

## The Bible in One Year Week 16: The Gospels (John Pt. 1)

(Mark 1:1-3; Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; John 1:1-18)

### • Jesus is Everything

- Jesus. *Jesus! Jesus is everything.* That's what the early disciples had come to see—they had seen Jesus, he had changed their lives, and they'd come to believe that he was *everything*. He was worth following anywhere, worth risking everything, worth losing everything, because in him they found all that really mattered. And they put together these accounts of his life, these God-breathed words that convey to us the life of Christ, so that we too can say, "Jesus is everything." Remember John? "*These are written so that you may believe...and have life in his name.*"
  - Did you know: "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*—*Joshua*. And Joshua means, *salvation—the Lord saves*. Christ, *Christos*, is the Greek word for *Messiah*, which means, *anointed one*. It's not a surname, it's a title for the promised King. He's *the Saving King*.
- He's the One. The one who is from the beginning. The one through whom all things were made. The one who holds all things together. The one whom everything points to—this whole Story of Scripture points to him. All history is leading to him—to the Day of his return. Everything hinges on him. He's the Lord above all. The Lamb who was slain. The Great High Priest. The Savior, the Healer, the Teacher, the Suffering Servant. The Resurrected One who died and now lives forever. The Second Adam, the Firstborn over all creation. The Son of God. And the amazing thing is, by grace and faith, *he can be ours: our Lord, our Savior, our Shepherd, our Friend.*  
*Jesus.*
  - You can explore the depths of Jesus all your life and never really reach the bottom of *all that he is* and *all that he means* and *all that he's done*. Once you really see him, *you're never the same*. Paul summed it up in Philippians simply, "*To live is Christ, to die is gain.*" People all over the world from the early days to the present have *literally given up their lives* for the Name of Jesus. And people all over the world from the early days to the present have had divided opinions about this man from 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine who is called the Son of God: he's the great Stumbling Block of history which everyone, sooner or later, has to reckon with. Who is Jesus? Is he who he says he is, who Scripture claims he is, *or not?*

### • Quality Sources

- This week at "The Absolute Basics" group, we explored that question, "Who is Jesus?" And I want to ask you today, how would you answer that question in just one sentence?
- Where to begin, right? Well, a great place to start—really the only place to start—is *the Gospels* of the New Testament: *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*. Because—no matter what random conspiracy theories you find online, or what strawman arguments you hear at the Intro to Religion class at College, or what the latest pseudo-history mystery novel drums up for entertainment—the New Testament Gospels still are and always have been the most accurate, reliable sources of information we have about Jesus of Nazareth. End of story.
  - If you want to know about Jesus, who he was, what he did, what his earliest followers believed about him, read the New Testament. All four Gospels are based on *eye-witness testimony*, carried on from the first days of Jesus' ministry and in a short time put into writing for future generations. What did Luke say at the beginning of his Gospel that we read today? "*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you...*"
- So, today, for the first time in our teaching series through the Bible in One Year, we're finally entering the New Testament! We're going to spend 7 weeks in John, then Acts and Romans, before going back to the Old Testament prophets for a little while—we have to switch things up!

### • Not One, but Four

- Here's what's really cool: in the New Testament, we get not just one account of Jesus, *we get four!* That might seem strange at first, but when you think of all Jesus did, all the people he

impacted, and all that his life means, it's no surprise we get more than one book. They tell the same basic story and hold together the same core truths, but they emphasize different aspects of Jesus that, taken together, give us a fuller picture of Christ. It's awesome!

- Think about how movies can tell stories in different ways: some follow a pretty linear chronological path, maybe they start with a backstory then drop you into the present; some jump around a lot and keep you guessing, maybe tell a couple stories at once until everything comes together by the end; some will even start at the end to give you this mystery cliff-hanger, then go all the way back to the beginning to work you up to the conclusion.
- Or think about a few different directors taking the same footage and editing a movie together their own way—what would happen? They might put the story in a little different order, they might choose different shots and angles, they might slow it down and speed it up in different places. One might keep a scene, another might delete it. They'd be telling the same story, but in unique ways, to give a different experience and highlight different things for their audience.
- That's kind of what's happening with the four Gospels: they all have their unique, wonderful flavors. Some stories are repeated in all four with slightly different angles, some only show up in one. Sometimes they skip around or sandwich things together, sometimes they give you a little hint or foreshadowing, but leave you hanging until the end. It's powerful, but it can be confusing.
- Here's one basic distinction between the Gospels that I want you to be aware of going into the Gospel of John. The first three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are known as *the Synoptic Gospels*, ("synoptic" means "seeing all together") because they use a lot of the same core content—there's a lot of overlap and they're clearly drawing from some of the same sources. On the other hand, John's Gospel has a distinct flavor to it and a good bit of unique material that's found only in his account. The way they unfold the story and identity of Jesus is one of the biggest differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel—and this is really neat:
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke sort of take you on the journey with the disciples when it comes to discovering the fullness of Christ's identity: the disciples didn't understand it all at once. They didn't grasp right away that he was the Messiah, or what kind of Messiah he would be, or the mind-blowing reality that he was *God* in the flesh. It took time, and the stories bring us along that journey, so we can discover it with them. John's Gospel, on the other hand, lays it all out from the first chapter: "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God..." and, "The Word became flesh..." The Synoptic Gospels are like a dimmer switch, just gradually fading in the light, but John just goes over and throws open the windows to let the light in. It's cool to know and keep in mind.
- Do yourself a favor and checkout the YouTube video from the Bible Project on the Gospels: [https://youtu.be/xrzq\\_X1NNaA](https://youtu.be/xrzq_X1NNaA) ("The Gospel"). Here's what the Bible Project says about each Gospel: "**Matthew** presents Jesus as a greater Moses, and so he's grouped Jesus' teachings into five large blocks, just like the five books of the Torah. **Mark** presents Jesus as a new start for humanity, bringing the mystery of God's New Creation crashing into the present. **Luke** highlights how Jesus is God's royal servant from the book of Isaiah, who brings God's light to the nations. **John** focuses on Jesus' claim to be Yahweh, the God of Israel become human, to do for us what we could never do for ourselves," (The Bible Project). There's so much more, but here's the bottom line: One Saving King, Jesus; four different books, four different emphases. One story.
- **In The Beginning**
  - So, John's Gospel takes us all the way back to Genesis, to the very beginning, and he just bursts into the scene with this massive, panoramic view of Jesus: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*" And he goes on to say, "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*"—literally, he *tabernacled* among us, like the presence of God at the Tent of Meeting—"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." It's great how he builds the anticipation, waiting until the very end to finally say the

Name: *“Out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* And then this clincher: *“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”* And that’s how John starts his book about Jesus.

- What’s it mean? And why does it matter? “The Word” here in Greek is *Logos*, and it doesn’t just mean a simple word, as an article of speech. *Logos* has to do with the expression of a thought. *Logos* is the embodiment of an idea from someone’s mind, into speech. So, when I speak a word out loud, it’s *distinct* from me as a word uttered into space, but it’s also a part of me as an expression of my inner-mind. That’s deep. John is saying that Jesus is the embodiment of the divine Word of God that created *all things*. Wow! That’s going to take some time to digest.
  - Jesus is the Word made flesh, the life and light of God. Jesus is fully God and fully human, not one or the other—he’s fully “both/and.” Through him we know God is Triune, three distinct persons, one God; Father, Son, Holy Spirit in eternal, loving relationship.
- And here’s why it matters: the fact that Jesus is the Word made flesh, God among us, means *everything*. It means that, after millennia of humans searching for God, groping, reaching out into the darkness to catch a glimpse what is infinitely beyond us, struggling and striving up that mountain that we could never ascend, trying to find God—God all along had a plan to come and find us. He’s come closer to us than we could have imagined. And his motivation is *Agape*, unconditional, self-giving Love. It’s better than our wildest dreams. It’s the *Good News* of Jesus!
  - We’re all searching for purpose, searching for meaning, searching for connection searching for something to make life work, searching for our own salvation, searching for what only God can give. We’re hungry, we’re thirsty, we’re empty. What if all along it’s been offered right here for us? *Everything we need*. The Word made flesh. Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
  - What if God came down from the mountain to show us the way? What if he himself became the bridge between heaven and earth? *“No one has seen God but Jesus Christ, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”* When you look at Jesus, you’re seeing God, in human skin. This definitively answers *what God is like* and *what God’s intentions are for us*. We don’t have to go searching anymore. He’s come all this way *for us*.
  - This changes everything, this means everything. And it’s either true, or it’s the greatest lie of all history. Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, a legend—or he’s Lord. Take a look at the evidence, study the source documents: Does he act like a liar? Does he seem like a lunatic—like those phony, self-centered cult leaders who make people drink the purple cool aid? Do his disciples seem like the type of people who would be cunning enough to pull off such a hoax? Was there enough time between the life of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels to even establish such a far-fetched myth? The honest answer, in my mind: *no to all of the above*.
  - Then he’s Lord. And we have to decide what we’ll do with that.
- The opening of John also says, *“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”*
  - I want to be a child of God, but I mess it up a lot. I’m a massive work in progress. Sometimes my aspirations are stronger than my actual values, sometimes my talk is stronger than my walk. Sometimes when the rubber meets the road, I feel like I’d rather run away. But I’ve seen his gaze, I’ve heard his voice, “Follow me,” and I want to be on this journey with Jesus for life. I want the fullness of Christ, the fullness of his grace and truth, the glory of God. Will you come with me? It starts with a few steps at a time, today, and tomorrow, and the next day. Let’s discover again all that he is, as we read the Gospels. *Jesus is everything*.