Eden? There were at least two. “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’” (Genesis 3:1–4).

There’s the first lie—“You will not surely die.” We’ll talk more about that lie in a later chapter when we consider the radical teaching of Jesus about death. But there is a second lie in Genesis 3:5, “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Did you notice Satan’s second lie? “You will be like God.” According to the prophet Isaiah, that was Satan’s downfall. He wanted to be like God. Isaiah gave this inspired testimony: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:12–14).

Satan’s temptation to the first family was “you will be like God.” He wanted to convince them they could assume God’s power and authority. So it makes sense that the one commandment he would particularly want us to forget is the one that talks about God our *Creator*. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that we *aren’t* God. We didn’t create ourselves. Neither are we the result of some cosmic accident. Hear again the appeal of our Creator: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God . . . For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8, 9, 10a, 11).

The Creator’s Gift

The Sabbath is a great gift from our Creator’s hand. Jesus didn’t do away with the Sabbath. He made it. He is Lord *of* the Sabbath. And He didn’t tell His followers to forget the Sabbath. There is not a single word in

Scripture which points to Jesus telling His followers to abandon the Sabbath. Rather, the radical teaching of Jesus reminds us the Sabbath is a time of blessing and healing. Followers of Jesus need the Sabbath! It is a precious gift from our Creator to remind us of who we are and who He is.

Do you need blessing and healing in your life today? There is no better time to experience blessing than on the Sabbath day. There is no better time to experience healing than on the Sabbath day, because the Sabbath is a time of blessing and healing.

That's why it's good for us to gather together for worship every Sabbath. We could worship God by ourselves. We could go to the mountains or the desert and spend time alone with God, remembering who we are and who He is, and there are certainly times when that is meaningful and appropriate. But it's also good for us to gather together for worship on the Sabbath day, because as we worship together, we can experience blessing and healing.

- We can experience blessing as we fellowship together.
- We can experience blessing as we bear one another's burdens.
- We can experience healing from our stresses and anxieties as we cast all our cares upon God, because He cares for us.
- We can experience healing from our sense of loneliness and alienation as we gather together in Jesus' name.
- We can experience healing for our emotions and our bodies as we come in faith and claim the precious promises of God.

Yes, the Sabbath is a time of blessing and healing. Our Creator told us to *remember* the Sabbath day because He loves us. He wants to bless us and to heal us. That's the radical teaching of Jesus.

Chapter 6

What Jesus taught about the judgment

When I was 12 years old, I had to stand before a judge, and I can still remember how terrified I was! My knees knocked together, sweat trickled down my back, and I had a terrible sense of impending doom. And I hadn't even done anything wrong! I was simply called into court because someone had stolen *my* bicycle from the parking lot of the local swimming pool.

But I remember how small I felt, with the judge sitting way up above me behind a huge wooden bench. To me, he looked like a massive eagle perched up in a tree, ready to swoop down on me. Close to his right hand was a wooden gavel which I imagined might be used to strike me on the head! I'm sure it wasn't there for that purpose, but it was scary nonetheless. All in all, it was a very traumatic experience for me.

Many of us grew up with ideas about the final judgment that are similar to my experience with the judge. We think about the judgment with anxiety and fear, and imagine God with a giant gavel just waiting to strike us down for our sins. Perhaps we have heard the messages of the three angels, which begin with these words, "Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment has come" (Revelation 14:7). We may have heard the solemn warning of the apostle Paul that "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). It all sounds very troubling, doesn't it?

In this chapter, we are going to examine the radical teaching of Jesus about the judgment. You may be pleasantly surprised to discover that what Jesus taught about the judgment is good news indeed.

A Day of Judgment

There is no doubt from the teaching of Jesus that there will be a day of judgment. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this

day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:21–24). Jesus also declared, “For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

That doesn’t sound very encouraging, does it? Who could ever claim to have never spoken idle words? If we are to give account for every moment of corrupt communication, then we’re all in big trouble! So where’s the good news?

Good News

We’ll begin our search for the good news Jesus taught about the judgment in the Gospel of John. Jesus said, “For the Father judges *no one*” (John 5:22). Who then is the judge in the final judgment? Jesus continues: “But has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).

The first piece of good news in the radical teaching of Jesus about the judgment is *He* is the judge. During my anxious encounter with that judge who was perched up behind the huge wooden desk, do you think I would have reacted differently if I had known him? Do you think I would have experienced different emotions if he had been my friend? Would it have made any difference if he had waved at me, winked at me with a sparkle in his eye, and smiled at me? Of course! I wouldn’t have been shaking in my shoes if I’d known the judge was my friend who cared for me, who loved me.

Jesus says, “There’s something very important that I want you to know about the judgment: I’m the judge. I’m in charge! I render the verdicts.” That’s good news! Our precious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who loves us and gave Himself for us—*He* is the judge. The Father has committed all judgment to the Son. We can let go of the picture of God with a giant gavel waiting to strike us down. If God was “out to get us,” then the Son of God could have stayed in Heaven. But instead, God loved the world so much He *sent* His Son to save us.

The second piece of good news in the radical teaching of Jesus about the judgment is embedded in a story Jesus told about the time when the Son of Man will perform that work of judgment. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right

hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:31–46).

We need to be careful not to read too much into this story. This parable isn’t teaching us how to be saved. We already know from chapter 3 that we are saved when we look to Jesus in faith as our Savior and Lord. However, we *can* learn from this story what happens in the final judgment.

More Good News

This story of the sheep and the goats teaches us that in the judgment Jesus will identify those who belong to Him. Jesus *knows* those who belong to Him. It’s true that those who belong to Jesus have certain identifying characteristics, but that’s not the *reason* they belong to Him. The good works of the sheep are simply the outward manifestation that they belong to Jesus.

Back to my experience with the judge: can you imagine how I would have felt if that judge had gotten me confused with the juvenile kleptomaniac who stole my bike? It would have been devastating for me. Fortunately, even that earthly judge knew who was who, and I can assure you that Jesus, the righteous heavenly Judge knows who is who as well. Jesus knows those who belong to Him.

Imagine we're standing in a room with 100 dogs in it. Now, imagine your dog is part of that pack. Would you be able to identify which dog belonged to you? Of course you would! But how? Because you know your dog. You know what your dog looks like, and your dog responds to your voice. If you called your dog by name, what would happen? Your dog would come running to you.

Do you get the point? Jesus knows those who belong to Him. I'm so glad Jesus is the One who oversees the final judgment, aren't you? I don't mean to offend you, but I'm glad you're not the one who identifies those who belong to Jesus. I'm sure you are equally glad I'm not the one who does the identifying. Why? Because people look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

If any of us saw the woman crumpled up at the feet of Jesus, we might have told her to go stand with the goats. But Jesus recognized this beaten, bruised, used and abused woman at His feet as a lamb of His flock. I'm so glad it's Jesus who identifies all those who are His!

If we saw the crooked tax collector who appeared to have more money than morals, we might have told Zacchaeus to go stand with the goats. But Jesus recognized this undersized wheeler-dealer up in the tree as a lamb of His flock. Aren't you glad it's Jesus who identifies all those who are His?

If we looked at the foul-mouthed fisherman who seemed to change his allegiance faster than a quick-change artist, we might have told Peter to go stand with the goats. But Jesus recognized this feisty and flawed firecracker as a lamb of His flock. Aren't you glad that it's Jesus who identifies all those who are His?

With Jesus doing the identifying, then our key issue is not *how much* we have done or even *what* we have done but *who* we belong to. If we belong to Jesus, our lives *will* bear the fruit of that connection with the Lord of Life.

The Best News

There's a third piece of good news in the radical teaching of Jesus about the judgment, and it's the best news of all. In fact, it sounds too good to be true. The best news about the judgment is found in John 5:24. Jesus is addressing not only His hearers on that Sabbath day in Jerusalem, but us as well: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life."

Now, that is good news! We can know with certainty that through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord we

have everlasting life. But Jesus isn't finished. "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

What is the "word" we need to hear in order to have everlasting life and in order to not come into judgment? Is it a particular word Jesus spoke, like love, or forgiveness, or peace? No. It's not a particular word. It's not even a particular combination of words. Jesus gives us the answer in John 6:47: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."

The Word we need to hear is not a "what," but a "*who*." Jesus is the "Word." We must hear Jesus and believe in the One who sent Him. John tells us "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1–2, 14). When we hear that Word, when we receive Jesus for who He is—the One who is full of grace and truth, sent from the Father—and believe in the One who sent Him, we have everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but have passed from death into life.

The King James Version (KJV) translates John 5:24 as follows, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into **condemnation**; but is passed from death unto life." But it's the same Greek word that's used in John 5:22, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all **judgment** unto the Son" (KJV). And it's the same Greek word used in John 5:26–27, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute **judgment** also, because he is the Son of man" (KJV).

The translators of the King James Version may have had difficulty with what Jesus was saying in John 5:24, but to be consistent, since the same Greek word is used in John 5:22, 24, and 27, it should be translated consistently in each place. I believe the New King James Version (NKJV) and many other translations are correct when they translate the words of Jesus in John 5:24 as follows: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into *judgment*, but has passed from death to life."

Death to Life

Note carefully now what I'm about to say. For the person who belongs to Jesus—the outcome of the judgment is already settled. Let me repeat. For the man or woman, boy or girl who belongs to Jesus, the outcome of the judgment is already settled—it's a “done deal.” You have *already* passed from death to life!

Do you remember the most difficult exam you ever took in school—the one where you did really poorly? I remember mine. It was the year following my encounter with the judge. We had moved from one part of London to another, and I was dropped into the physics class at my new school. Unfortunately for me, I hadn't taken physics the previous year so I was already a year behind when I started the class. Obviously, I didn't have a clue what was going on. In fact, it was like a different language to me. Have you ever sat in a class like that? At the end of the year when I took the final exam, I knew I was in trouble. It still makes me wince when I think about it. I got 37% on the final exam, which, needless to say, was not a passing grade. I crashed and burned! It was a total disaster!

Now, imagine you're back in school and you're scheduled to take the most difficult exam you have ever taken in your life. Then, imagine that a week before the test, your teacher comes to you and says, “I've got some bad news and some good news for you. There's going to be a very difficult test next week. In fact, it's so difficult only one person has ever passed it. That's the bad news.” How would that make you feel? Terrified? Anxious? Depressed? But then the teacher continues. “Now here's the good news,” she says. “I've already taken the test for you and you made an A!”

Wouldn't that be great news? That's what the final judgment will be like for those who belong to Jesus. The outcome of the judgment is already settled. We have already passed from death into life. We don't have to be anxious. We don't have to be afraid. Jesus, our precious Savior who loves us and gave Himself for us, is the judge. He will identify all those who belong to Him, and for all those who are His, the outcome of the judgment is already settled. That, my friend, is the best news of all!

Too Good to be True?

The radical teaching of Jesus about the judgment makes the judgment sound *easy* for those who belong to Jesus. How is it possible for a just and holy God to pass over all of our sins which are worthy of condemnation and death? The prophet Isaiah answered that question 700 years before the Son of God came to this earth. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah wrote, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our

iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5–6).

When you belong to Jesus, the outcome of the judgment is already settled. It is true the Day of Judgment is coming. It is true we will all have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. In fact, a careful study of prophecies in the books of Daniel¹¹ and Revelation¹² reveals that we are already living in the time of the judgment.¹³ But there’s no need to be anxious. No need to be afraid.

Jesus, Himself, is the Judge. No one could possibly be a more loving, more compassionate, more merciful judge than Jesus. Jesus loved us so much that He gave His own life to save us. Jesus ever lives to makes intercession for us. Jesus is soon to return in glory that where He is, there we may be also. This same Jesus is the Judge! The Father has committed all judgment to the Son, and Jesus knows those who belong to Him. Not one of those who belong to Jesus will be passed by. Jesus will identify all of those who belong to Him, and for those who belong to Jesus, the outcome of the judgment is already settled. It’s a done deal! We don’t have to wonder what the outcome will be. Jesus already told us, “He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24).

I love the promise of Jesus recorded in John 10:27–28: “My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”

When I was a young pastor in my late twenties, our family lived in Allentown, Pennsylvania. That’s where I met Violet Bauman. Violet was a devoted follower of Jesus. She was in her eighties when we became friends. I remember the day I went to the ICU at the hospital to visit her. Her life was slipping away, but she was not afraid. As I took her hand, Violet looked at me and said, “Pastor, the Lord has me in the palm of His hand and no one can snatch me out!” Violet knew she belonged to Jesus. She knew that Jesus is the Judge. She knew that Jesus will identify those who belong to Him. She knew that for those who belong to Jesus the outcome of the judgment is already settled.

So let the day of judgment come! Let Jesus, the Righteous Judge, take His seat. Let Him identify all those who belong to Him. We do not need to be anxious. We do not need to be afraid. Jesus knows all those who belong

to Him and who hear His voice. We have already passed from death into life. For those who belong to Jesus, the outcome of the judgment is already settled. That is good news indeed.

Chapter 7

What Jesus taught about death

Some years ago, my wife and I traveled to Tennessee for a family vacation. Bodil took her faithful

suitcase, which we have affectionately named “Buford.” It’s a large suitcase that can hold almost everything needed for a vacation, even if you’re planning to stay for several months! When we arrived in Tennessee and prepared to unpack, we encountered one small problem. We had forgotten the key for the suitcase. “Buford” was locked, and without a chisel or a chainsaw, we weren’t getting it open! All we needed was one tiny key, but that key was 2000 miles away!

I had another interesting experience with a key when our youngest son Jonathan was just a little boy. We had toured Independence Hall while on vacation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of our tour, we visited the gift shop. That’s where our youngest son Jonathan found a very special key—a replica of the original key to the lock on the massive front door of Independence Hall. He was so impressed with it that he bought it, even though it cost \$5. After his purchase, Jonathan started wondering whether or not it was indeed an exact replica of the original key. So, when no one was looking, Jonathan and his daddy sneaked over to the massive front door, quietly slipped the key into the old metal lock, cautiously turned it, and it unlocked! Jonathan was so surprised when it worked that he quickly locked it again! You can imagine how important Jonathan felt at that moment. He had “the key” to Independence Hall, the “birthplace of the United States!”

The Bible talks about some keys Jesus holds that are much more important than the key to “Buford” or even the key to Independence Hall. We are going to learn about those keys as we consider together the radical teaching of Jesus about death. We’ll start with a strange story Jesus told about two men—a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus.

Rich Man and Lazarus

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torment in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received

your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’ Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment. Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’” (Luke 16:19–31).

During the time of Jesus, the Jews recounted numerous fables and legends about imaginary situations. Many scholars suggest this story was a modification of one of those popular fables. But why did Jesus tell this strange story? Was His intention to teach doctrine, to tell the truth about death, or to make some other point using a popular fable of His day? Well, let’s look at the story more closely.

There are three main characters in the story: a rich man, a poor beggar named Lazarus, and Abraham. There is no evidence from the story that the rich man was an unrighteous or ungodly man. We are simply told he was rich and lived in luxury. There is also no evidence in the story that the beggar Lazarus was a godly man who placed his faith in God. Regardless of their character, both men died.

The beggar was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom, which was a popular concept among the Jews in Jesus’ time. The rich man ended up in Hades, a Greek word which simply means “the grave.” Hades is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Sheol.” Here we meet our first problem with taking this story as a literal description of what happens when we die. Nowhere else in the Old Testament or the New Testament is Sheol or Hades described as a place of torment, but this story describes Hades that way.

What’s even more troubling, if we read this fable as a literal description of what happens when we die, is the fact that the place of the saved—Abraham’s bosom, and the place of the lost—Hades, are so close to each other it’s possible to see what’s happening from one place to the other. It’s even possible to talk to people across the gulf. Does that sound like heaven to you? A place where you could hear the screams of tormented loved ones forever and ever?

Jonathan Edwards, a famous American preacher proclaimed that the agonies of the damned enhance the bliss of the redeemed. But I don’t agree. That makes no sense. I can’t imagine that anyone would be happy to see

loved ones in pain.

I believe it is a mistake to base any doctrine on this or any other fable. Would it really bring any relief if Lazarus dipped his finger in water, reached across the gulf, and cooled the tongue of this rich man who is in fiery torment? The whole story just doesn't make sense if it's a literal description of what happens when we die. So what *is* the point Jesus is trying to make? I'm convinced the answer is found in Luke 16:26: "And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us."

Once death comes, we have no more opportunity to change. Jesus had just told four other stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin, two lost sons, an unjust steward who lost his job, and then he tells this fable about a lost opportunity. The rich man missed the opportunity to make wise choices before his life came to an end, and once life comes to an end, the chance to change is lost. That's a lesson we can learn from the fable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Another Lazarus

Now if it's dangerous to build any doctrine about what happens when we die based on this fable, which obviously cannot be taken literally, where else in the gospel record do we find what Jesus taught about death? Let's look at another story, also about a man named Lazarus—but this story is true.

"Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick'" (John 11:1–3).

Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, were friends of Jesus. Whenever He was in the vicinity of Jerusalem, Jesus stayed at their home in Bethany. The disciples probably expected Jesus to drop whatever He was doing and head straight to Bethany in response to this urgent appeal. But He didn't. Instead, the Bible tells us, "When Jesus heard that, He said, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was" (John 11:4–6).

Jesus finally left for Bethany, and on the way He shared with His disciples His radical teaching about

death. “These things He said, and after that He said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up’” (John 11:11). Jesus chose His words very carefully. He knew Lazarus was not taking a nap, but Jesus specifically chose to use the word “sleep” to describe Lazarus’ condition in death.

Did the disciples understand what Jesus was saying? No. Notice their reaction, “Then His disciples said, ‘Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.’ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’” (John 11:12–14).

Jesus spoke of death as a sleep, and His followers understood that the redeemed would be raised from the sleep of death. Notice Martha’s response to Jesus when He arrived in Bethany: “Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’” (John 11:23–24).

Undoubtedly, Martha had heard the radical teaching of Jesus concerning death, recorded in John 5:28–29. There Jesus says, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.”

Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25). Even Martha realized something out of the ordinary was about to happen. “Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’ Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying.’ And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me’” (John 11:38–43).

Notice the words of Jesus now. “Lazarus, come forth!” Jesus didn’t use the language of the fable in Luke 16. He didn’t say, “Lazarus, come down from Abraham’s bosom,” even though that was a common Jewish belief regarding what happens to those who die. Jesus didn’t say, “Lazarus, come up from the place of torment in Hades.” What did Jesus say? “Lazarus, come forth.” The Word of God tells us in John 11:44, “He who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and

let him go.”

The Silence of Lazarus

Have you noticed that after his special resurrection from the sleep of death Lazarus doesn't say anything about his experience during the previous four days? He doesn't say, "O, let me tell you what it was like in Abraham's bosom!" He doesn't say, "O, thank you for delivering me from the torment of Hades." Why? Because he wasn't up somewhere or down somewhere. He was in that rock tomb. That's why Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" Jesus was simply waking Lazarus up from the sleep of death.

So then, if Lazarus was in the sleep of death, how did he hear Jesus call him? The answer is both simple and profound. Lazarus heard Jesus call him in the same way that all who are in the graves will hear the voice of Jesus at the resurrection on the last day. The word of Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, is so powerful, that in the milliseconds it took for the sound to leave His mouth and travel to the place where Lazarus was lying, a miracle of re-creation occurred.

Lazarus had been dead for *four* days. Martha told Jesus her brother's body was already stinking. His body was decomposing. But the word of Jesus was so powerful, so full of life, that as soon as He spoke the resurrection was occurring. By the time the words reached Lazarus, his body had already been restored. Lazarus was awakened from the sleep of death, heard the words of His Savior, and just as he had obeyed Jesus during his life, so now he continued to obey Jesus, and came forth from the tomb.

Paul's Teaching on Death

The apostle Paul gave this testimony about the sleep of death after he had received a special revelation from the risen Christ: "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you *by the word of the Lord*, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15, emphasis added). Paul received a special revelation concerning the radical teaching of Jesus about death "by the word of the Lord." Paul didn't want Christians to be ignorant about those who are asleep and he tells those of us

who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord that we “will by no means precede those who are asleep.”

What sleep is Paul talking about here? The sleep of death. Paul continues, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Paul was restating the radical teaching of Jesus about death. The dead in Christ are asleep, but they will not sleep forever. They will hear the Savior’s voice when He calls and will awake from the sleep of death in obedience to the Master.

Jesus Holds the Keys

Jesus shared another precious truth as part of His radical teaching about death. “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of death” (Revelation 1:17–18). We don’t need to be afraid of the sleep of death because Jesus has the keys! When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and was laid in the garden tomb, Satan thought he had finally won. Jesus was dead. But Satan forgot one very important point. Jesus has the keys of death and death’s domain, and early Sunday morning Jesus responded to His Father’s call. He unlocked death’s door and came forward as more than a Conqueror. Jesus not only conquered death and death’s domain for Himself—He conquered them for all who believe in Him.

You do not need to fear death anymore. You do not need to fear the grave anymore. You believe in Jesus. You have received Jesus, and Jesus has the keys. Even if you fall asleep in death before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ returns in glory, you won’t stay sleeping forever. You won’t be locked up in the tomb forever. Jesus has the keys.

That’s why Jesus says, “Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:26). Some of His people may take a rest in the sleep of death but that’s not the end of the story. Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25).

Do you believe in Jesus, the Son of God? Have you accepted Him as your personal Savior and Lord? Then for you death has lost its sting, and the grave has lost its victory. For you, death is but a sleep and your Savior holds the keys of Hades—the grave, and of death.

What Happens to The Unrepentant?

What about those who don't accept Jesus as their personal Savior? What happens to them when they die, according to the radical teachings of Jesus? Although it isn't pleasant, I have to be honest with you and tell you what Jesus taught: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched . . . And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched . . . And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. . ." (Mark 9:42, 43, 45, 47).

When are unrepentant sinners cast into that unquenchable fire? When they die? No, not according to Jesus. Jesus taught that death is a sleep until the resurrection at the last day, and He taught that there are *two* resurrections. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28–29).

So what happens to those who have done evil, after they have been raised in the resurrection of condemnation? Jesus doesn't tell us in this teaching passage. However, we find the answer in the revelation of Jesus Christ to His servant John. "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Revelation 20:13–15).

What else can we learn about this lake of fire? We find another reference in Revelation 21:7–8, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

We don't know for sure how long the fire burns, but the result is *not* eternal torture. The redeemed will not have to listen to the screams of the wicked forever and ever. We won't look across an abyss and see people being

tormented in flames like the fable Jesus told in Luke 16. The result of being cast into the lake of fire is *death*—the second death. That’s what Jesus came to save us from. Listen to the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16–17).

Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life. Whoever does not perishes. I don’t want to be one of those cast into the lake of fire. Do you? Jesus doesn’t want you to have a part with those who are cast into the lake of fire either. Jesus doesn’t want you to perish. He wants you to be saved. Jesus wants to write your name in the Book of Life. That happens when you accept Jesus as your Savior, and then you don’t need to fear the sleep of death. If you fall asleep in death before the glorious return of Jesus, you will rise first, in the resurrection of the righteous!

Reunion

I have come to know and respect a man of God named Dave Allen. Dave and his wife Ginny have devoted their lives to sharing the good news about Jesus with others. Seven years ago, their son, Bob, was killed in a tragic accident after he was thrown from his snow-mobile and hit a tree, chest first. Bob died at the scene, leaving a grieving wife, two precious little girls, ages 5½ and 2½, grieving parents, and many grieving loved ones and friends. The pain of that loss seemed almost unbearable. Several days later, Dave was driving over to visit his newly widowed daughter-in-law when a wave of sorrow enveloped him. He began to weep. As tears streamed down his face, he cried out, “O God, I loved my son and he died on a tree!” That instant, God spoke to Dave’s heart as powerfully as if He were sitting by his side in the car: “I loved *My* Son too, and *He* died on a tree so *your* son could live for eternity.”

That, my friends, is the good news, the Gospel. It’s not that life will always be easy. I can’t promise you when you choose to follow Jesus that nothing difficult will happen. But I can tell you Jesus has the keys to death and the grave, and on that day when the dead in Christ rise first, there will be people looking for Bob. When you believe in Jesus, the sleep of death has lost its sting. Bob is not looking down from heaven, watching his family struggle without him. That would be a “living hell.” No, Bob is sleeping, in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection when Jesus returns in glory! That day will be a great reunion both for Bob’s family, and for all those

who belong to Christ and have lost loved ones.

Fear not, my friend. When you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you don't need to fear death, for yourself, or for those you love—because, praise God, Jesus holds the keys. “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Revelation 1:17–18). Accept Jesus today as your personal Savior and death has lost its sting. You will live—*forever*.

Chapter 8

What Jesus taught about His church

“I don't need the church. All I need is Jesus!” Have you heard anybody say that? The statement is both right *and* wrong. It's true—Jesus *is* all we need, but those who love Jesus and accept Him as their Savior and Lord will not disregard what Jesus taught about His church.

The first recorded teaching by Jesus regarding His church is found in the book of Matthew, chapter 16. “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it’” (Matthew 16:13–18).

In this brief conversation with Peter and the other disciples, Jesus shared four important truths about His Church.

Whose Church?

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build *My church*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18, emphasis added). The first important truth Jesus shares with His disciples and with us is He has a church, and He calls it “*My church*.”

The word “church” in the Greek language is *ekklesia*, which means “called out.” *Ekklesia* is used in classical Greek for a political assembly, but in the New Testament it is given special meaning: the *ekklesia* of God, the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ. Those who are gathered together in the church that Jesus calls “*My church*” are the “called out” ones. What are we called out from? “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Called Out

When Kevin walked into my office about 18 months ago, he was living in darkness—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say he was “dying” in darkness. Kevin had been a functional cocaine addict for 26 years but his junky world was crashing down on his head. He had lost his wife, his house was going into foreclosure and the creditors were about to repossess his SUV. He was in really bad shape. About the only thing Kevin had left was his life, and the cocaine was killing him. Kevin knew Jesus, or at least he had known about Jesus when he was a little boy but Kevin had wandered far away, and he was living in darkness.

I looked straight in Kevin’s bloodshot eyes and said, “Kevin, you need a miracle! Will you come to our prayer service this evening and ask the people of God to pray for you?” Kevin agreed to come. He had nowhere else to turn. That night, he gave his testimony at the House of Prayer—not a testimony of victory, but a testimony of failure. Kevin cried out to God for help. I asked if there might be any men and women of God who wanted to pray for Kevin. I wish you could have seen what happened next. People came running up to the front of the church, like a tsunami of blessing, surrounded Kevin in prayer and cried out to Jesus on his behalf.

I know what skeptics say. “How can talking to someone you can’t see transform a broken life and deliver someone from the darkness of a destructive addiction?” I don’t know exactly how it works, but I can testify that there is power when we pray in Jesus’ name. Kevin was delivered that night! He was set free. Oh yes, he’s faced a

few bumps in the road in his walk with Jesus, His Savior. One Wednesday evening, an old party friend gave Kevin some marijuana, but another friend was at the House of Prayer and when he realized Kevin wasn't there, he felt deeply impressed to pray for him. Kevin was driving his van when he came under deep conviction. He stopped his vehicle and wrestled with God for about fifteen minutes. Finally, he crumpled the drug into a powder, started driving, and dumped it out the window. Kevin responded to the call of God to come out of darkness. He decided to follow Jesus, no turning back. Today Kevin helps lead a Christian 12-step program at his local church, and he rejoices that Jesus has called him out of darkness and into His marvelous light!

Darkness isn't all that Jesus calls His people out of. In the book of Revelation, we are told of a voice from heaven calling to people who are in Babylon saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive her plagues" (Revelation 18:4). Jesus calls His people out of the spiritual confusion of Babylon and into the truth.

My Church

Do you know why Jesus identifies His church as *My* church? Because Jesus knew that others would come and try to set up their own churches. Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). What do these false prophets, these ferocious wolves, seek to do? The apostle Paul gives us the answer, "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29-30).

These "savage wolves" seek to draw disciples after themselves. They try to call people out to themselves, to establish their own church. They teach as doctrines the commandments of men. So we need to be careful, because not every place that calls itself "church" would qualify as the one that Jesus calls "My church."

Still the Carpenter

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock *I will build My church*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18, emphasis added). A second important truth in the radical teaching of Jesus about the church is that *He* is the one who builds His church.

Some people think it's *their* job to build the church. It's not. We are called to join Jesus in what He is doing. We are called to go into all the world and preach the good news about Jesus, baptizing people in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the things that Jesus taught, but we do not build the church. Jesus, forever the carpenter, builds His church! Notice the testimony of Dr. Luke, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b).

Jesus builds His church. How does He build it? That's the topic of my book *The Radical Prayer*.¹⁴ God has used the message of that book to impact thousands of lives around the world. It's about Jesus calling us to join Him as He builds His church. He invites us to give Him permission to "throw us out" into His harvest.

After the apostles prayed the radical prayer, Peter made this bold declaration: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). His hearers came under deep conviction and cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" Acts 2:38–39). With many other words Peter testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40). As a result of that powerful testimony about Jesus, about three thousand people were baptized and added to the church.

Jesus was building His church on the day of Pentecost and Jesus continues to build His church today! You can experience radical joy when you join Him in His work! Wherever hearts are open to Him, all over the world, the Lord is adding to the church daily those who are being saved. Jesus builds His church, and we have the privilege and joy of joining with Him wherever He needs us.

This Rock

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and *on this rock* I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). This comment by Jesus has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some claim Jesus was saying to Peter, "I'm going to build my church upon you!" A study of church history, though, reveals that this interpretation emerged in the 5th century AD, proposed by a bishop in Rome who claimed Peter was the first bishop of Rome, and authority was passed down from bishop to bishop by a process known as

apostolic succession. It ought to concern us that this interpretation was embraced by someone who was trying to consolidate his power and authority.

However, a more careful look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18 reveals something very interesting: “You are Peter (**Petros**), and on this rock (**petra**) I will build my church.” If Jesus intended to build His church on Peter, He could have said, “You are Peter and on *you* I will build my church.” But Jesus uses two different words here: **Petros**—Peter’s name, and **petra**—Rock. So what is this Rock, this *petra*, on which Jesus will build His church, if it’s not Peter?

There are two possible answers to this question. First, this *petra*, this rock, upon which Jesus builds His church could be the confession of Peter recorded just a few verses earlier, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus could be saying, “I’ll build my church on that rock solid confession—“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” This is certainly a plausible explanation, but I prefer a second possible answer.

When Jesus says, “Upon this Rock, this *petra*, I will build My church, Jesus could have been referring to Himself. He uses this same word, *petra*, in His sermon on the mount: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the *rock (petra)*” (Matthew 7:24, emphasis added).

The rock isn’t Peter or any of those who claim to be his “successor.” The rock is Jesus. The Psalmist declared, “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation” (Psalm 95:1). The apostle Paul testified, “All [the Israelites in the wilderness] ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:3–4).

In fact, Peter, himself, clearly identifies Jesus as the Rock, the *petra*, on which the church is built. “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,’ and ‘a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed”

(1 Peter 2:4–8).

Jesus is the Rock upon whom His church is built. There are people who will reject Jesus. They won't want to listen to Him, and they will stumble. But to those who believe in Jesus, who understand that Jesus is the Rock, He is the "chief cornerstone" on whom His church is built.

Binding and Loosing

What about the keys Jesus gave to Peter? What does that mean? "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Some claim this means they have the keys to the doors of heaven, and can lock and unlock those doors. Perhaps you have seen pictures of a church leader holding the keys.

It does sound like a lot of authority is given to Peter, doesn't it? But wait. In the center margin of my Bible it gives the *literal* translation of that text. It sounds a little awkward, but this is what the word of God actually says. "Whatever you bind on earth ***will have been bound*** in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth ***will have been loosed*** in heaven."

No person, no church, and no church leader has the authority to tell heaven what to do. The role of a true and faithful church leader is merely to confirm what God has *already* said. When someone comes to me, burdened down by guilt and shame, confesses sin and asks for forgiveness in Jesus' name, I can boldly tell that person, "Your sins are forgiven." And, praise God, that person *is* forgiven—not because I said so, but because God's Word says so. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

We simply confirm what God's Word has already declared to be true. So when a church leader claims to have authority to change the times and the laws, but Jesus says "If you love me, keep my commandments," we have to decide who has authority in the church. Who is the church built on? Is it a human religious leader, or is it Jesus, the Son of God? The answer is clearly found in the bold declaration of Jesus, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus declared, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). Jesus is the One who has authority in His church. Not a church leader. Not a church council. Only Jesus.

Prevailing

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and *the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16:18, emphasis added). The fourth important truth in the radical teaching of Jesus about the church is that His church will be victorious.

Jesus gave this promise to us because He knew His enemy. He knew the gates of hell would *try* to prevail. The gates of hell would try to destroy the church Jesus calls My church, the church Jesus is building, the church built upon Jesus, the Rock. Jesus gave us this promise, and gave us the evidence in His own life to prove victory will be given to all who are His.

- Satan tried to destroy Jesus shortly after His birth. He failed.
- Satan tried to deceive, tempt, and bully Jesus in the wilderness. He failed.
- Satan tried to crush Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He failed.
- Satan tried to overwhelm Jesus on the cross. He failed.
- Satan tried to keep Jesus in the tomb. He failed there, too.

So I believe the words of Jesus when He says, “The gates of hell will not prevail against My church.”

In the book of Revelation, Jesus revealed to the apostle John some important details about the great controversy between good and evil. “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down’” (Revelation 12:7–10).

Satan attacks the church Jesus is building. “For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Revelation 12:12). That sounds serious, but the apostle John tells us under inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11). They, that is, the saints—those who are called out, those who keep the commandments of God and are faithful to Jesus, those who are part of the church that Jesus is building—overcome that old serpent called the devil or Satan.

How? By the blood of the Lamb. What does that mean?

In Revelation 7:14, the redeemed are described with these words: “These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Satan says, “You’re a sinner and deserve to die,” but the redeemed believe God’s Word which tells us “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Satan says, “There’s no hope for you,” but the redeemed believe God’s Word which tells us Jesus came to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). When Satan comes to accuse you, you can overcome Him by the blood of the Lamb. You can say, “Get behind me, Satan. I belong to Jesus. My sins have been forgiven. I’ve been washed clean, and greater is the One who is in me than the one who is in the world.”

The redeemed are those who count their relationship with Jesus worth more even than their own lives. John says of them, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11). The redeemed are not even afraid of death because they know Jesus holds the keys of Hades and Death, and they refuse to be unfaithful to Jesus. The redeemed love Jesus so much that they are faithful to Him no matter what the cost. They love Him so much they keep His commandments. They love Him because they recognize He loved them first, and they hold fast to the promise of ultimate victory. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church that Jesus builds!

Jesus is building His church even today—calling people out of darkness and out of spiritual confusion. He invites you to be part of His church. Make that decision right now. Respond to His invitation.¹⁵ Then give Him permission “to throw you out” into His harvest.¹⁶ There are people you know and love who need to respond to the radical claims of Jesus and need to hear the radical teachings of Jesus while there is still time.¹⁷ Soon Jesus will return in glory. When that glorious day arrives, may you welcome Him with joy and may many rejoice with you!

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

² [Http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism/thebible.html](http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism/thebible.html)

³ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 88.

⁴ This remarkable miracle is recorded in all four Gospels: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14.

⁵ Matthew 12:40.

⁶ “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

⁷ “The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

⁸ The Greek noun **logos** is used in Hebrews 4:12 where it says “The **Word** of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”

⁹ Glenda is a pseudonym.

¹⁰ Romans 15:4.

¹¹ Jesus recognized Daniel as a true prophet of God.

¹² The apostle John recorded “the Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1). A blessing is promised to those who read and hear the words of this prophecy.

¹³ For a more detailed study of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation regarding the final judgment, go to www.TheRadicalTeachingsOfJesus.com.

¹⁴ Visit *The Radical Prayer* website at www.TheRadicalPrayer.com and learn more about a prayer that thousands of Christians are praying around the world!

¹⁵ If you have responded to the invitation of Jesus and accepted Him as your personal Savior, I would love to hear from you. Go to www.TheRadicalTeachingsOfJesus.com, click on Contact Us, and send us your testimony.

¹⁶ See *The Radical Prayer*, Chapter 3.

¹⁷ For resources that can help you to share the radical teachings of Jesus with others, go to www.TheRadicalTeachingsOfJesus.com.