

***The Gospel According to Jesus***  
***What is authentic faith?***

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# CONTENTS

**PREFACE:** 1<sup>st</sup> , 2<sup>nd</sup> , 3<sup>rd</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **PART ONE: Today's Gospel: Good News or Bad?**

1. What Does Jesus Mean When He Says: "Follow Me"?
2. Look at the Issues

### **PART TWO: Jesus Heralds His Gospel**

3. He Calls for a New Birth
4. He Demands True Worship
5. He Receives Sinners but Refuses the Righteous
6. He Opens Blind Eyes
7. He Challenges an Eager Seeker
8. He Seeks and Saves the Lost
9. He Condemns a Hardened Heart
10. He Offers a Yoke of Rest

### **PART THREE: Jesus Illustrates His Gospel**

11. The Soils
12. The Wheat and Weeds
13. The Treasure of the Kingdom
14. The First and Last
15. The Lost and Found
16. The Vine and the Branches

### **PART FOUR: Jesus Explains His Gospel**

17. The Call to Repentance
18. The Nature of True Faith
19. The Promise of Justification
20. The Way of Salvation
21. The Certainty of Judgment
22. The Cost of Discipleship
23. The Lordship of Christ

### **PART FIVE: Jesus Fulfills His Gospel**

24. *Tetelestai!* The Triumph Is Complete

## Preface to the Anniversary Edition

**Modern and postmodern evangelism has aimed at making the gospel sound as easy and appealing as possible. Jesus' evangelistic approach was exactly the opposite.** He responded to people's queries about how to gain eternal life by **making salvation sound nearly impossible**, see Mark 10:17-27.

For fallen sinners who are trying to save themselves, it is impossible.

As the pressure mounts today to contextualize biblical truth by taming the gospel and toning it down for a self-centered culture, it is just a new post-modernized version of the no Lordship gospel. Only this time there is no attempt to defend it from Scripture.

A whole new category, called "***carnal Christians***" was invented to explain how someone could be converted to Christ and given eternal life, but left totally unchanged in heart and lifestyle.

The Gospel according to Jesus made one simple point: Jesus proclaimed no such message!

**The faith Jesus called sinners to was a repentant, submissive surrender to the truth, including the truth of his Lordship.**

## Preface to the 2nd Edition

In Mark 8:34 Jesus summoned the multitudes with his disciples, and said to them, "*if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*"

What does Jesus mean when he says, "Follow Me?" **Answer: self-denial, daily death, a willingness to die to self and serve him.** See John 12:24-26 and read Luke 14:25-33.

Some, however, responded eagerly to Christ while neglecting to count the cost. They received no encouragement from Jesus. Read Luke 9:57-63.

Difficult demands? Impossible in human terms! Yet those are Jesus' very words, untempered by any explanation or soothing rationalization.

Our Lord was sounding a note that is missing from much that passes for evangelism today. **His command to "Follow Me!" was a call to surrender to his Lordship.**

We preach Christ Jesus as Lord, the apostle Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 4:5. "**Jesus is Lord,**" was the core of the early church's confession of faith, the primary nucleus of truth affirmed by every true Christian, as noted in 1st Corinthians 12:3. "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved,*" such are the words of Acts 16:31. Similarly, Romans 10:9 promises that "*if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*"

## **The Lordship of Christ is clearly at the heart of true saving faith!**

Nevertheless, many influential voices in contemporary evangelism are preaching that we should not tell unbelievers they must yield to Christ as Lord. They make the preposterous allegation that calling the unsaved to surrender to Christ is tantamount to preaching salvation by works.

This anniversary edition includes a new chapter on justification.. I regard this doctrine as the centerpiece of the gospel.

### **Preface to the 1st edition.**

2 Corinthians 4:5 " *We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord.*"

The very essence of God's saving work is the transformation of the will, resulting in a love for God. Salvation thus establishes the "root" that will surely produce the fruit.

Some may think I question the genuineness of anyone who is converted to Christ without a full understanding of his Lordship. That is not the case. **No one fully understands all the implications of the Lordship of Christ.** I am, however, equally certain that no one can be saved who is either unwilling to obey Christ, or is consciously, callously rebellious against his Lordship.

The message of salvation includes a call to surrender to Jesus as Lord. Those who would come to Christ for salvation must be willing to acquiesce to his sovereign authority.

## **Those who reject his right to rule cannot expect to lay claim to him as Savior.**

The average person in the pew is confused, having heard two conflicting messages from the same evangelical camps. It is to those men and women in the pew that I write, for **the gospel must be clearly understood.**

I certainly do not advocate a "works salvation." **In no way would I minimize grace or seek to encourage needless doubts in the minds of those who are genuinely saved. At the same time, it must be understood, there is no more important issue, then the question of what gospel we ought to believe and proclaim.**

### **The gospel IS the issue.**

I am convinced that our lack of clarity on the most basic matter of all, the gospel, is the greatest detriment to the work of the church in our day.

## Introduction

### What is the gospel?

**I want to know what God's Word teaches so that I can proclaim it with accuracy and clarity.**  
I want the doctrine I teach to be purely biblical.

### **All that really matters is what God's word says!**

Most of modern evangelism, both in the form of witnessing and preaching, falls far short of presenting the biblical evangel in a balanced and biblical way.

### **The gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope to sinners.**

It promises that they can have eternal life, yet continue to live in rebellion against God. It encourages people to claim Jesus as Savior, yet wait till later to obey him as Lord. **Such false gospels offer false security.**

### **By separating faith from faithfulness, it teaches intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth.**

Thus, the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious "easy-believism" that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message Jesus proclaimed.

This new gospel has spawned a generation of professing Christians whose behavior is in trouble... based on the rebellion of the unregenerate. **Theirs is a damning false assurance.**

### **The Church's witness to the world has been sacrificed on the altar of cheap grace!**

The promise of eternal life without surrender to divine authority feeds the wretchedness of the unregenerate heart. And **the converts to this new gospel believe their behavior has no relationship to their spiritual status.**

The church of our generation will be remembered chiefly for a series of hideous scandals of depravity in the lives of some highly visible evangelists & pastors. Most troubling of all is the painful reality that most Christians continue to view these people as insiders, not as wolves and false shepherds who have crept in among the flock (cf. Matthew 7:15). Why should we assume that people who live in an unbroken pattern of deceit are truly born again?

Sadly, professing Christians of this age hear from the beginning that obedience is optional. It follows logically, then, that someone's one time profession of faith is more valid than the evidence of that person's ongoing lifestyle in determining whether to embrace him or her as a true believer.

The character of the visible church reveals the detestable consequence of this theology.

What is needed is a re-examination of the gospel. **We must go back to the gospel that was proclaimed by Jesus.**

Most people will be surprised to find how radically different the message of Christ is from what you might have learned in a personal evangelism seminar.

My purpose in writing this book is to deal with the biblical accounts of Jesus' major evangelistic encounters and his teaching on the way of salvation. We will explore a series of questions: who is Jesus? How is he to be identified in the gospel proclamation and received by sinners? What is saving faith? What occurs in the saving act?

**The message we proclaim has eternal consequences. We dare not preach a message that sows confusion or false hope.**

You would do well to read the Galatians 1:6–9. This passage is a curse on anyone who distorts the gospel of Christ!

### Galatians 1:6-9:

is a sobering warning of eternal damnation to those who would tamper with the message of salvation and corrupt it to make a different Gospel. The difference between the gospel of Christ and any other gospel is the difference between the blessed and cursed. It is the difference between the sheep and the goats, the saved and the lost, the true church and the cult's, the truth versus a lie!

I for one want to understand the fullness of the gospel Jesus taught, so that I might become a more faithful and effective communicator of the way of life (cf. Acts 5:20).

## Part ONE: Today's Gospel: Good News or Bad?

### Chapter 1: What does Jesus mean when He says: “Follow Me!”

***“Jesus is Lord.”*** (1st Corinthians 12:3) that is the single, central, foundational, and distinguishing article of Christianity. It is also the 1st essential confession of faith every true Christian must make.

The now pervasive influence of the **“no-Lordship” doctrine among evangelicals reflects the shallowness and spiritual poverty of the contemporary evangelical movement.**

It is also one of the main causes of evangelicalism's impoverishment. **You cannot remove Lordship of Christ from THE gospel message without undermining faith at its core.** That is precisely what is happening in the church today.

**Jesus’ teaching always kept the issue of His Lordship at the center.** He never once shied away from declaring his authority as sovereign Master. **He refused to tone down the implications of his demand for unconditional surrender.** So the true gospel according to Jesus is a message that cannot be divorced from the reality of his Lordship.

When Jesus called people to follow him, He was not seeking sidekicks or admirers. He was calling people to yield completely and unreservedly to His Lordship.

#### **A Word About Words.**

The expression most often translated “LORD” in the English New Testament is the Greek word “kurios.” It speaks of someone who has power, ownership, and an unquestionable right to command. A nearly synonymous Greek term also translated “LORD” sometimes is “despotes,” which describes a ruler with absolute power over his subjects. Both words are used in reference to Christ as LORD in the New Testament. The 4<sup>th</sup> verse of Jude applies both terms to Jesus!

Both words are extremely powerful. They were part of the vocabulary of the slavery community in New Testament times. They describe a slave-owner. His subjects are duty-bound to obey their lord’s directive, not merely because they choose to do so, but because they have no rightful liberty to do otherwise. Therefore, **wherever there was a LORD (kurios) or Master (despote), there was ALWAYS a slave (doulos).**

That explains Jesus’ incredulity at the practice of those who paid homage to Him with their lips but not with their lives:

*“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”* – Luke 6:46

The Greek word “doulos” is quite common in the New Testament. It is used 130 times; frequently as a descriptions of what it means to be a true Christian! Read 1 Corinthians 7:22-23.

“Doulos” is not an ambiguous term. It suggests a very specific concept, which, while repugnant to our culture, should not be toned down or backed away from. It is the main Greek word that was used to describe the lowest subject bond slave.

## ***A “doulos” was a person without standing or rights.***

Readers of the English Bible translations have long been shielded from the full force of the word “doulos.” Translators have toned down the literal sense of the word; translating it as “servant,” or “bond servant,” rather than “slave.”

## ***Service and slavery are NOT the same thing!***

Thus, it is extremely unfortunate (and damningly dangerous) that the full impact of the expression “doulos” has been obscured.

There are at least 6 Greek words for “servant,” and “doulos” is not one of them!

Doulos speaks of “slavery” – pure and simple. It describes someone lacking personal freedom and personal rights whose very existence is defined by his/her service to another. See Matthew 6:24.

## ***A “servant” gives service to someone... BUT a “slave” BELONGS to someone!***

Scripture repeatedly and emphatically places Christians in the later category:

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** = *“Do you not know that... you are not your own?  
For you have been bought/purchased with a price.”*

**2 Peter 2:1** = *“We have a Master who has purchased us”*

**Romans 14:7-9** = the very essence of what it means to be a Christian:

*“For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”*

### **Why Such A Revolting Concept?**

The word “slavery” conjures up so much negative imagery and so many strong passions for us that we instinctively shy away from it...



## **We are proclaiming a message that is inherently offensive...**

see 1 Corinthians 1:22-31 & 2 Corinthians 4:5).

Slavery is distasteful to every sane person.

The idea that Jesus demanded absolute slave-like obedience to His lordship is a particularly difficult concept for people from contemporary Western cultures to grasp. But that is no reason to ignore or soft-pedal what Scripture clearly teaches about our duty to submit to Christ as Lord.

Do not forget, **slavery was by no means a glamorous institution** in 1<sup>st</sup> century culture either.

Not all slaves were mistreated but many were, and Roman-style slavery was notorious for abuses.

The idea of being a slave was universally loathsome... **No one wanted to be anyone's "doulos."**

Jesus' portrayal of discipleship as slavery had no more appeal to the popular tastes or "felt-needs" of His time than it does today.

**He was certainly not trying to appeal to a longing for self-esteem or make discipleship look enticing** to the people of Galilee when He spoke about the cost of following Him.

### **The Problem With A Feel-Good Gospel.**

**The idea of the Christian as a slave and Christ as Master is almost totally missing from the vocabulary of contemporary evangelical Christianity.**

### ***Modern and post-modern people crave autonomy.***

With that said, as the church has become increasingly worldly, the biblical truth of our duty to him as our absolute LORD has all but disappeared.

The church has reduced all of saving faith and Christian discipleship to a "politically correct" cliché: "a personal relationship with Jesus." Sadly, **the ambiguity of that phrase reflects the destructive vagueness with which evangelicals have been mishandling the gospel.**

**A lot of people (as well as Satan) had/have some kind of "personal relationship" with Jesus, without submitting to Him as LORD.**

John 15:14 tells us that only His true "friends" did what He said to do...

Consider what this truth would mean for the prosperity gospel and the idea that Christians have the power to create health, wealth, and material success with their own words; or the market-driven philosophy of “church-growth,” which promises the fulfillment of felt-needs and the achievement of personal satisfaction as incentives for responding to Christ; or the elusive quest for a brand of faith that guarantees “Your Best Life Now”; or the postmodern concept of truth as something we each get to define for ourselves.

***All of these are at odds with the biblical principle & truth that Christians are slaves – totally subject to the will of another; namely, Christ, who is their ABSOLUTE Master!***

***We need to let Scripture speak for itself.***

Slavery to Christ is not a minor or secondary feature of true discipleship. This is not merely symbolic language. It is exactly how Jesus Himself defined the “personal relationship” He must have with every true follower (**see John 12:26 & 15:20**). This fact is represented and repeated throughout the New Testament.

The opening words of several New Testament books include their various author’s own confessions that they were but a slave of Christ... (see Romans, Philippians, Titus, James, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation).

***The fundamental aspects of slavery are the very features of our redemption.***

CHOSEN:	Ephesians 1:4-5; 1 Peter 1:1, 2:9
BOUGHT:	1 Corinthians 6:20 & 7:23
OWNED:	Romans 14:7-9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Titus 2:14
SUBJECT TO:	Acts 5:29; Romans 6:16-19; Philippians 2:5-8
TOTALLY DEPENDENT:	2 Corinthians 9:8-11; Philippians 4:19
CALLED TO ACCOUNT:	Romans 14:12
EVALUATED:	2 Corinthians 5:10
CHASTENED or REWARDED:	Hebrews 12:5-11 & 1 Corinthians 3:14

## What Would Jesus Say?

Jesus frequently drew a direct connection between slavery and discipleship.

In the parables, He often used slavery as the symbol of discipleship.

**Matthew 25:21** = *“Well done, good and faithful slave...enter into the joy of your master.”*

Jesus always described true discipleship in such terms, and He never adjusted His message to make it sound appealing to worldly minded sinners.

### ***Christ’s preaching and private discourses were notable for their directness.***

Nothing Jesus ever said or taught about the cost of discipleship was ever toned down or pillowed in soft words.

***Jesus was not the least bit encouraging toward people who wanted to follow Him around just for the food & miracles.***

In fact, He did everything possible to discourage people like that (read John 6!). **He called only broken people who were sick of their sin, who understood their hopeless condition, and who were willing to forsake everything else to be His disciples** (Luke 5:32 & 14:33)

Jesus didn’t save the “hard words” for people who were already believers... He said the same things to unconverted crowds (Luke 14:25-35).

***Sometimes Jesus sounded like He was trying to turn away as many inquirers as possible – and indeed, He DID turn away multitudes of merely curious and halfhearted admirers.***

(Read John 6:66-67)

Jesus demanded that people deny themselves completely.

Jesus required their implicit obedience.

Jesus instructed them to be ready to die for Him.

Jesus called them to let go of ALL their normal priorities – including family, friends, ambitions...

Christ’s followers were to place their entire life under His authority.

Christ’s Lordship was understood to be total and non-negotiable!

## ***Would-be disciples who tried to dictate “different” terms were always turned away.***

(Read Luke 9:59-62)

### **Not Mere Slaves, But Slaves Who Are Friends.**

The key passage on Jesus’ demand for implicit obedience is John 15:14-15: “You are My friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

Notice, the fundamental principle this passage begins with: OBEDIENCE. The Lord commands them, and they are expected to obey. His authority over them was absolute, and **their obedience was to be unequivocal – or else they were NOT His friends.**

It is vital to understand that **Jesus was not suggesting that obedience “makes” someone His friend** – as if His favor could be earned through service. He was, however, saying that obedience is a singular proof that someone IS His friend.

### **Obedience is the natural fruit of genuine love for Him.**

**Obedience is also, therefore, the tell-tale mark of authentic saving faith.**

(An important question needs to be understood and answered)

But then why does Jesus say: “No longer do I call you slaves... I have called you friends”? Is He expressly telling them their relationship with Him was now a familiar personal camaraderie between colleagues, rather than a master-slave relationship?

Not at all. **Look at the context.** First, he expressly indicates that he had called them slaves—because that is precisely what they were: "doulos," with Him as their uncontested "kurios." That relationship by definition, cannot change. So **Jesus is simply saying that his followers were his friends as well as his slaves.**

Friendship with one's Lord or master does not nullify the authority inherent in the relationship.

**This concept of friendship between master and slave was highly unusual.** The tension between slaves and slave owners was usually filled with enmity.

Jesus turned that principle on its head.

**Jesus makes his slaves his friends by his love for them.**

**Christ's total and unqualified submission to the will of the father is precisely the pattern we are given to follow: read Philippians 2:5–8.**

Slavery and true liberty:

Understood correctly, the gospel is an invitation to slavery. When we call people to faith in Christ, we need to stress that fact in the same way, Jesus did.

**Romans 6:18** tells us: having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

**1 Peter 2:16** tells us: Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-slaves of God.

**There is a glorious freedom in being the slaves of Christ!**

*“If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed”* – John 8:36. On the other hand, being a true follower of Christ means the end of human autonomy.

If we want true liberty from sin and all its fruits, it is not a autonomy that we need, but a different kind of bondage: complete surrender to the Lordship of Christ.

Everyone serves some master:

No one is truly independent and self-governing. We are all enslaved in one way or another. See Romans 6:16–20.

The Gospel according to Jesus calls sinners to give up their independence, deny themselves, submit to an alien will, and abandoned all rights in order to be owned and controlled by the Lord.

There is no legitimate way to adjust the gospel to make it sound appealing to people who admire Jesus, but are not prepared to serve him.

Jesus never catered to that perspective. **Jesus was not seeking admirers**; he was calling followers... not casual followers, but **slaves!**

That explains why when he encountered people who were unwilling to obey unconditionally, he discouraged them from following him at all.

**Jesus declared his Lordship without hesitation or apology. He made it clear that true faith in him begins with an unconditional surrender of the sinner's heart.**

**It is a glorious surrender, and it is the supreme joy of every true believer's heart to be Christ's slave.**

But remove that spirit of submission, and the most profound kind of admiration for Christ is not true faith at all.

Yielding completely to Christ's Lordship is that vital element of true saving faith, therefore the **proclamation of his Lordship is an absolutely necessary component of the true gospel.**

His Lordship dominated his public preaching and teaching:

His Lordship is the unifying idea in the story of redemption, the song of the redeemed, and the reason for the gospel in the 1st place.

Philippians 2:10–11 states: *"...that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"*

## **Chapter 2: A Look At The Issues**

Listen to the typical gospel presentation nowadays... You will hear sinners entreated with words like: *"Accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior;" "Ask Jesus into your heart;" "Invite Christ into your life;"* or, *"...make a decision for Christ."* **It will surprise most people to learn that none of these directives are based on biblical terminology.**

These phrases are the products of a diluted gospel.

### **It is not the Gospel according to Jesus.**

**The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer.**

The message of Christ confronted and condemned hypocrisy.

**It was an offer of eternal life and forgiveness for repentant sinners, but at the same time to outwardly religious people, it was a rebuke to those whose lives were devoid of true righteousness.**

It was in every sense, good news,  
yet it was anything but "easy-believism."

**Jesus taught that the cost of following him is high, that the way is narrow and few find it.**

**Jesus said many who call him Lord will be forbidden from entering the kingdom of heaven—Matthew 7:13–23.**

Present-day evangelism, ignores those warnings.

The prevailing view of what constitutes saving faith continues to grow broader and shallower, while Christ becomes fuzzy.

Anyone who claims to be a Christian can find evangelicals willing to accept a profession of faith, whether or not the person's behavior shows any evidence of commitment to Christ.

The Abandonment of Jesus' Gospel:

Justification without sanctification is a deficient doctrine of salvation.

**The impact on the church of such an understanding of salvation without sanctification has been catastrophic.**

**Professing Christians have bought into a system that encourages shallow and ineffectual faith. Many sincerely believe they are saved, but their lives are utterly barren of any verifying fruit.**

If you read Matthew 7:21–23, you will quickly understand that no past experience—not even doing signs and wonders—can be viewed as evidence of salvation, apart from a life of obedience.

I fear that multitudes who now fill church pews will be among those turned away on judgment day.

**Contemporary Christians have been conditioned to believe that because they said a prayer, they are saved and should never question their salvation.**

It is a widely held misconception that anyone who questions whether he is saved is challenging the integrity of God's Word. What misguided thinking that is!

**The Bible encourages us to examine ourselves to determine if we are in the faith** – 2nd Corinthians 13:5. Moreover, Peter wrote, *“be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you”* – 2nd Peter 1:10.

It is right to examine our lives and evaluate the fruit we see there, because **each tree is known by its own fruit**—Luke 6:44.

**The Bible is absolutely clear, evidence of God's work in a life is the inevitable fruit of transformed behavior**—1st John 3:10.

James 2:14–17 tells us that faith that does not result in righteous living is dead and cannot save.

**Professing Christians lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance of salvation—1st John 2:4.**

Real salvation is not only justification. It cannot be isolated from regeneration, sanctification, and ultimately glorification.

Salvation is the work of God through which we are conformed to the image of His Son—Romans 8:29 and 13:11.

**Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit's transforming work in one's life, not from clinging to the memory of some experience.**

Some historical background:

**Prior to the last hundred years, no serious theologian would have entertained the notion that it is possible to be saved, yet see nothing of the outworking of regeneration in one's lifestyle or behavior.**

In 1918 Lewis Chafer wrote a book entitled "He That Is Spiritual," articulating the concept/theory that 1st Corinthians 2:15–3:3 speaks of 2 classes of Christians: carnal and spiritual. The doctrine of spirituality stressed in this book became the basis of a whole new way of looking at the gospel. Consequently, many people began to draw hard lines of distinction between salvation and discipleship... between the church and the kingdom... between faith and repentance... and between the age of law and the age of grace.

The law/grace division in particular has wreaked havoc and contributed to confusion about salvation. Of course, **there is an important distinction to be made between law and grace**. But it is wrong to conclude, that law and grace are mutually exclusive in the program of God.

Clearly, **even Old Testament saints were saved by grace through faith**—Romans 4:3, 6–8, 16. **Just as clearly, New Testament saints have a law to fulfill**—Galatians 6:2; 1 Cor. 7:19; 9:21.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost—Luke 19:10. He came to call sinners to repentance—Matthew 9:13. He came so the world through him might be saved—John 3:17. He proclaimed the saving Gospel.

**His gospel is the only message we are to preach.**



Wrongly dividing the Word:

**Jesus is both Savior and Lord**—Luke 2:11—and no true believer would ever dispute that. While Savior and Lord our separate offices, **we must be careful not to partition them in such a way that we divide Christ** —1st Corinthians 1:13.

Nevertheless, there are some loud voices professing Christ who are putting forth the teaching that it is possible to reject Christ as Lord, yet receive him as Savior.

**We do not make Christ Lord; he is Lord!**

**Faith that rejects Christ's sovereign authority is really unbelief.**

Conversely, acknowledging his Lordship is no more a human work than repentance or faith itself — see 2nd Timothy 2:25 and Ephesians 2:8–9.

In fact, **surrender to Christ is an important aspect of divinely produced saving faith, not something added to faith.**

The two clearest statements on the way of salvation in all of Scripture both emphasize Jesus Christ's Lordship. Acts 16:31 states: “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.” Romans 10:9 is equally clear: “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.”

No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse Christ's Lordship. Thus, there is no salvation except Lordship—salvation.

**True faith is not lip-service.**

Christ pronounced condemnation on those who worship him with their lips but not with their lives... see Matthew 15:7–9.

Jesus does not become anyone's Savior until that person receives him for who he is—Lord of all! Read Acts 10:36.

A.W. Tozer said, **"the Lord will not save those whom he cannot command. He will not divide his offices. You cannot believe on a half—Christ."**

Faith and true discipleship:

Those who teach that obedience and submission are extraneous to saving faith make a firm but unbiblical distinction between salvation and discipleship.

This false dichotomy, like that between the carnal–spiritual Christian, sets up two classes of Christians: “believers–only,” and true disciples.

**No (false) distinction has done so much to undermine the authority of Christ's message.**

Are we to believe that when Jesus told the multitudes to deny themselves (Luke 14:26), to take up a cross (14:27), and to forsake ALL and follow Him (14:33)... that His words had no meaning whatsoever for the unsaved people in the crowd?

The call to Calvary must be recognized for what it is: a call to discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

**To respond to that call is to become a believer. Anything less is simply unbelief!**

The Gospel according to Jesus explicitly and unequivocally rules out easy-believism!

**To make all of our Lord’s difficult demands apply only to a higher class of Christian blunts the force of his entire message. It makes room for a cheap and meaningless faith—a faith that may be exercised with absolutely no impact on the fleshly life of sin. That is not saving faith.**

By Grace through faith:

**Salvation is solely by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). That truth is the biblical watershed for all we teach. But it means nothing if we begin with a miss understanding of Grace or a faulty definition of faith.**

God's grace is not a static attribute whereby He passively accepts hardened, unrepentant sinners.

Grace does not change a persons standing before God, yet leave his character untouched.

Grace does not grant permission to live in the flesh; it supplies power to live in the Spirit.

Faith, like Grace, is not static. Saving faith is more than just understanding the facts and mentally excepting them. It is inseparable from repentance, surrender, and a supernatural longing to obey.

**Those who reject Lordship salvation assume that because Scripture contrasts faith and works, faith must be incompatible with works. They set faith in opposition to all practical elements of salvation.**

They stumble over the twin truths: salvation is a gift, yet it costs everything

Those ideas our paradoxical, but not mutually exclusive.

Salvation is a gift, but it is appropriated through a faith that goes beyond merely understanding and assenting to the truth. Demons have that kind of faith—James 2:19.

True believers are characterized by faith that is repulsed by the life of sin.

Drawn to Christ, they are drawn away from everything else.

Repentance, as Jesus characterized it, involves a recognition of one's utter sinfulness and a turning from self and sin to God – 1st Thessalonians 1:9. It is the inevitable result of God's work in a human heart. **Repentance is much more than a mere change of mind—it involves a complete change of heart, attitude, interest, and direct should.**

Repentance is a conversion in every sense of the word.

**The Bible does not recognize conversion that lacks this radical change of direction** – Luke 3:7–8. A true believer cannot remain rebellious-or even in different.

In fact, **Scripture often equates faith with obedience**: John 3:36; Romans 1:5; 16:26; 2nd Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 11:8. That is the heart of the message of Hebrews 11, the hall of fame of faith.

**Faith and works are not incompatible. God brings us to faith, then enables and empowers us to believe unto obedience (Romans 16:26 & Ephesians 2:10).**

Read Ephesians 2:8–9 and then, having understood though role of Grace, read verse 10. It becomes clear that no one is saved by works, yet every one who is saved, is saved for works.

We must remember above all that salvation is a sovereign **work of God**.

Works are not necessary to earn salvation. But true salvation will not fail to produce the good works that are it's fruit—Matthew 7:17.

No aspect of salvation is merited by human works. It is all the work of God—Titus 3:5–7. Thus, salvation can not be defective in any dimension.

As a part of his saving work, God will produce repentance, faith, sanctification, obedience, and ultimately glorification. Since he is not dependent on human effort in producing those elements, an experience that lacks any of them cannot be the saving work of God.

If we are truly born of God, we have a faith that cannot fail to overcome the world—1st John 5:4.

We may sin—1st John 2:1—we will sin—but the process of sanctification can never stall completely.

God is at work in us—Philippians 2:13—and He will continue to perfect us until the day of Christ—Philippians 1:6; 1st Thessalonians 5:23-24.

## Part 2: Jesus Heralds His Gospel

### Chapter 3: He Calls For A New Birth

Not everyone who claims to be a Christian really is. Unbelievers do make false professions of faith in Christ.

**People who are not truly Christians can be deceived into thinking they are.**

The cheap grace and easy faith of a distorted gospel are ruining the purity of the church.

Modern-day Evangelicalism is embracing those whose doctrine is suspect or whose behavior indicates a heart in rebellion against the things of God.

From the first time Jesus began to minister publicly he rejected quick, easy, or shallow responses. **Jesus turned away far more prospects than he won, refusing to proclaim a message that would give anyone a false hope.**

His words, always tailored to the individual's needs, never failed to puncture the inquirer's self righteousness, unveil wrong motives, or warn of false faith and shallow commitment.

Christ's meeting with Nicodemus in John 3 is an example of this. Far from encouraging Nicodemus, Jesus, who knew the unbelief and self-righteousness of Nicodemus's heart, dealt with him as an unbeliever.

Jesus did not offer this self righteous Pharisee a message of easy-believism.

Nicodemus stands as an illustration of inadequate faith. His mind accepted to some extent the truth of Christ, but his heart was unregenerate.

**Our Lord's strategy in witnessing was always frank, direct, and to the point. He took the confrontational approach in his encounters.**

The futility of religion:

The Pharisees were hyper legalists who externalized religion. The Pharisees were the very epitome of all who pursue a form of godliness with no reality—2nd Timothy 3:5. **They were fanatically religious.** They held to more than 600 laws, many of which were simply their own inventions.

Nicodemus had always believed that salvation was to be earned by good works. **He probably even expected Christ to commend him** for his strict legalism! Instead, Jesus confronted him with the futility of his religion.

Nicodemus's reply has often been misunderstood: how can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus was not speaking in literal terms, give him credit for a little common sense. A teacher himself, Nicodemus understood the rabbinical method of using figurative language to teach spiritual truth. He was really saying, I can't start all over. It's too late. I've gone too far in my religious system to start over. There is no hope for me if I must begin from the beginning.

Jesus was demanding that Nicodemus forsake everything he stood for, and Nicodemus knew it.

**Christ was challenging him with the most difficult demand he could make.**

To call him to a spiritual rebirth was asking him to turn away from everything he was committed to.

**Jesus was saying to Nicodemus, law and religious rituals cannot give eternal life.**

The unity of revelation:

Nicodemus's next question revealed the turmoil in his heart: how can these things be? He simply couldn't believe what he was hearing.

Jesus answered and said to him, are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?

That rebuke completely silenced Nicodemus. He made no further response.

Nicodemus seems to have ultimately become a believer—if not here, at some later date. After the crucifixion it was he, along with Joseph, who claimed the body of Christ and prepared it for burial—John 19:38–39.

**The silence of Nicodemus is understandable. Jesus challenged his aptitude as a spiritual leader which was a devastating put down. The Lords use of the definite article indicates that Nicodemus had a reputation as the preeminent teacher and all of Israel.**

Christ's rebuke, however, insinuated that he really understood very little of the truth of the Scriptures.

**Jesus' challenge also made an important doctrinal point. The clear implication is that the Old Testament plainly taught the way of salvation – 2nd Timothy 3:15.**

There is perfect unity in God's Word, and the way of salvation revealed in the Old Testament was the same as salvation after Christ's work on the cross.

**Salvation was never a reward for human works; it has always been a gift of grace for repentant sinners, made possible by the work of Christ.**

In the Old Testament, salvation was not a payoff for those who observe the law; it was a gift to those who humbly and by faith sought redemption from their sin. Yet it always meant a new start, a rebirth, a turning point from sin to God. **Read Isaiah 1:16–18.**

## **The central theme of the Old Testament is redemption by grace.**

Incredibly, the Pharisees entirely missed it. In their rigid emphasis on religious works, they deemphasized the truth of God's grace and forgiveness to sinners. They stressed obedience to law, not conversion to the Lord, as the way to gain eternal life. They were so busy trying to earn righteousness that they neglected the marvelous truth of **Habakkuk 2:4** – ***“the righteous will live by his faith.”*** They looked to Abraham as their father but overlooked the key lesson of his life, read Genesis 15:6– *“he believed in the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.”*

The Pharisees anticipated the coming of their Messiah, but closed their eyes to the fact that he would come to die as a sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 53:4-9).

**The Pharisees missed the most basic lesson of God's law: that they themselves were sinners in need of redemption.**

People have always stumbled over the simplicity of salvation.

That is why there are so many cults. Each one has a unique slant on the doctrine of salvation. Each one corrupts the simplicity of the gospel revealed in God's Word. See 2nd Corinthians 11:3. **Every other false gospel calls for salvation by human works.**

All forms of false religion are alike in that they advocate self righteous achievement as the way to God.

**The Bible disproves them all. Its message is simply that God graciously saves repentant sinners who come to him in faith.**

## **The gospel is not a secret and it is not complex.**

The Necessity of Regeneration:

Nicodemus had fallen short. **Jesus did not mask the truth or try to make it palatable.** Nicodemus was nurturing a great sin... the sin of unbelief.

**Unbelief always begets ignorance.** Nicodemus claimed he didn't understand.

Jesus wanted him to know that faith comes before full understanding. Read 1st Corinthians 2:14.

Spiritual truth does not register in the mind of one who does not believe...

## **Unbelief understands nothing.**

Nicodemus had come to Jesus with a smug profession of faith. Jesus responded by letting him know that he did not know the very basics about salvation.

**Like most religious unbelievers, Nicodemus did not want to confess that he was a helpless sinner. He thought of himself as a great spiritual leader.**

Jesus had just reduced Nicodemus to nothing.

**Jesus is not just a teacher sent by God; he is in fact God in human flesh. We either accept what He says, or we are left with our sin.**

Jesus said: you **must** be born again. Regeneration is an absolute necessity. No one—not even the most religious Pharisee—is exempt from the divine call to a new birth.

Thus, we have the starting point of the Gospel according to Jesus: **salvation is impossible apart from divinely gifted regeneration.**

The Reality of Redemption:

Jesus lovingly and graciously explained to Nicodemus the new birth and all its simplicity.

## **The issue is simply faith in the divine offer.**

A careful study of Numbers chapter 21 reveals that Jesus was not painting a picture of easy faith. He was showing Nicodemus the necessity of repentance. **Jesus was showing Nicodemus that he must identify with the sinning, rebellious Israelites.**

The issue was sin. Jesus was challenging this great teacher of the law to acknowledge that he had been bitten by the great serpent, Satan, and to come to the Lord for salvation.

Far from giving Nicodemus an illustration of the ease of belief, our Lord established that Nicodemus must acknowledge his sinfulness and repent.

The illustration of the bronze serpent also pictured Jesus' death as the price for salvation. Just as Moses lifted up that serpent, so the Son of Man would be lifted up on a pole—the cross of crucifixion. The word "must" in verse 14 is significant; Christ had to die. Hebrews 9:22 tells us: without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. God's sacrificial system demanded a blood atonement, for the wages of sin is death.

## Someone must die to pay the price of sin.

That truth leads into the most familiar and magnificent statement in all of Scripture: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

**What does it mean to obey Christ?**

## Real faith has at its heart, a willingness to obey.

Verse 20 and 21 say: everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

Verse 36 goes even further, equating disobedience with unbelief.

**Thus, the test of true faith is this: does it produce obedience?**

Faith that does not produce obedience is not saving faith.

Disobedience is unbelief.

**Real faith obeys.**

### **Chapter 4: He Demands True Worship**

John chapter 4 contains one of the most familiar and beautiful conversations in all of Scripture. Here our Lord offers salvation to an outcast woman. Those who oppose lordship salvation often point to this account as proof that salvation is a gift apart from any demand of the sinners life.

Many skeptics point to this passage and say that Jesus made no mention of sin's wages, repentance, faith, atonement, his death for sin, or his resurrection.

Are we to conclude then, that those are not indispensable elements of the gospel? Certainly not.

Unlike Nicodemus, **she was no theologian, but her heart was ready to acknowledge her sin and embrace Christ.** His message to her was meant to draw her to himself, not to provide a comprehensive gospel outline intended to be normative for every episode of personal evangelism.

This encounter is not primarily the tale of a Samaritan woman. Rather, **this is the account of Jesus' self revelation as Messiah.**



Jesus chose to tell this unknown woman of Samaria before he revealed his identity to anybody else. **Why would he reveal it first to an obscure, adulterous woman?** Certainly he intended to demonstrate that the gospel was for the whole world, not just the Hebrew race, and that his ministry was to poor outcasts as well as the religious elite.

We are told only the barest essentials of the Lord's conversation with the woman. Scripture reveals nothing specific about her thoughts or emotions. In fact, although we assume she embraced Christ as Messiah and became a believer, even that is not explicitly stated in the text. We make that judgment on the basis of her behavior... that she ran to tell others about him, and they believe.

As the master evangelist, Jesus directed the conversation, taking her from a simple comment about drinking water to revelation that He is the Messiah. Along the way, He skillfully avoids her attempts to control the conversation, change the subject, and ask irrelevant questions.

### **5 lessons stand out as critical truths to be emphasized in presenting the way of salvation:**

#### **1: The Lesson of the Well:** *Christ Came to Seek & Save the Lost*

The more people came to see Jesus, the more uncomfortable the religious leaders appear from this point on in the ministry of Christ, his running battle with the Pharisees is a constant theme.

Notice, that by journeying through Samaria, our Lord was displaying his love for sinners. Samaria had essentially become a separate nation, viewed by the Jews as more abhorrent than the Gentiles. By traveling through Samaria, our Lord was shattering age old barriers.

Jesus was at the appointed place, in God's timing, determined to do God's will. He was there to seek and to save a single pathetic, wretched woman.

#### **2: The Lesson of the Woman:** *God is No Respector of Persons*

This woman was a moral outcast, ostracized from society. In that culture, men did not speak publicly with women—even their wives. Furthermore, Jesus had shattered the racial barrier..

Jesus was not ashamed to take a drink from the vessel of a woman for whom he had come to die.

Nobody was/is beyond the reach of his divine love.

#### **3: The Lesson of the Water:** *Everyone Who Thirsts May Come*

Jesus turned the situation around and began to speak to the woman as if she were the thirsty one and he had the water. He declared that she needed a drink from his fountain. The issue was no longer his physical thirst, but her spiritual need.

He was offering living water for her dry soul.

The offer of living water is not just for religious people like Nicodemus—everyone who thirsts is invited to drink deeply of the living water.

**Jesus never sanctioned any form of cheap grace.** He was not offering eternal life as an add-on to a life cluttered with unconfessed sin.

**4: The Lesson of True Worship:** *Now is the Acceptable Time*

Jesus confronted her with her real need—forgiveness.

**The “where” of worship is not really the issue; it is Who, when, and how that really counts.** True worship occurs not on a mountain or in a Temple, but in the inner person.

It is significant that Jesus used the expression "true worshipers" to refer to the body of redeemed people.

**All who are saved are true worshipers.**

There is no possibility of being saved and yet not worshiping God in spirit and truth.

When Jesus said the Father was seeking true worshipers, it was more than a statement of fact. It was a personal invitation to the Samaritan woman. Do not miss the importance of that invitation. It rejects the notion that Jesus was offering eternal life without making any demand for a spiritual commitment.

The call to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth was a clear summons to the deepest and most comprehensive kind of spiritual submission.

**5: The Lesson of the Witness:** *This Man Receives Sinners*

**The woman at the well evidenced all the characteristics of genuine conversion. She had sensed her need, she had confessed her guilt, she recognized Jesus as Messiah, and now she was showing the fruit of her transformed life by bringing other people to him.**

It is significant that her first impulse as a new believer was to go and tell others about Christ.

The desire to proclaim one's faith is a common experience of new believers. In fact, some of the most zealous witnesses for Christ our brand-new believers.

**Jesus had given her a drink of the water of life, and she had begun to worship God in spirit and truth.**

She didn't need to conceal her guilt anymore; she was forgiven.

The Samaritan woman told the men of her town: "***he is the Messiah, but he receives sinners!***" What had been repugnant to the scribes and Pharisees, was good news to the Samaritans because they were willing to admit they were sinners.

In Matthew 9:13 Jesus said, *I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.* **Those who refused to it knowledge their sin found him to be a judge, not a savior.** He never gave such people any encouragement, any comfort, or any reason to hope.

God seeks people who will submit themselves to worship him in spirit and in truth. That kind of worship is impossible for those sheltering sin in their lives.

Those who confess and forsake their sin, on the other hand, will find a Savior eager to receive them, forgive them, and liberate them from their sin.

**Revelation 22:17** states: "let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

## **While living water is free, it is not cheap!**

The Savior himself paid the ultimate price so that thirsty, repentant seekers can drink as deeply as they like.

### **Chapter 5: He Receives Sinners But Refuses the Righteous**

Sadly, churches are teeming with people who, claiming to be born again, live like pagans.

**Multitudes declare that they trust Christ as Savior, while indulging in lifestyles that are plainly inconsistent with God's Word – yet no one dares to challenge their testimony.**

It is hard for me to understand how someone who teaches the Bible can assume that a man living in open rebellion and against God's standards is a Christian merely because he claims to be.

Coming to grips with sin:

**We tell people that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives, but that is only half the truth.**

God also hates sin and will punish unrepentant sinners with eternal torment.

**No Gospel presentation is complete if it avoids or conceals that truth.**

Any message that fails to define and confront the severity of personal sin is a deficient Gospel.

**Any salvation that does not alter a lifestyle of sin and transform the heart of the sinner is not the salvation that God's Word speaks of.**

Sin is no peripheral issue as far as salvation is concerned; it is the issue!

In fact, the distinctive element of the Christian message is the power of Jesus Christ to forgive and conquer our sin.

**This truth is the heart and the very lifeblood of the Christian message. No message that excludes it is truly representing the Gospel according to Jesus.**

It is absurd to suggest a person can be saved without also coming to grips with sin and longing to turn from it.

**In the Bible, those who met God were invariably confronted with an overwhelming sense of their own sinfulness.** Read the following passages: Luke 5: 8; 1st Timothy 1:15; Job 1: 1, 8 & 42:6; and Isaiah 6:5.

Matthew 9:9 records one of the most important statements ever recorded in the Bible, the Lord says, “**I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**” This is a summary of the message of Christianity, a close-up of the nucleus of the gospel, and the basis behind the incarnation of Christ.

Why did Jesus come into the world? **To call sinners.**

**Jesus came to call sinners, those who are broken, those whose lives are shattered, those who are desperate – sinners who know they are unworthy, yet longing to be forgiven.**

Jesus was aiming his words at the self-righteous Pharisees and others who thought they were without any real spiritual need. The truth is that unless people realize they have a sin problem, they will not come to Christ for a solution.

People do not come for healing unless they know they have a disease; they do not come for life unless they are conscious that they are under the penalty of death; they do not come for salvation unless they are weary of the bondage of sin.

**Consequently, Jesus came to expose us all as sinners.**

Receiving sinners:

When you read about Matthew's conversion, you realize that Jesus only spoke 2 words to him: "Follow me!" and Matthew obeyed. Luke 5:28 adds: *"and Matthew left everything behind."* Matthew forsook all to follow Christ. Matthew was too humble to say that about himself, but Luke did. Matthew's humility speaks volumes about the nature of his conversion.

**Matthew paid a great price**, perhaps a higher price than any of the other disciples. A fisherman who followed Jesus could always go back to fishing. But a tax collector who left his station was finished, because the next day Rome would have someone else to take his place.

## **Matthew forsook everything... immediately!**

Matthew turned his back on it all, forsaking everything he had.

**Matthew was a major sinner, and everyone knew it. He was a tax collector.** He made his living by squeezing tax money out of his own people. Tax collectors would buy franchises from Rome. By buying into the Roman system, Matthew had revealed himself as a traitor to Israel. Nothing in the mind of the Jewish people was more offensive. He established his reputation as the worst kind of turncoat, heretic, and renegade.

Rome required each tax collector to send in a certain amount of taxes. Anything they acquired over that amount they could keep. A shrewd tax collector could amass a huge fortune in very little time—all at the expense of his own oppressed brothers.

Tax collectors were so despised by the Jews that they were barred from the synagogues. They were regarded as unclean beasts, treated like swine.

**The Jewish religion said it was impossible for a man in Matthew's position to repent.** Can you imagine the gasps from the crowd when Jesus stopped before Matthew and said, "Follow me!"

**Matthew must've been a man under conviction.**

Deep down in his heart he must have longed  
to be free from his life of sin.

Eating with tax gatherers and sinners:

Matthew decided to have a banquet to introduce Jesus to his friends. **Like most new believers, he wanted to bring everyone he knew to Christ.** The only people Matthew knew were wretched sinners, because no one else would associate with him.

The “respectable” people despised Matthew.

Churchy religious types would say, Jesus shouldn't go to a banquet with people like Matthew. Yet, Matthew 11:19 indicates that Jesus was known among the people as a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Jesus exposed the Pharisees as pious critics who freely defined others as sinners but were utterly indifferent to their own plight.

Jesus used Scripture to blast the Pharisees pride when He told them to go and learn. This phrase was used by rabbis to reprove their students who were ignorant about something they should have known.

Jesus was quoting **Hosea 6:6**, reprimanding the Pharisees by telling them that God is not concerned with the ritual and ceremony, but with compassion, mercy, and loving-kindness, which is another way to say “Christian character.”

## **The Pharisees, good at ritual, had no love for sinners.**

Psalm 51:16-17 point to a broken and contrite heart... **When the heart was not right, the ritual was an abomination.**

**God is never pleased with forms of religion  
apart from personal righteousness.**

Notice that Luke 18:9 describes the Pharisees as: *“certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt.”*

This is the theme of the Gospel according to Jesus: **He came to call sinners to repentance.**

Until people have been brought to see that they are sinners, until they feel the weight of sin and long to be rid of it, the Lord will not give them salvation.

Refusing the righteous:

**God receives sinners.**

**God refuses the righteous.**

Not that there are any truly righteous people, but those who think they are good enough – those who do not understand the seriousness of sin – cannot respond to the gospel.

**They cannot be saved, for the gospel is a call to sinners to repent and be forgiven.**

The unmistakable message is that Christ's gracious call to salvation is not extended to those who view themselves as righteous.

## **The Gospel according to Jesus is first of all a mandate for repentance.**

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the heart of his message was a call to repentance.

In fact, when our Lord first began to preach, the opening word of his message was: "Repent" (Matthew 4:17).

**It was also the 1st word of John the Baptist's message (Matthew 3:2) and the basis of the gospel the apostles preached (Acts 3:9; 20:21; 26:20).**

No one who neglects to call sinners to repentance is preaching the Gospel according to Jesus.

A few years ago, a nationally known preacher redefined sin as nothing more than a poor self image. The way to reach people, he said, is to bolster their self-esteem, not to make them think of themselves as sinful. There is no gospel in a message like that! Rather than bringing people to salvation, it confirms them in their self-condemning vanity of their own egos.

The truth of the gospel according to Jesus is that the only ones who are eligible for salvation are those who realize they are sinners and are willing to repent.

**Christ's call is extended only to sinners who in desperation realize their need and desire transformation.**

To those who are unwilling to admit their sin, He has nothing to say—except to pronounce judgment.

### **Chapter 6: He Opens Blind Eyes**

Those who argue against Lordship salvation have a tendency to identify the object of faith as a basic set of biblical facts. To them, the gospel is largely an academic issue, doctrinal data about Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Trusting those things alone constitutes saving faith, or so they say. Everything else is peripheral to them. **Any talk of obedience, submission, or Jesus' right to rule is refuted as adding to the gospel.**

So informing an unbeliever that the Savior has the right to be sovereign over his or her life is challenged as extra doctrine added to the gospel.... I reject that.

A cultist who denies the deity of Christ could wholeheartedly affirm the truths shared in Scripture, (see 1 Corinthians 15:3–4), but that does not make the person a true believer. **Anyone who rejects the Savior's right to be sovereign, is an unbeliever, no matter what other points of doctrine he or she might accept.**

**True faith embraces not only the data of the gospel, but the person of Christ as well.**

True faith comprehends not merely the truth that Jesus died and rose again, but **also the corresponding implication**: that He did this to deliver us from our sins in order to be the sovereign Master of our lives—see Romans 14:9.

## The gospel is not a sterile set of facts.

**The gospel calls for more than the surrender of the mind, the gospel calls for the full surrender of the heart, soul, mind, and strength.** Read Mark 12:30.

The Gospel's work is not to make a theologian of a heathen, but to open the eyes of the spiritually blind.

The physical miracle:

The man in John 9 was born blind. There was no way for skeptics to dismiss this miracle. This man's blindness was a birth defect – such is the case with the sin of the human race.

We might expect the witnesses to this healing to say: “that settles it! This must be the Christ.” But they didn't. **They were locked into unbelief.** Instead, this incident became a turning point in the ministry of Christ. From here on, He began to withdraw from the Jewish crowds and their unbelieving leaders. Instead, He turned his attention to the Gentiles.

Note carefully the setting in which the miracle took place. At the end of John 8, Jesus was engaged in a toe to toe confrontation with the religious leaders, where He made a dramatic proclamation of his deity: **“before Abraham was born, I AM”.** The next verse says the Jews were so angry that they tried to stone him...

John 9 picks up the narrative just as Jesus left the Temple. **Although our Lord's life was in danger, Jesus stopped to deal with this blind man.** The man was a beggar. Yet he did not initiate contact with Jesus. He did not ask Jesus to heal him.

Instead, God's grace had chosen him to receive a miracle.

The disciples raised an interesting theological question: “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” Those were the only 2 options they could see. That was standard teaching in their time. The common assumption was that suffering and illness were always traceable to an individual specific sin.



Jesus simply answered: "Neither." Jesus said, it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.

## **The blind man was a miracle waiting to happen!**

Without even speaking to him, Jesus spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes. Notice, we cannot attribute any special significance to the method Jesus used to heal this man. Jesus told him simply, go, washing the pool.

## **The blind man responded with unquestioning obedience.**

Through his act of obedience, God opened the man's physical eyes. Thus the man began a pattern of response to Christ that would culminate in his seeing spiritually.

The Inquisition:

**The miracle stirred up an extraordinary furor.** The people were perplexed. This was very hard to believe! No one had ever witnessed a miracle like this.

Noticed the man's theological naïveté. The crowd wanted an explanation, but all he could provide was a reciting of the events. He was unsure of who Jesus was, did not know where he was, and had no logical theological explanation for what had happened to him.

**Suddenly the story turns nasty.** When the blind man told the Pharisees, they were indignant.

## **Jesus had violated their Sabbath tradition.**

It makes a pathetic picture - legalistic, unbelieving zealots, groping around trying to investigate a miracle without the capacity to see or believe it.

**What a contrast!** The beggar, void of any theological explanation or rationale for what had happened, simply rejoiced in what Jesus had done.

The Pharisees, **fat with theological information, wanted only to deny what had obviously happened, because they could not harmonize it with their predetermined system.** Frantic in their passion to disprove the validity of the miracle, the Pharisees sought out the man's parents. The parents dodged the question. They were afraid of the Pharisees, who had threatened to put anyone out of the synagogue who affirmed that Jesus was the Christ. Excommunication was a terrible thing. The synagogue was the center of the Jewish community. Those who were excommunicated became total outcasts. And when they died, they were given no funeral.

**These Pharisees were militant unbelievers.**

Still, exposed to all the evidence, unbelief always remains resolute. **Their minds were made up, and they were not going to be confused by the facts.**

The blind man's second response was a bit sarcastic: "...*Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, though I was blind, now I see!*"

And what response did the Pharisees have for that? None. **It is hard to argue against the simplicity of the obvious.**

The calm, simple, response of the blind man vanquished their attack. Clearly, he was in control of this debate. As the Pharisees became more and more antagonistic, he became more and more convinced that Jesus was from God!

**The more they challenged him, the clearer his testimony became.**

Finally, when the Pharisees had no more to say, they turned to mockery and put him out. That means they threw him out of the building and excommunicated him from the synagogue.

Thus, **this once blind beggar became the 1st person recorded in Scripture to be put out of the synagogue for Christ's sake.** This incident began the breach that finally resulted in the separation of the church and Israel.

The Pharisees Inquisition was over. Their unbelief was hardened, vicious, and determined.

Meanwhile, the beggar's faith was still incomplete.

**Notice, he had responded positively to Christ, even defended him against the Pharisees. But he was as of yet unregenerate.**

His physical eyes were healed,  
but his spiritual blindness still needed to be removed.

The spiritual miracle:

When Jesus heard that the man had been put out of the synagogue, he sought him out. Again, the Lord made the overture; the beggar did not come looking for him.

This episode illustrates perfectly the working of divine sovereignty.  
Salvation always results because God first pursues sinners.

In **John 15:16**, Jesus said to his disciples: “*you do not choose Me, but I choose you, and appointed you.*” **Luke 19:10** says: “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

## Christ is always the seeking Savior.

His divine initiative made redemption possible, it is through his initiative that individuals are sought out and saved.

**No one seeks God unless God has first sought that person** (Romans 3:11).

## A blind man has no capacity to give himself sight.

Here is an important point. The blind man did not gain his sight because he was exposed to the light.

**No amount of light effects blindness.**

## Teaching theology to a heathen will not bring him to faith in Christ.

He may learn the church vocabulary and verbally affirm the truth. He may even intellectually accept a list of gospel facts. But without a divine miracle to open his blind eyes and give him a new heart, **he will only be a theologically informed pagan, not a Christian.**

If, on the other hand, salvation is truly a work of God, it cannot be deficient. It cannot fail to impact an individual's behavior. **It cannot leave his desires unchanged or his conduct on altered.**

## Salvation cannot result in a fruitless life.

Obviously God had begun to work in this blind man's heart. **He stood up for Christ before the Pharisees and paid a great price for it.** Though he did not yet know the fullness of who Christ was, he was totally committed to him.

Christ asked him, do you believe in the Son of Man? The beggar was willing and responsive. His heart was completely open: “Who is he Lord, the blind man asked, that I may believe in him?” His confidence in Jesus was such that he would have responded immediately to anyone Jesus pointed out as the Son of Man. Now **contrast his attitude with that of the Pharisees, who thought they knew it all.**

The Pharisees were learned but their hearts were blinded  
by willful unbelief.

**Faith is the necessary complement to the sovereignty of God.**

**Though divine initiative is ultimately responsible for redemption, there will still be on our part the submissive response of personal faith in Jesus Christ.**

This blind man's simple response of faith is instructive. He said in verse 37 & 38: *"Lord, I believe."* **He did not hesitate. He did not ask for proof.** Christ had given sight to his spiritual eyes. And the moment they were open, he saw Christ and responded to him in faith.

**Like the physical healing, this was a divine miracle.**

**When someone understands the truth about Christ,  
it is always a divine miracle.**

When Christ opens the eyes of a soul, suddenly truth becomes recognizable. Spiritual sight is a gift from God that makes one willing and able to believe.

Verse 38 says: *"...the man worshiped Jesus."* He fell on his knees right there and worshiped. It is a beautiful climax to the story. It was not a question of making Christ is Lord; **when the scales fell off his spiritual eyes, he saw Jesus for who He really was, and the only possible response was to sink to his knees.**

It is a tragic thing to be spiritually blind, but it is more tragic still to be blind and not know it. These Pharisees thought they could see. After all, in terms of theological knowledge, they were far beyond this beggar. But unlike him, **they had never had the blindness removed from their spiritual eyes.**

They knew doctrine, but they could not recognize the Messiah.

The result of spiritual sight is a surrendered, worshiping heart.

**The result of spiritual blindness is more blindness, more sin, and ultimately certain doom.**

**The only hope for those lost in the darkness of spiritual blindness is a miracle of God to open their eyes.** That is what God does through his Spirit in salvation—1st Corinthians 2:9–10.

Those who would be saved do not require in-depth theological instruction to know that Christ is Lord and that they should obey him; the truth becomes self-evident when their spiritual blindness is removed.

**Salvation is a supernatural, divine transformation.**

The believing person will see Christ for who He is – sovereign Lord of all – and that revelation will inevitably provoke worship, adoration, and a heart that desires to do the will of God.

None of that is the result of theological tutoring; it is the work of God's Holy Spirit in the heart of the redeemed.

## Chapter 7: Key Challenges & An Eager Seeker

Many years ago a man surprised me by asking: “Do you know how I could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?” I said: “Yes, you simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior.” I explained that Jesus had died and risen again so that we might have eternal life. I told him all he needed to do was receive Christ as his personal Savior. He said, I'd like to do that. So I led him in a prayer and he asked the Lord to be his Savior. Later that month I baptized him. I was eager to follow up and disciple him. After a short time, however, he broke off contact with me. Sometime later I discovered that he had no continuing interest in the things of Christ.

What happened? Why is the above such a common experience?

**It is relatively easy to get people to profess faith.** Getting them to follow the Lord is a much more frustrating experience. All of us have known converts who never really follow the Lord. Why?

I really did not understand until I studied the count of **the rich young ruler in Matthew 19**. If there was ever a place to look for **a straightforward presentation of the Gospel according to Jesus**, we would expect it here.

What we find is a startling discourse: (Read Matthew 19:16-22).

If we could condense the truth of this entire passage into a single statement, it would be **Luke 14:33** – “*so therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.*”

Our Lord gave this young man a test. He had to choose between his possessions and Jesus Christ.

### **He failed the test.**

**He failed the test because he was unwilling to turn from what else he loved most, he could not be a disciple of Christ.**

Salvation is only for those more willing to give Christ first place in their lives.

**The issue here was clearly this man's salvation, not some higher level of discipleship.**

**Much of the work in evangelism is getting people to come to the point where they sense their need for salvation.**

**This young man was the perfect evangelistic target.** He was ready to sign the card, raise his hand, walk the aisle, or what ever. There was no need to explain to him how we know God exists, why we can trust the Bible, or why he should be concerned about eternity. **He appeared ready. To the human eye, he looked right. He was eager.**

There was no way he would get away without receiving eternal life. **But he did.**

**He left without life,** not because he heard the wrong message, not even because he didn't believe, but because he was unwilling to forsake what he loved most in this world and commit himself to Christ as Lord.

**Instead of taking him from where he was and getting him to make a decision, Jesus had laid out terms that were unacceptable to him.**

In a sense, Jesus drove him away.

Jesus would have failed personal evangelism in most churches,  
Bible college or seminaries!

**Jesus began by preaching law and didn't even mention faith or the facts of redemption.** He didn't challenge the man to believe. He failed to get closure. He didn't draw the net. After all, when a person comes along saying he wants eternal life, you can't let him get away, right? Wrong!

**Modern evangelism is preoccupied with decisions, statistics, gimmicks, emotional manipulation, and even intimidation.**

Modern evangelism's message is one of easy-believism and simplistic appeals. Unbelievers are told that if they invite Jesus into their hearts, except Him has their personal savior, or believe the facts of the gospel, that is all there is to it.

The aftermath is appalling failure.

**The appalling failure is seen in the lives of millions who have professed faith in Christ with no consequent impact on their behavior.**

Many people are deluded into believing they are saved when they are not.

He had the right motive:

This man came seeking eternal life. **He knew what he wanted, and he knew he didn't have it.** Nothing was wrong with his motivation. It is good to desire eternal life.

Note: the Greek word for “ruler” in this passage most likely means that he was a ruler of the synagogue. **It appears he was a Jewish legislator—devout, honest, young, wealthy, prominent, highly respected, and influential.** He had everything.

He was a man undoubtedly in turmoil. **All his religion and wealth had not given him confidence, peace, joy, or settled hope.**

He felt the absence of assurance in his heart.

He came up on the basis of a deeply felt need. He knew what was missing: **eternal life.**

Biblically, eternal life speaks not only of the promise of life in the ages to come, but also of the quality of life that is characteristic of the redeemed.

**It signifies quality as much as quantity – John 17:3.**

**Eternal life is being alive to the realm where God dwells.**

The rich young ruler knew that he did not walk with God.

He was not experiencing God's love, rest, peace, hope, joy, or security. **In this, the young man was very perceptive.** Spiritually, he had gone far beyond the Pharisees, who were content with their own show.

This man was not content.

He knew he was missing eternal life, and he wanted to have it. No one can fault his motivation in approaching Christ.

He had the right attitude:

**His attitude was commendable as well.** He was not pompous or presumptuous. Many people know they do not have eternal life, but they also feel no need for it.

Not this young man. He was desperate. One can feel the urgency in his question. Mark 10:17 says the man came running. He also came publicly.

**He was bold enough to confess publicly and openly that he did not possess eternal life.**

For a man in his position to ask such a question took tremendous courage. He had a lot to lose by openly admitting that he lacked the eternal life.

Mark also tells us that this rich young ruler fell at Jesus' feet. He wanted eternal life so badly that he risked losing face with all those who looked to him as a spiritual giant already.

**He had been religious all his life, yet something was missing. This is the cry of a heart in deep need.**

What are we to make of the young man's claim that he had kept all of the law? Of course he exaggerated, but apparently he did live an exemplary life outwardly.

He was a moral man... Not a “gross” sinner

If he had been in a contemporary evangelistic service, he would have been deemed to be ready. He was enthusiastically in pursuit of eternal life, and he seemed to have the right attitude.

**What an opportunity!** This fellow was eager, he was young, rich, intelligent, and influential. “Think what he could do for the Lord!” No evangelist worth his salt would muff an opportunity like this.

He came to the right source:

He was in the right place to be pursuing what he wanted.

Some people look in the most bizarre places for eternal life. **Satan is a master counterfeiter** when it comes to false assurance. **Most people never find eternal life because they spend their entire lives looking in the wrong places.**

He asked the right question:

He had been raised in the Pharisee tradition. **He was trained to think of religion as a system to earn divine favor.** Still he asked a simple, honest question in search of the truth: *“What good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”*

**After all, there is something we have to do to inherit eternal life: we have to believe.**

Jesus' answer to this young man seems preposterous: *“If you wish to enter into life, keep the Commandments.”* **Our Lord revealed nothing of himself or the facts of the gospel. He did not invite the man to believe. He did not ask for a decision.**

Instead, Jesus erected a wall in front of him.

He was filled with pride:

**Jesus knew the young ruler was utterly lacking a sense of his own sinfulness.**



His desire for salvation was based on an emptiness in his soul, with the desire to attain joy. While good desires, they did not constitute a valid reason for committing oneself to Christ.

**Contemporary evangelism is woefully deficient when it comes to confronting people with the reality of their sin.**

Present day Christians find a person's psychological needs, then offered Jesus as a panacea for whatever the problem is.

It is very easy to get a response, because people are looking for quick solutions to their felt needs.

**That is not legitimate evangelism.**

**Our Lord offered no relief for the rich young ruler's felt need. Instead, his answer confronted the ruler with the fact that he was a living offense to God.**

It was imperative that he perceived his sinfulness.

Recognition of personal sin is a necessary element in understanding the truth of salvation.

One cannot come to Jesus Christ for salvation only on the basis of psychological needs, anxieties, lack of peace, a sense of hopelessness, and absence of joy, or a yearning for happiness.

**Salvation is for people who hate their sin and want to turn away from the things of this life.**

**Salvation is for those who want to live for God's glory.**

Jesus took the focus off the man's felt needs and put it back on God: "there is only one who is good." Then Jesus slammed him up against the divine standard so that he would see how far he fell short. But the young man ignored and rejected the point.

**He was utterly unwilling to confess his own sinfulness.**

**Evangelism must take the sinner and measure him against the perfect law so he can see his insufficiency.**

A gospel that deals only with human needs, lacks biblical balance.

**That is why churches are full of people whose lives are essentially unchanged after their supposed conversion. Most of these people, I am convinced, are unregenerate and grievously misled.**

In Romans, Paul spends 3 chapters declaring the sinfulness of humanity before he begins to discuss the way of salvation.

**Law always precedes grace:** it is the tutor that leads us to Christ—Galatians 3:24.

Without the law, grace is meaningless.

We need to adjust our presentation of the gospel. We cannot dismiss the fact that God hates sin and punishes sinners with eternal torment.

**How can we begin a gospel presentation by telling people on their way to hell that God has a wonderful plan for their lives?**

**Psalm 7:11** tells us: God is angry with the wicked every day.

A righteous, holy God cannot tolerate evil. He will not save those who try to come to him harboring sin.

**We have no business preaching grace to people who do not understand the implications of God's law.**

It is meaningless to expound on grace to someone who does not know the divine demand for righteousness.

**Those who do not sense their own guilt cannot possibly comprehend God's mercy.**

You cannot preach a gospel of grace to someone who has not heard that God requires obedience and punishes disobedience...

He did not confess his guilt:

Scripture says, the young man said to Jesus: *"All these things I have; what am I still lacking?"*

That statement indicates how he perceived the law. The man could not escape the demands of the divine standard. **He could not have been telling the truth—if he was not lying, he was certainly deluded.**

The Pharisees were custom to externalizing the law, **but they never dealt with the heart.** Jesus, on the other hand, taught that hatred was the moral equivalent of murder. **The young ruler had missed the significance of Christ's teaching.** He was saying, in effect, I don't have any real sin.

## Self-righteous religion is deceiving.

**This man actually believed he was righteous. He had no idea how far he had fallen short.**

There was no way this man could be saved... all he clung to was his self-righteous attitude.

Salvation is not for people who want an emotional lift, but for sinners who come to God for forgiveness.

**Those who are not ashamed of their sin cannot receive salvation.**

At this point, **Mark 10:21** tells us, Jesus felt a love for him.

What a pathetic picture. This young man was sincere. His spiritual quest was genuine. He was an honestly religious person. And Jesus loved him. Our Lord was about to die for sinners like him.

## **The Lord Jesus does not take sinners on their own terms.**

As much as Jesus loved this young man, he nevertheless did not grant him eternal life upon request.

He would not submit to Christ

Finally, **Jesus gave him the ultimate test:** *“if you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”*

## **Jesus challenged his claim.**

In effect, Christ told the young man, you say you love your neighbor as yourself. Okay, give him everything you've got.

The ultimate test was whether this man would obey the Lord.

Jesus was saying, here is the test of true faith: are you willing to do what I want you to do? Or do you want to run your life? **Knowing where his heart was, Jesus said, unless I can be the highest authority in your life, there is no salvation for you.**

Do we literally have to give away everything we own to become Christians? No, but we do have to truly give Christ first place – Colossians 3:18. We must be willing to forsake all for him – Luke 14:33.

We must not cling to anything that takes precedence over Christ.

The true believer will desire to do what ever God commands.

Jesus' request of this man was simply to establish whether he was willing to submit to the sovereignty of Jesus over his life. **The Lord was making a frontal attack on the man's weakness—the sin of covetousness and materialism.**

**The rich young ruler failed the test.** He was not willing to acknowledge Jesus as Lord over his life. He went away grieved. His possessions were more important to him than Christ. In other words the man remained in unbelief.

**Contrast this man's response with that of Zaccheus in Luke 19**, where we met a man with a deep sense of sorrow for his sin. **He was willing to do anything—including getting rid of all his wealth—to come to Jesus Christ on the Lords terms.** And the message Jesus gave Zach was, today salvation has come to this house, *“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”* – Luke 19:9–10.

**Proverbs 13:7** says, there is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing; another pretends to be poor, but has great wealth. **This young man thought he was rich, but he walked away from Jesus with absolutely nothing.**

People with genuine faith do not refuse to acknowledge their sinfulness.

People with genuine faith do not reject the Lordship of Christ.

People with genuine faith desire Christ more than the things of this world.

Saving faith does not recoil on the demand to forsake sin and self and follow Jesus Christ at all costs. Those who find his terms unacceptable cannot come at all.

## **Jesus will not barter away his right to be Lord.**

I do not believe a person coming to Christ must understand fully all the implications of sin, repentance, or the Lordship of Christ. Even the seasoned believer will not know all these in their full depth. Because we are sinful creatures, we can never understand or obey his Lordship perfectly. **But a person must have a willingness to obey.**

Furthermore, repentance and submission are no more human works than faith itself.

A message that does not require a turning from sin and an affirmation of the Lordship of Christ is a false gospel that will not save.

**If we learned anything from the account of the rich young ruler, it is the truth that although salvation is a blessed gift from God, Christ will not give it to one whose hands are filled with other things.**

## **Chapter 8: He Seeks and Saves the Lost**

There is no more glorious truth in the Bible than the words of Luke 19:10 which tell us, the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

That verse sums up the work of Christ on earth.

Search and Rescue:

**The nature of God is to seek and to save sinners.**

From the opening pages of human history, it was God who sought the fallen couple in the garden. In **Ezekiel 34:16** God says, *“I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick.”*

Jesus entered this world on a search and rescue mission for sinners.

**That truth is what characterizes the gospel as good news.**

But it is good news only for those who perceive themselves as sinners. **Those who will not acknowledge and repent of their sin are beyond the reach of saving grace.** For those who are willing to admit their depravity, Jesus becomes their friend—Matthew 11:19. For those who will not admit to their depravity, they will know Jesus only as Judge—Matthew 7:22.

**Humble repentance is the only acceptable response to the Gospel according to Jesus.**

Those who fail to confess their sin—like the rich young ruler—get turned away. But **Jesus reaches out in grace to those who admit their sinfulness and seek deliverance.**

The worse the sinner, the more marvelously God's grace and glory are revealed through that sinner's redemption.

Multitudes of repentant sinners responded during Jesus' earthly ministry. The Pharisees worst complaint about Christ's ministry was, *“this man receives sinners, & eats with them”*—Luke 15:2.

The Pharisees set themselves in contrast to Christ and were condemned by their own comparison.

**They had no heart for the outcast, no love for the sinner, no compassion for the lost.**

**Worse, they had no sense of their own sinfulness.**

The Setting for a Miracle:

Zaccheus was a tax gatherer whose heart was divinely prepared to receive and follow Christ. Still, he was despised by the whole community. Luke 19:7 says that everyone called him a sinner. This designation probably meant that his personal character was debauched as well.

**The Lord Jesus had a special love for tax collectors.**

Luke especially focuses on the numerous times Jesus encountered tax collectors. Luke's theme is the love of the Savior for the lost. He repeatedly portrays Jesus reaching out to the riff raff of society. Notice, every time Luke mentions a tax collector, it is in a positive sense. These were the outcasts of a religious society—flagrant public sinners—the very kind Jesus had come to save.

If Jesus had not first seen Zach, he never would have come. **Sinners never seek God on their own—Romans 3:11.** In our natural, fallen state we are dead in trespasses and sins—Ephesians 2:1. Thus, we are totally unable and unwilling to seek God. **Only when we are touched by the convicting power of God do we move toward him—John 6:44, 65.**

Thus, it is not until God begins to pursue a soul that the soul responds by seeking him.

**Whenever someone seeks God, it is a response to the prompting of a seeking God.**

**We would not love him if he had not 1st loved us—1st John 4:19.**

Nevertheless, God invites sinners to seek. Read Isaiah 55:6; Jeremiah 29:13; Amos 5:4; Matthew 6:33; and Matthew 7:7.

Here was a man that was hated, whose hands were filled with money he had taken at the expense of poor people. He was a man with tremendous guilt. Yet **he desperately wanted to see Jesus.** On this day, **he was not even concerned with his dignity.** He was so determined to see Jesus that he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed up into a sycamore tree to await the Savior. It was not a dignified place, but **this tax collector only wanted to see Jesus.**

## The Seeking Savior:

What happened next must have staggered Zach. Although Jesus had never met him before, he stopped and said, Zach, hurry and come down, for today I am to stay at your house—Luke 19:5. That is known as *the direct approach to evangelism!*

Nothing about Jesus' approach was subtle.

Zach wanted to see Jesus, but he had no idea Jesus wanted to see him.

We might suppose that such a despicable sinner would be distressed to hear the perfect, sinless son of God say, I'm coming to your house, but this tax collector was glad.

## His heart was prepared.

The reaction of the crowd was predictable. They all began to grumble. They believed that to eat with someone like Zach, was the worst possible defilement.

The crowd placed no value on Zach's soul. Jesus did.

The crowd had no concern for his spiritual welfare. Their self-righteous eyes could see only his sin.

Jesus had come to seek and to save sinners, exactly what the crowd condemned him for. In doing so, they condemned themselves.

We are not told what happened at Zach's house. Nor do we know what Jesus said to Zach in bringing him to salvation. The methodology Jesus used is not the point.

Conversion is a Divine Miracle.

**There are no formulas that can bring salvation about or explain it. There is no 4 or 5 step plan of salvation or any prefabricated prayer that can guarantee the salvation of the soul.**

We can assume that Jesus dealt with the issue of Zach's sin. Whatever he said, Jesus found in Zach and open heart.

## The Fruit of Salvation

Notice that Zach addressed Jesus as Lord. In verse 9, Jesus said Zach was saved. If so, he must have acknowledged Jesus as Lord God, confessing him as his own sovereign master.

Here is a radically changed man.

**Deciding to give half his possessions away was evidence that his heart was transformed.**

## The taker had become the giver.

It was not so much that his heart had changed towards people, although that surely had happened. But **first his heart had changed toward God**. Now he wanted to obey God by doing what was just and righteous.

**There is something in the heart of every newborn believer that wants to obey.** It is a heart of eager, generous obedience, a changed mind and change behavior.

**This is the purpose of salvation: to transform an individual completely.** Genuine saving faith changes behavior, transforms thinking, and puts within a person a new heart. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Notice the contrast between Zach, 2 Corinthians 5:17, & the contemporary movement who's people claim to be born again but whose lives challenge everything Christ stands for.

In Luke 3, John the Baptist rebuked the multitudes who came to be baptized: “...bring forth fruits in keeping with your repentance”—v. 8. **This is a striking picture**—a prophet of God, chiding those who have responded positively to his ministry, calling them a brood of vipers.

## We might do well to imitate John the Baptist's example.

**Contemporary Christianity often accepts a shallow repentance that bears no fruit.**

The conversion of Zach argues against any such superficial response. His instant and dramatic transformation is the expected result of true faith.

When a soul is redeemed, Christ gives a new heart. Implicit in that change of heart is a new set of desires—a desire to please God, to obey, and to reflect his high righteousness.

If such a change does not occur, there is no reason to think genuine salvation has taken place.

## Chapter 9: He Condemns a Hardened Heart

Some people say, if only committed people are saved people, then where is there room for carnal Christians? The contemporary church's eagerness to accommodate so-called carnal Christians has driven them to define the terms of salvation so loosely that virtually every profession of faith in Christ is regarded as the real thing. Anyone who says he has accepted Christ is enthusiastically received as a Christian, even if... a persistent pattern of disobedience, sin, or hostile unbelief.



Such a person will thus become an *“unbelieving believer.”*

**No one who denies God should be deceived into thinking that because he or she once professed faith in Christ, he or she is eternally secure—Matthew 10:33.**

The point is not that God guarantees heaven to everyone who professes faith in Christ, but rather, that those whose faith is genuine will never totally or finally fall away from Christ.

Even if they fall into grievous sins or continue to sin for a time, they will never abandon the faith completely.

## **True believers will persevere.**

Professing Christians who turn against the Lord only prove that they were never truly saved. Read 1 John 2:19.

**No matter how convincing a person's testimony might seem, once that person becomes apostate, he or she demonstrates beyond question, that the testimony was hypocritical and the professed salvation was spurious.**

God will keep his own—Jude: 24.

**Judas is a prime example of a professing believer who fell into absolute apostasy. For 3 years he followed the Lord with the other disciples.**

### **Judas “*appeared*” to be one of them.**

**Presumably he thought of himself as a believer.** It is doubtful that he joined Christ's band with the intention of turning against him.

Apparently Judas initially shared the hope of Christ's kingdom. He likely believed that Jesus was the Messiah. After all, he also had left everything to follow the Lord. **In modern terminology, he had “accepted “ Jesus.**

For 3 years, day in and day out, he occupied himself with Jesus Christ. In all that time, no one ever questioned his faith. He had the same status as the other disciples.

**No one ever suspected that Judas would betray Christ.**

Yet while the others were growing into apostles, Judas was quietly becoming a vile, calculating tool of Satan.

He became the treacherous man who sold the Savior for a fistful of coins...

Don't miss **John 13:27**. In the end, Judas was so prepared to do Satan's bidding that **the devil himself possessed Judas**.

Judas was so skilled at hypocrisy that he stayed on the inside right up to the very end. He was there in the upper room, seated next to Jesus.

Judas even let the Savior wash his feet...

Jesus washed his feet after Judas had made his bargain to betray Christ. And Jesus knew it all the time. **See John 13:18.**

Why, you might ask, did the Lord choose Judas? To fulfill Scripture. Jesus was quoting Psalm 41:9. Another song that prophesied about Judas is 55:12–14.

**Judas was as close as anyone could get to the Savior but as far from salvation as it is possible to be.**

Judas and his life of treachery stand as a solemn warning to anyone who casually professes faith in Christ. We learn from his story that it is not enough to be close to Jesus Christ.

A person may "accept" Jesus and still fall short.

**The individual who responds positively but not wholeheartedly risks being lost forever.**

In the words of Psalm 55, one who is friendly to Jesus may yet turn against him and thus condemn himself. Judas is proof.

One of you will betray me... The hearts of the disciples must have raced when Jesus said one of them would betray him.

Who Is It?

**It is interesting that the disciples were perplexed. Apparently Jesus had treated Judas just the same as the other disciples. The disciples would have known if Jesus had treated Judas any differently. In fact, Judas was the treasurer of the group.**

The disciples all trusted him.

The Guest of Honor:

Jesus, in a gesture of love toward Judas, treated him as if Judas were the guest of honor. Jesus had already washed Judas's feet; now He treated him as an honored friend. **That should have broken Judas's heart, but it didn't. His heart was like granite.**

John 13:27... *"Satan then entered into him."*

## **There is an eternity in that verse.**

After flirting with evil while pretending to follow Christ, Satan now entered his heart and took full control. Judas was damned to hell by his own choice.

Do It Quickly:

**Jesus was through with Judas.**

All he wanted to do now is get him out of the room. When you read verse 27, it becomes clear that Judas was confirmed in his unbelief, and Jesus had no more to say to him...

Scripture says, *"now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose Jesus had said this to Judas."* The testimony of Judas had been so convincing, his hypocrisy so slick, that none of them yet realized he was capable of such treachery. Yet he was possessed by Satan himself.

## **How wrong appearances can be!**

**How deceiving is a carnal person's profession of faith!**

Into the Night:

*"Judas went out into the night"* – verse 30. It was the beginning of eternal night in his soul as well.

Judas, who had been privy to the greatest spiritual advantages afforded any man, had squandered that wonderful opportunity.

**Why?** Because his faith was never genuine.

**In the beginning, he had responded positively to Christ, but never with a heart of sincere, obedient faith. This same frightening potential exists for every person who comes to Christ without a committed heart.**

## Kiss of Death:

it is a bitter irony that Judas' final contact with Jesus was a kiss. **It was the kiss of death—not for Jesus, but for Judas.** In their culture, a kiss on the cheek was a sign of close affection, warm love, and intimacy. Such a gesture was reserved for the closest of friends. And so the kiss of Judas became the most despicable of all acts.

## They All Forsook Him and Fled:

The behavior of the rest of the disciples at this point raises the question of how they differed from Judas. Matthew 26:56 says, *“all the disciples left him and fled.”* Jesus had predicted this earlier see verse 31. **Peter even denied Christ 3 times, and sealed it with a curse. How did that act differ Judas' betrayal?**

Answer: for one thing, it was motivated differently. The disciples fled out of fear and in the pressure of the moment; Judas chose to betray Jesus through a calculated act. The disciples failed in the face of great trial; Judas chose treason and plotted a scheme against Christ. The disciples later turn from their sins and humbly accepted Christ's forgiveness; Judas was resolute in unbelief and hatred. **The disciple's denial was a lapse of normally faithful behavior; the sin of Judas was manifest out of an utterly depraved soul.**

The mark of a true disciple is not that he never sins, but rather that when he does sin he inevitably returns to the Lord to receive cleansing and forgiveness.

Unlike a false disciple, the true disciple will never turn away completely. When Christ confronts him, he will return to a life of service for the Savior.

## The Marks of a False Disciple:

### Judas illustrates false discipleship.

Note carefully the characteristics of his hypocrisy.

**1st, he loved temporal gain more than eternal riches.** He wanted glory; he wanted success; he wanted earthly treasures. It is typical of false disciples that they get on board with Jesus to get what they want, but when instead of delivering he makes demands on them, they turn away. **Such people reveal that they never had genuine faith to begin with.** They are like the seed that springs up in rocky soil. It grows well for a while, but when the sun comes out, it withers and dies—Matthew 13:20–21. They follow Christ for a season but eventually sell him for selfish desire, money, prestige, or power.

Second, **Judas was marked by deceit.** His show of faith was a masquerade.

**False disciples are masters of subtle deception.**

**3<sup>rd</sup> and lastly, Judas, and all false disciples, are in it for what they receive.** Some of them profess Christ because it is good for business or because they think trusting Christ will bring health, wealth, or prosperity. Like Judas, they love the world.

**Their halfhearted faith turns inevitably to hard-hearted unbelief.**

**I fear there are multitudes like Judas in the contemporary church.** They are friendly to Jesus. They look and talk like disciples. **But they are not committed to him and are therefore capable of the worst kind of betrayal.**

**A real disciple may fail Christ but will never turn against him.**

A true Christian might temporarily fear to stand up for the Lord but would never willingly sell him out. Inevitably, true disciples will falter, but when they fall into sin, they will seek cleansing. They won't wallow in the mire – 2 Peter 2: 22. **Their faith is neither fragile nor temporary; it is a dynamic and ever-growing commitment to the Savior.**

## **Chapter 10: He Offers A Yoke Of Rest**

Scripture never once exhorts sinners to "accept Christ." The popular appeal that asks people to make a decision for Christ; ask Jesus into your heart; try Jesus; accept Jesus as your personal savior; violates both the spirit and the terminology of the biblical summons to unbelievers.

**The gospel invitation is not an entreaty for sinners to allow the Savior into their lives. It is both an appeal and a command for them to repent and follow him. It demands not just passive acceptance of Christ but active submission to him as well.**

He will not respond to the beckoning of the heart that cherishes sin. He will not enter and sanctify a life of continued disobedience.

**The great miracle of redemption is not that we accept Christ,  
but that He accepts us.**

Salvation occurs when God changes the heart and the unbeliever turns from sin to Christ.

The Savior described in the New Testament is God in the flesh, challenging sinners to turn from their iniquity. Rather than waiting for an invitation, he issues his own—in the form of a command to repent and take on a yoke of submission. See **Matthew 11:25–30**.

**God is giving an invitation to salvation, not just an appeal for believers to move into a deeper experience of discipleship.**

The Savior emphasized that God himself is a determinative factor in salvation. We who witness for Christ are not ultimately responsible for how people respond to the gospel. **We are only responsible to preach it clearly and accurately, speaking the truth in love.** It is God who either reveals the truth or keeps it hidden, according to what is well pleasing in his sight. **His plan cannot be stymied.**

The gospel may offend, yet its message must not be made more palatable by watering down the content or softening the hard demands.

Although he had demonstrated irrefutably that he was the Messiah, a majority of the people were unresponsive. Yet Jesus never wavered. He continued to reach out to the unregenerate. He had come to seek and to save the lost. Negative circumstances never deterred him from that purpose.

**Jesus' offer of rest for the weary is a call to conversion.**

Christ's offer of rest is a synopsis of the Gospel according to Jesus. It outlines 5 essential elements of genuine conversion, all so inextricably linked that **it is impossible to eliminate any one of them from the biblical concept of saving faith.**

## Humility

Jesus prayed, *"You hid these things from the wise and intelligent and did not reveal them to the babes"* – Matthew 11:25. He was condemning people whose knowledge of spiritual truth is limited only to what they can discover what their own intelligence—those who are ultimately dependent on human wisdom. **Their sin is not their intellect, is their intellectual pride.**

This warning was especially applicable to the Pharisees, the rabbis, and describes. **Unaware that they were spiritually blind, they depended on human reason to interpret spiritual reality.**

Human intellect cannot understand or receive spiritual truth—1 Corinthians 2:9.

Jesus' point in Matthew 11 was not that God has withheld the truth from the intelligent people, but rather that those who rely on their own cleverness cut themselves off from the truth. **A childlike response is the antithesis of human wisdom and stubborn pride.** It requires the humility of one who has little human ability. One word best sums up the child – **dependent.**

Who can enter into salvation? **Those who, like children, are dependent, not independent. Those who are humble, not proud.** Those with true humility, the babes, have access to God and his truth.

The contrast between the wise and the childlike is actually a contrast between works and grace.

Less sophisticated people, deeply distressed over their own emptiness, humble and broken, were open to Jesus.

Pride says, I can do it on my own, I have my own resources. The “wise and prudent” who take that position are shut out from the kingdom.

## Revelation

A second essential element of conversion is revelation. Salvation comes to one who is childlike but only on the basis of revelation from God. **The only people who receive it are those who are sovereignly chosen.**

## Repentance

if you are troubled by the fact that God’s sovereign grace determines the recipients of saving revelation, note that those words are immediately followed by an all-inclusive invitation: *“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* – verse 28 area

God is sovereign in election, but he issues an open invitation.

We must affirm both truths, despite the difficulty in harmonizing them.

The word “*weary*” in Greek signifies labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion. As Jesus uses it here, it is a reference to the futility of attempting to please God through human effort. **It describes one weary of the search for truth, one who has despaired of trying to earn salvation.**

The term “*heavy laden*” brings to mind the pitiable image of someone working hard, with a heavy burden on his back that continually gets heavier. The legacy of the Pharisees and rabbis teaching was a whole nation of people utterly spent and desperately in need of relief from the crushing load of a sin laden, guilt ridden conscience.

**When Jesus says “Come to Me,” He demands a complete turnaround, a full change of direction.** The invitation is for people who know they have no answers.

Overpowered and overburdened by sin, they have failed to gain entry into the kingdom through self-effort.

In verses 20–24, **Jesus blasted in fury those who refused to repent.** Moments later, he invited those who were weary of their sin and their self-righteousness, their works based religion, to turn to him and lay down the load they were carrying.

## Faith

**Another essential element of genuine conversion is faith.** *“Come to me,”* is tantamount to saying, believe in me. **To come to Jesus is to believe in Jesus.**

Faith is the flipside of repentance.

**Repentance speaks of turning from sin. Faith is turning to the Savior.**

In desperation the soul turns from sin and embraces Christ. It is not an intellectual exercise.

## Submission

The call to surrender to the Lordship of Christ is part and parcel of his invitation to salvation. Those unwilling to take on his yoke cannot enter into the saving rest He offers.

In ancient writings, a pupil who submitted himself to a teacher was said to take the teachers yoke. “Pupil” also implies obedience. **The imagery of the yoke argues against the notion that one can take Jesus as Savior and not as Lord.** True salvation occurs when a sinner, in desperation, turns from his sin to Christ with a willingness to have Him take control.

If coldhearted disobedience and deliberate rebellion continue unabated, there is good reason to doubt the reality of a person's faith.

**Obedience under his yoke is a joy.** It is when we disobey that the yoke chafes our neck.

The yoke of submission to Christ means liberation from the guilt and burden of sin. The yoke of submission to Christ equals rest for your souls.

**His yoke was easy, but for hypocritical, rebellious, stubborn, sin laden hearts, the demand to come to him was too much.** These people loved the darkness of their sin more than the brightness of his glory. By their unbelieving rejection of his Lordship, they damned themselves.



## Part 3: Jesus Illustrates His Gospel

### Chapter 11: The Soils

**Jesus' invitation**, "*Come to Me, take my yoke upon you, and you shall find rest*" – Matt. 11:28–30; **signaled the end of one phase of his public teaching ministry**. From that day on, the tenor of Jesus' ministry changed. **Now the call he issued was for individuals to surrender in faith to the yoke of his Lordship.**

Even the style of Jesus' teaching changed. **Beginning that very day he taught in parables.**

The parables described the nature of God's rule...

The kingdom—God's rule over the earth and in the hearts of people—exists now in mystery form. Christ does not exercise his full divine will as king over all the earth, though he is ultimately sovereign. He rules as King only among those who believe.

**As always, Jesus was preoccupied with seeking and saving the lost.** In their culture, agriculture was the heart of Jewish life. Everyone understood the sowing of seeds in the process of growing crops. Hence, Jesus told a parable in which seed would fall on 4 kinds of soil.

#### The Wayside Soil:

First was the hard-packed dirt of the road bordering the field. See Matthew 13:4

The method of sewing by broadcasting caused some of the seed to fall on the paths. **The soil of the path would be beaten hard, packed down, uncultivated, never turned over or loosened. The soil on these paths would be as hard as stone. Seed could not penetrate this ground.** It would lie there until the hovering birds ate it. What they did not eat, Luke 8:5 says, was trampled.

#### The Shallow Soil:

Matthew 13:5 says: "*and others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; immediately they sprung up, but when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.*"

In Israel, in places, the rock bed lies only inches beneath the topsoil. As seed fell on these shallow places and begin to germinate, the descending roots would soon reach rock and have nowhere to go. **The young plants would generate tremendous foliage, making them more spectacular than the surrounding crop. But when the sun came out, those plants would be the 1st to die because their roots could not go deep for moisture.**

### The Weedy Soil:

Matthew 13:7 says: *“and others fell among the thorns, & the thorns came up & choked them out.”*

**Weeds that are indigenous to an area always have an advantage over cultivated crops.**

**The weeds are where they flourished naturally, the planted crop is a foreign element that needs cultivation and care. The weeds grow faster.** The weeds have stronger roots and are able to soak up most of the moisture.

### The Good Soil:

Matthew 13:8 describes the good soil: *“and others fell on good soil, and yielded a crop, some 100 fold, some 60, and some 30.”* **This soil is soft, deep, clean, healthy soil.**

Here the seed bursts into life and brings forth a tremendous harvest.

### The Parable:

On the face of it, the story of the sower and the seed is simple. The disciples must have realized that this simple story about planting and harvesting grain concealed some rich spiritual truth. They came to Jesus when he was alone with them and asked him to explain the parable.

Note the bridge... *“he who has ears, let him hear”* in 13:9, connecting to *“...Blessed are your ears, because they hear;”* in verse 16. Notice as well that Jesus says: *“many prophets and religious men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*

### The Seed and the Sower:

**The seed he spoke of was not literal seed, but rather the gospel.** The seed is the message about the King and his kingdom. The seed is the Word of God. Thus **the sower is anyone who plants the seed of the gospel by the Word of God** (cf. 1 Peter 1:23).

**The prototype of all sowers is the Lord himself.**

**Seed cannot be created; it is only reproduced.**

God does not call on us to create our own seed, or message.

**His Word is the only good seed.**

There is no such thing as evangelism apart from God's Word.

### The Condition of the Soil:

The point is not that something is wrong with the sower. Nothing is wrong with the seed.

**Nothing is fundamentally wrong with the composition of the soil. The problem is the condition of the soil.**

### The Soil Illustrates the Human Heart:

**In their essential makeup, all the soils in the parable are the same.**

The difference in the soils has to do with how they have been conditioned. All the soils could receive the seed, if they were properly prepared.

**But soil that is not properly prepared will never bear a crop.**

It is the same with human hearts. **A person's response to the gospel depends primarily on the preparation of his or her heart.** A heart not properly prepared will never bear spiritual fruit.

### The Unresponsive Heart:

**The soil by the wayside pictures a hardened, unresponsive person.** This is the hard-hearted individual—see Proverbs 29:1. This person is unresponsive, indifferent, negligent, and often hostile. **Luke 18:12** makes the meaning indisputable; **these are unsaved people: the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart,** so that they may not believe and be saved.

**The human heart can be so pounded and beaten down with the traffic of sin that it becomes completely insensitive to the gospel.** This heart knows no repentance... no concern for the things of God. ...he does not want to be bothered with a gospel invitation.

Many people have hearts like that. You can shower them with seed, but it just lies there. It does not stay very long before Satan comes and takes it away completely.

Dry, hard soil does not necessarily signify someone who is anti-religious. They are very close to the truth, very close to the good soil.

### The Superficial Heart:

**The shallow soil pictures the response of a superficial, impetuous heart.** Matthew 13:20–21 tells us: *“and the one on whom seed was sown on rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, he immediately falls away.”*

**This heart is enthusiastic but shallow. It responds positively but not with saving faith.**

**This shallow heart is quick, emotional, without any understanding of the actual significance of discipleship. That is not genuine faith.**

The superficial response is epidemic in 21st century Christianity. Why? Because the gospel is usually presented with the promise of a good feeling, but without the hard demand to take up one's cross and follow Christ.

**Converts are not confronted with the real issues of sin and repentance. The initial enthusiasm is mere emotion; the germinating seed quickly dies. These people are not saved – see 1 John 2:19.**

**Shallow responders constitute one of the greatest disappointments of the ministry.**

On the surface, their faith looks encouraging. In fact, you might think these people stand taller and stronger than everyone else. But **they have no root to support such lush growth** and as soon as a trial or persecution comes, they dry up and wither away.

**Be on guard against conversions that are all smiles and cheers with no sense of repentance or humility. That is the mark of a superficial heart.**

**If a profession of faith in Christ does not grow out of a deep sense of loss; if it is not accompanied by an inner conviction of sin; if it does not include a tremendous desire for the Lord to cleanse and purify and lead; if it does not involve a willingness to deny self, to sacrifice, and to suffer for Christ sake, then it is without a proper root.**

### The Worldly Heart

**Weedy soil represents a heart preoccupied with worldly matters.** Matthew 13:22 says, *“the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”* That is a **perfect description of a worldly person—one who lives for the things of this world. He or she is consumed with the cares of this age.**

**For a while, they come to church, identify with the people of God, even show signs of growth. But they never bear spiritual fruit. They are uncommitted and preoccupied with the world's pleasures.**

**They say that they are Christians, but they care nothing about a pure life.** That is the response of weedy soil.

What happens when the seed that once looked so promising is choked out? Has such a person lost their salvation? No. Such a person never had salvation. Weedy hearts may be willing to accept Jesus as Savior, but not if it means letting go of the world. That is not salvation. John wrote in 1 John 2:15, ***“if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”***

## The Enemies

**The weeds, the sun, and the birds of this parable represents our enemies.** The weeds are the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches—Matthew 13:22. The sun that scorches is affliction and persecution which challenges the comfort that appeals to so much of the flesh—verse 6 and 21. The birds portray the evil one, Satan, who does everything he can to steal the seed of the gospel even before it can germinate.

**These are the 3 constant enemies of the gospel: the world, the flesh, and the devil.**

An important lesson for the sower: you will face resistance and hostility.

**The hardness of the road, the shallowness of the soil, and the aggressiveness of the weeds will frustrate your efforts to sow.**

Be encouraged. The Lord of the harvest can break up even the hardest ground and rid it of the most stubborn weeds. **One ancient Palestinian method of farming was to throw the seed 1st, and then plow it under.** Sometimes, that will happen in evangelism as well.

## The Receptive Heart

**Good soil illustrates the receptive heart.** The good soil is the man who hears the Word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit—see Matthew 13:23.

This is the climax of the parable.

**It is a promise to the discouraged disciples that there is good soil in the field.** Jesus wanted them to know that there is a huge field ready to receive the seed. It will bear abundant fruit.

## The Fruit

**Fruit-bearing is the whole point of agriculture. It is also the ultimate test of salvation.**

Jesus said, *“every good tree bears good fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. You will know them by their fruits” – Matthew 7:17–20.*

If there is no spiritual fruit, or if the fruit is bad, the tree must be rotten. Or if the soil does not produce a crop, it is worthless ground, symbolic of an unredeemed heart.

The message of the parable of the soils is clear: of 4 soils, only one is good.

**Thus, it alone is of any value to the farmer. Good soil pictures the believer. The weedy soil and the shallow soil are pretenders. The soil by the wayside is an absolute rejecter.**

## **Fruit, not foliage, is the mark of true salvation.**

Those who missed that point confuse the meaning of the parable. Much has been written to argue that the shallow soil or weedy soil represent true believers, albeit unproductive ones.

The seed of the parable is not symbolic of eternal life; it is the message of the gospel. The sprouting of the seed in the shallow soil and the weedy soil simply means that the word had been received and begun to operate, not that eternal life had been conferred.

**Notice that not all the good ground is equally productive.**

Some good soil bears 100X, 60X, and 30X. Not every Christian will always bear as much fruit. But each Christian is fruitful to some degree.

**As sowers, we are called to broadcast the seed of the unadulterated gospel, even if some of it falls on unprepared soil.**

## **Chapter 12: The Wheat and The Weeds/Tares**

**Christians are not supposed to live like unsaved people.**

I am saddened at the way Christians tolerate flagrant sin in their midst. **Like the Corinthian church, who arrogantly welcomed a bold fornicator into their fellowship, some Christians today seem to take perverse pride in never challenging the lifestyle of anyone who claims to be a believer.** See 1st Corinthians 5:1–2.

The popularized gospel of our day has made all this possible and inevitable. **The notion that faith is nothing more than believing a few biblical facts caters to human depravity.**

The tragic result is that many people think it is fairly normal for Christians to live like unbelievers. Contemporary liberal theologians have devised an entire category for this type of person – the “**carnal Christian.**” **Who knows how many unregenerate persons have been lulled into a false sense of spiritual security by the suggestion that they are merely carnal?**

Christians do not masquerade as children of the devil.

When Scripture acknowledges the difficulty of telling the sheep from the goats, the point is not that Christians may seem ungodly, but rather that the ungodly often appear to be righteous.

In this regard, the parable about the wheat and the weeds has often been misunderstood. Read Matthew 13:24–30. This parable uses imagery similar to that of the parable of the soils, but here our Lord makes a completely different point...

Over-sowing another's grain crop with weeds was a common enough act that Rome had a law against it.

In this parable, a man's enemy had sowed weeds in his field. In Christ's day the word for **weeds represented a wheat like plant that produced useless seed instead of grain**. It so closely resembled wheat that it was known as bastard wheat. It was nearly impossible to distinguish from real wheat.

The land owner in this parable chose not to risk destroying any of the legitimate crop. Instead, he decided to let both wheat and weeds grow together until harvest, at which time the reapers would separate the good crop from the bad. **What can this story mean?**

### The Players

Jesus gave an explanation: **the one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man**. The title the Lord used more than any other to refer to himself is: the Son of Man. In identifying himself this way he describes his humanness as the incarnate One, the perfection of all that a man could be.

According to Matthew 13:38, **the field is the world**. By implication **the sower** –the Son of Man – **owns the field**. He cultivates his crop there. What does he sow? As for **the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom** – see verse 38. The **children of his kingdom are believing people**, those submissive to the King. And **He sows them throughout his field, the world**.

**The weeds are the sons of the evil one**; and the evil one, the enemy, is the one who sowed the weeds – see verse 38 and 39. **The weeds are unbelievers**. 1 John 3:10 indicates that all who are not children of God are children of the devil.

### The Plot

The meaning of this parable is not complicated. **Jesus sowed the children of his kingdom in the world. Satan ruins the purity of the crop, mingling his children with those of the Son of Man. In the final judgment God will separate the wheat from the weeds.**

As simple as that is, many Bible students missed the point entirely. A surprising number think the field is the church. To them, the parable is a message about false elements in the church and divine permission to leave them alone.

Obviously, that is not the point of this parable at all. **Such a teaching would violate everything the New Testament teaches about church discipline**. We are to have nothing to do with false teachers and sham believers – 2 John verse 9–11. **We are clearly commanded to purge such influences from the church—1 Corinthians 5:2 and 7.**

This parable contains instructions for the church in the world,  
not a free pass for the world in the church.

**The message of the wheat and the weeds is simply that God does not sanction any effort that would rid the world of unbelievers by force.** Religious fanatics always see genuine believers as the enemy.

**God does not call his people to a ministry of Inquisition.** Now is not the time to rip the weeds out. We are sent out rather, to be ambassadors for Christ, missionaries of his mercy and grace.

**Remember, in the spiritual sense, all wheat begins as weeds.**

Without a divine rebirth, a weed will never be wheat. **Grooming a weed to look like wheat will not make it produce good grain.** In Matthew 7:6, Jesus said: “*Do not throw your pearls before swine.*” In other words, do not take Kingdom principles and try to enforce them on a society that lives outside the kingdom.

We are commanded to teach the gospel and live as examples of righteousness. **But we are not God's executioners.**

#### The Plan

**At harvest time, the wheat and the weeds will be separated.** In Matthew 13:39 we are told that the reapers are angels. **The weeds—the sons of the evil one—will be gathered and burned** – verse 40. **Hell will be their eternal home.** The reapers will cast them into the furnace of fire—verse 42. The picture is terrifying in verse 43.

**How will the reapers know the wheat from the weeds?** The issue, as always, is the spiritual fruit they bear. **Weeds may look similar to wheat, but weeds cannot produce wheat kernels.** So it is in the spiritual world. The sons of the devil can imitate the children of God, but they cannot produce true righteousness – Matthew 7:18.

This parable is not saying we should be unconcerned with the difference between wheat and weeds until the final judgment. **It does not sanction indifference about the sins of the lost.** Nor does it suggest we forget there are weeds in the field. It simply tells us to leave final judgment and retribution in the hands of the Lord and his angels.

### Chapter 13: The Treasurer of the Kingdom

A Calvinist once remarked that the contemporary church often fails to present the gospel clearly enough for the non-elect to reject it. **The gospel our age has popularized is a sugarcoated placebo designed more to soothe sinners than to convert them.**



The Gospel according to Jesus stands in stark contrast. **Luke 9:57–62**, for example, relates how **Jesus ran off 3 other hot prospects**. Jesus repeatedly made difficult demands. **He commanded those who sought eternal life to deny themselves, forsake all, and follow him. He never held forth the hope of salvation to anyone who refused to submit to his sovereign Lordship.** Mark 8:34–37 could hardly have been more straightforward: *“if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

We see similar words from the Lord in John 12:24–25, once again making his meaning unmistakable. The subject here is explicitly eternal life and salvation: *“truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.”*

### **Forsaking oneself for Christ sake is not an optional step of discipleship subsequent to conversion; it is the validation of saving faith.**

**Faith as Jesus characterized it is nothing less than a complete exchange of all that we are for all that he is.**

Two brief parables in Matthew 13:44–46 illustrate precisely this truth. **They show the incomparable worth of the kingdom of heaven and the nature of the commitment required of everyone who would enter.**

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and the body.”*

Both parables make the same point: **a sinner who understands the priceless riches of the kingdom will gladly yield everything else he cherishes in order to obtain it.** Also clear by implication: those who cling to their earthly treasures forfeit the far greater wealth of the kingdom.

An important point to remember: symbolism in a parable is not meant to be carried out too far. Most parables have one main lesson, and if you allegorize, stretch the symbolism too far, or try to squeeze meaning from peripheral details, you will inevitably find a point where the metaphor breaks down.

**Jesus was giving these parables to unveil the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven—not to explain the atonement.** Biblical interpreters know that the simplest and most obvious interpretation is the normal one. In these stories the most obvious interpretation is **that they portray the kingdom of heaven as a treasure more valuable than the sum of all our possessions.**

**That interpretation is consistent with everything Jesus ever taught.** If you are not convinced, compare these parables with the words of Christ to the rich young ruler in Mark 10:21.

## Hidden Treasure

It was common in Palestine for people to bury valuables in a secret place. Israel was a land of war. Jewish history is filled with battles in conquering armies who came to steal and to plunder. And rabbinic law said that if a man found scattered fruit or money, it was his.

## A Costly Pearl

The parable of the costly pearl is only slightly different. See Matthew 13:45–46. Here we meet a wholesale merchant who specialized in pearls. Unlike the man in the 1st parable, he did not make his discovery by accident. His life was one long search for the finest pearls, which he would then sell to retailers—**until the day he discovered one pearl that he wanted more than anything else in the world.**

Pearls were the costliest of gems, and wealthy people purchased them as investments. The **Talmud speaks of pearls as being beyond price.** The Egyptians actually worshiped them. **When Jesus warned against casting pearls before swine in Matthew 7:6, he was contrasting the lowest unclean animal with what was perceived to be the most valuable jewel.**

## Acquiring the Kingdom

In relating these parables, the Lord debunked some cherished presuppositions of his Jewish listeners. They believed they were destined to gain entrance to the kingdom of God because of their lineage. These parables cautioned them not to take the kingdom for granted. No one gets in automatically. **The gist of both parables is: the kingdom of heaven is only for those who perceive its immeasurable value and are willing to sacrifice everything else to acquire it.**

One must embrace the kingdom with a whole heart – with the zeal of one who gladly forsakes everything to buy one treasure more precious than anything else.

**The kingdom of heaven is rich beyond comparison.** Its value far exceeds that of the world's richest treasure. Yet its riches elude most people. 1 Corinthians 2:14 acknowledges this: “*a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*” See also 1 Corinthians 2:10.

Those who do get a glimpse of the value of the kingdom will then joyfully give all they have to obtain it. **Note that the man who found the treasure sold all he owned out of sheer joy.** Sacrificing his possessions for something far greater was no drudgery for him.

He was rejoicing over his newfound riches, not mourning the junk he sold.

That is how it is with salvation. To the unregenerate mind, the thought of yielding everything to Christ is crazy. But a believing heart surrenders to the Master with great joy (Philippians 3:7-8).

## The Cost of Following Christ

### Saving faith retains no privileges and makes no demands.

*Saving faith safeguards no cherished sins, treasures no earthly possessions more than Christ, clings to no secret self indulgences – none. Instead, faith begets a heart that longs to surrender unconditionally to whatever the Lord demands.*

### Salvation is both free and costly.

With eternal life comes immediate death to self.

Read Romans 6:6; 2nd Corinthians 5:14; Romans 6:11; Galatians 2:20.

That is what Jesus meant when he spoke of taking up one's own cross to follow him. That is why **he demanded that we count the cost carefully.** He was calling for an exchange of all that we are for all that he is. He was demanding implicit obedience—unconditional surrender to his Lordship. *Faith that scorns our Lord's demands for surrender can hardly qualify as saving faith.*

**No one can rightfully lay claim to him as Savior while refusing to own him as Lord.**

Obviously, a new believer does not fully understand all the ramifications of Jesus' Lordship at the moment of conversion. **But every genuine believer has a desire to surrender.** That is what distinguishes true faith from a bogus profession.

True faith produces a heart that is humble, submissive, and obedient.

As spiritual understanding unfolds, that obedience grows deeper, and the genuine believer displays an eagerness to please Christ in abandoning everything to his Lordship. This **willingness to surrender** to divine authority is a driving force in the heart of every true child of the kingdom.

## Counting the Cost

**Our Lord sought only those willing to invest all they had in his kingdom.**

A perfect picture of saving faith is someone who believes in Christ and does not hedge their bet.

**The true believer gladly gives everything for Christ.** Read of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-26. Moses knew that he was really trading Egypt for a heavenly reward. He gave up incredible wealth without a 2nd thought because he understood the priceless value of the kingdom of heaven.

That is the kind of response the Lord Jesus called for: **wholehearted, all-in commitment.** A desire for him at any cost. Unconditional surrender. A full exchange of self for the Savior. It is the only response that will open the gates of the kingdom. **Seen through the eyes of this world, it is a high price. But from the kingdom perspective, it is really no sacrifice at all.**

## Chapter 14: The First and Last

*The Pilgrim's Progress*, notes that there is an entrance to hell even from the gates of heaven. **Judas is proof of that.** Who knows how many like him have come near enough to learn the truth and profess faith in Jesus, only to forfeit heaven because they have never surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus? In a sense, **their entrance to hell is from the gates of heaven.**

**But there is a contrasting reality as well;** even the lowest of sinners may be ushered into heaven from the very doorstep of hell.

Every repentant sinner who surrenders in faith to Christ receives full salvation.

Saving faith is an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is. **That does not mean we barter for eternal life.**

### **We do not buy salvation by surrendering our lives.**

Nor is the gift of eternal life given in proportion to the quality or the length of the life we yield.

Every one who surrenders to Christ gets all Christ has to give in return.

Jesus illustrated this point in the parable found in Matthew 20:1 through 16. This parable is often referred to as the parable of the land owner and the laborers.

Like other parables, this one is about the kingdom of heaven. Going back to the final verse in Matthew 19, we find that the parable is bracketed by the same thought: **many who are 1st will be last; and the last, will be 1st.**

What does it mean? It is a riddle in the form of a proverb. How can the one who finishes 1st be the last and vice versa? That is **possible only if the last in the 1st are the same.** Everyone crosses the finish line in a dead heat. **That is exactly the point of the parable.** When evening came and it was time to pay the laborers for their work, every worker got the same, no matter how long he had worked.

### The Question of Fairness

**The land owner was not unfair.** The land owner was generous.

**We are conditioned to think that inequity is always injustice.**

But sometimes unequal treatment is an expression of generosity. The landowner rebukes the men for their jealousy.

**The land owner's liberality was not evil, but the laborers' jealousy was.**

## The Issue of Equality

What is the spiritual point of this parable? God is the householder. The vineyard is the kingdom of heaven—the realm of salvation. The laborers are those who enter into the kingdom and into the service of the King. The day of work represents a person's lifespan. The evening is the entrance to eternity, and the money is eternal life.

**What Jesus is saying is that everyone who comes into the kingdom inherits eternal life, whether he laborers for God for years or comes to salvation in the final hour of earthly life.** The kingdom of heaven is not a merit system. Eternal life is not dispensed according to how faithfully we have performed here on earth. It is a sheer gift of God's grace.

Eternal life shows the marvelous grace of a loving God.

**A place in the kingdom is not something to be earned.** The kingdom will include tax collectors, harlots, beggars, and blind people. There will be apostles, martyrs, and people who served God their entire lives. But there will also be men who were converted in foxholes just before they were blown into eternity. All of them inherit the same eternal life and blessing, not because they earned it, but **because God is gracious.**

The New Testament letters describe differing rewards and crowns for service, but that is not the point of this parable makes. The issue here is the **quality** of eternal life.

## The Nature of Salvation

Several obvious truths about salvation flow through this parable.

First, it is God who sovereignly initiates salvation. He does the seeking and the saving, and it is he who brings sinners into his kingdom. Salvation is not ultimately a human decision. "God is both the author and the finisher of our faith" – Hebrews 12:2. "We love him because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19. Therefore, if he saw us early and we served him our whole lives, that was his choice. If he saw us late and we served by the brief time, that too was his choice.

Second, God establishes the terms of salvation.

Third, God continues to call men and women into his kingdom. The land owner went back again and again to call workers into the vineyard. In The same way, God never stops soliciting workers for the kingdom.

Fourth, everyone God redeems is willing to work for him. Everyone who went into the vineyard worked. That is the way of salvation. Faith is shown by works—James 2:24 and Ephesians 2:10.

Fifth, God is compassionate to those who recognize their need. They were so desperate for work that they had stayed in the market place all day. A similar sense of poverty and extreme desperation is one of the characteristics of saving faith—Matthew 5:3 and 6. The Lord calls into his kingdom those who know their need, *not the self-sufficient.*

Sixth, God keeps his promise. The land owner paid exactly what he said he would pay.

Seventh, God inevitably gives more than we deserve. Salvation is pure grace. Consequently, there is no place for jealousy in the kingdom. **We should never murmur or grumble because the fatted calf was killed for someone else.** God's grace abounds to us all.

### A Picture of Grace

Luke includes the account of how Jesus, hanging in agony on the cross, bearing the sins of the world, nevertheless turned aside to rescue a single condemned criminal from eternal damnation. **The thief was a career criminal,** and Roman law had condemned him to die on a cross.

Before this man died, his mocking changed to a confession of his own guilt and Christ's innocence: *"We are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong"* - Luke 23:41. Then, turning to the Lord, he added, *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!"*

Jesus replied to the thief: *"truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise."* – Luke 23:43. As far as we know, those were the only words Jesus ever spoke to the man. **There was no verbal pre-evangelism, no four-point message, no appeal of any kind. But as the thief watched the sinless Savior die, faith was kindled in him.** His conversion, even though it occurred as he was passing into eternity, was no less genuine than the apostle Paul's.

## Chapter 15: The Lost and Found

God does more than keep books on who is in and who is out. He weeps over the lost and celebrates whenever one is saved.

The Lord gave a series of parables in **Luke 15.** **The truth they teach is a critical element of the Gospel according to Jesus. Together, all 3 parables give a precious window into the heart of a loving God, who pursues lost souls and is patient—not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance** – 2 Peter 3:9.

The setting of Luke 15 is familiar: all the sinners were coming near Jesus to listen to him, while the Pharisees and the scribes sought to trip him up. The Greek verb translated as *"were coming"* signifies continual action, meaning that the tax collectors and sinners came to Jesus as a matter of habit. **Wherever he went, a crowd of undesirables gathered around him.**

Jesus, knowing the Pharisees hearts, rebuke them through 3 parables that contrasted their self-righteous attitude with God's tender compassion for the lost. **All 3 parables make the same point—that God does not sit passively by while people are going to hell.** He does not delight in the destruction of the wicked. Instead, he loves them, pursues them, and longs for them to be saved. **And he is jubilant at the redemption of even one lost sinner.**

## The Hundred Sheep

The 1st parable has a pastoral role theme. The phrase, “what man among you,” implies that the compassionate behavior Jesus describes would be expected even of a common sheep farmer. **No shepherd worth his salt would be satisfied with 99 sheep out of 100. Each sheep would be known to the shepherd by name – John 10:3. **Every night he would count and examine them. If one was lost, he would go out into the night to find.****

The point of this parable is the joy of the shepherd over the salvation of the sheep. His joy was overflowing; he had to share it with others.

Jesus' point is spelled out in verse 7: **when one sinner repents, God calls for a celebration in heaven.** He is a seeking shepherd whose desire is to rescue lost sheep.

## The 10 Coins

**The 2nd parable makes the same point with a different metaphor.** The silver coins were worth a good day's wages. When the woman found her lost coin, her joy was as great as the shepherd's. Like him, she called the group of friends together to share her joy.

**What touches the heart of God most deeply is the salvation of those whom he pursues and brings to repentance.** The emphasis in both parables is on God's joy.

## The 2 Sons

The most magnificent of the 3 parables is the story of the prodigal son. Although this parable goes into far greater detail than the previous 2, it makes exactly the same point. **The loving father is God, who rejoices to see the homecoming of the son once lost.**

The 1st half of the parable focuses on the contemptible behavior of the younger son. For this son to demand his inheritance was equal to saying he wished his father were dead. It is amazing that the father did not refuse the request and punish the son. This was a loving father. **Although his heart was shortly broken by the son's request, he gave him what he asked.**

After living in wayward sin, approaching starvation, reduced to eating with pigs far away from his home, the prodigal son finally came to his senses.

It is noteworthy that what ultimately brought him to his senses was sorrow over his predicament. The sorrow itself was not repentance, but it led to deep repentance—see 2 Corinthians 7:9–10. **The young son freely acknowledged his own guilt before God. He determined to ask forgiveness and take the consequences.**

Here is a perfect illustration of repentant faith. The prodigal who began by demanding an early inheritance was now willing to serve his father as a bond servant. He was making a complete turnaround. His demeanor was one of unconditional surrender and absolute submission...

He had become poor in spirit. He was mourning over his sin. His arrogance had given way to meekness and humility.

**While the son was still far from home, his father saw him and came running to greet him. Here again is a picture of the seeking heavenly Father. When a repentant sinner turns to God, he learns that God is already looking for him.**

The young prodigal did not get to the place in his speech where he was going to ask his father to make him a slave. Before he could, his father... ordered a banquet to celebrate his return!

All 3 of these parables have this common theme: a seeker finds what was lost and rejoices.

**Remember, the older son** had received his inheritance too. Instead of squandering it, he stayed home, serving the father. This older son was furious that the father would celebrate the homecoming of his prodigal brother. The jealous son would not even go inside. He was not about to eat with the sinner. He lacked the compassion of his father, playing the part of the Pharisee.

**This son's behavior might seem more socially acceptable but it was just as outrageous—and even a bit dishonoring to the father.** The older son had no real love for his father, or he would have shared his father's joy. Serving his father all those years, he had just been going through the motions. He served out of duty. He had no understanding of his father's heart. Here, too, was a lost son. And the father sought him as well – verse 28.

**The Lord always seeks to save the lost, but they must see themselves as lost.** The most flagrant, irreligious, repugnant sinners are quicker to understand their depravity than people steeped in religious achievement. Pharisaic people cannot tolerate the forgiveness of sins – especially flagrant ones. They do not understand repentance. Far from rejoicing, they are repulsed when a sinner confesses his or her sin.

**The 1st son in the story saw his sin, repented, humbled himself, received forgiveness, and entered into his father's joy. The 2nd son was bitter, unrepentant, with no sense of the deadness of his own heart.**

He was as lost as his younger brother had been but he was too proud to see it.

## **God is seeking the lost.**

Those who acknowledge their sin and turn from it will find him running to them with open arms. Those who think they are good enough will find themselves excluded from the celebration, unable to share the eternal joy of a loving father.



## Chapter 16: The Vine And The Branches

One of the recurring themes in Jesus' preaching, teachings and miracles was his equality with God. **He repeatedly affirmed his deity in the clearest possible terminology.** See John 5:17; 8:54; 10:30; and 10:38.

Every time Jesus called God "*My Father*" He was underscoring **his deity**. His Jewish audiences understood this perfectly.

Some of the most powerful affirmations of Jesus' deity in John's Gospel are known as the "I AM" statements. Each of these phrases employs the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush – "**I AM.**" **Jesus applied that name to himself on multiple occasions.** Perhaps the most stunning and inescapable affirmation of his self-professed Lordship is found in

**John 8:58... "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.*"**

Jesus' stature as the great I AM of the Old Testament was essential to his role as Savior.

Those who refused to acknowledge him for who he is could not be saved:  
*"unless you believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins"*—John 8:24.

*"You are the branches"* – is spoken to the disciples. Does he mean the fruit bearing branches as well as the fruitless ones? Some say the unproductive branches represent fruitless Christians and this proves that true believers might live spiritually barren lives. But look at verse 6. The empty branches are cut off, dried, gathered, and cast into the fire: they are burned. Could that possibly describe a true believer?

How are we to interpret this admittedly difficult metaphor? **As always, we consider the context.** Remember what was happening in the upper room. Take note of the characters in the drama...

### The Cast of Characters

Here, the cast includes: Jesus, the Father, His disciples, and Judas the betrayer. He was eager to affirm his great love for the 11. He must have also been grieving over Judas, who had utterly rejected his love and set out to betray him. He was burdened with the knowledge that tomorrow he would be the object of the Father's wrath as he bore the burden of our sin on the cross.

It is not surprising, then, that **Christ, the Father, the 11 faithful disciples, and Judas all play a part in the Vine and branches metaphor.** Christ is the True Vine. The Father is the Vinedresser. The disciples—along with all true disciples—are the fruit bearing branches. And

**Judas—along with all false disciples—represents the barren branches.**

## The Vinedresser

**Remember that figurative language must not be made to bear more meaning than is clearly intended.** For example, in this metaphor Christ is portrayed as a plant but the Father as a person. Some who reject the deity of Christ have tried to suggest that this proves Christ is not the same essence as the father. If Jesus is divine, they claim, the Father should be the root. And so they argue that the imagery here disproves the deity of Christ.

But that misses the entire point. Besides, the metaphor of the Vine and branches does affirm Christ's deity by portraying him as the Source and Sustainer of life.

Still, **the vine–branches metaphor is not primarily a lesson about the deity of Christ. Our Lord was using this imagery to underscore the reality of every believer's union with him. As the Father cares for the sons, so he cares for those joining to the son by faith. That glorious truth is the central point Jesus was making.** It is one of the most sublime truths in all Scripture!

**Believers are united by faith to the beloved Son of God.**

**Vinedresser's had two chief means of maximizing the fruit that grew on the vine.** One was to cut off the barren limbs. The other was to prune new shoots from the fruit bearing branches. **Doing so insured that the vine would produce more fruit, not just leafy growth.**

**Barren branches grow rapidly and new ones sprout quickly. They must be carefully and regularly pruned.** It is the only way to ensure maximum quantities of fruit.

## The Fruitful Branches

The identity of the healthy, fruit bearing branches seems clear—they represent genuine Christians.

**It is the nature of the Christian to produce fruit.**

(see Ephesians 2:10)

**The inevitable result of genuine salvation is good works.**

**We are not saved by works, but works are the only proof that faith is genuine, vibrant, and alive.**

(James 2:17 & Ephesians 2:10)

Fruit is the only possible validation that a branch is abiding in the true vine—read Matthew 7:16–17. **If someone's faith is genuine, that person's life will bear good fruit.**

The vinedresser prunes these fruitful branches so that they will bear more fruit. The pruning represents God's loving discipline—Hebrews 12:10.

**The vinedresser might remove extraneous shoots in several ways.** Sometimes the tip was simply pinched off. Other times a knife would be used to make a clean cut, neatly excising the useless growth. Large, heavy branches had to be topped to prevent them from becoming so long and weak that their own weight did them in. Consider the fact that grape clusters were thinned out while they were still flowering so that the healthiest fruit would grow even larger and more abundantly.

Spiritual pruning is the necessary process whereby the father removes everything that limits our fruitfulness. He cuts out sins and other distractions that sap our spiritual strength.

**The pruning knife he uses so skillfully is the Word of God.**

God's Word prunes the sin out of our lives. Charles **Spurgeon** one said: “the Bible is often the knife with which the great Vinedresser prunes the vine; and, Brothers and sisters, **if we were more willing to feel the edge of the Bible, and let it cut away even something that may be very dear to us, we should not need so much pruning by affliction.**”

Sometimes the pruning process is painful. We might even see other branches we think need pruning more than we do. But the Vinedresser always knows what he's doing.

Don't ever forget, He prunes us only because He loves us (Hebrews 12:6-7). Likewise, **the Vinedresser gives the closest scrutiny to the branches he cares most about. He spends no time dressing the fruitless branches** or pruning small shoots off of them because those branches are fit only to be taken away and burned.

#### The Judas Branches

The fruitless branches are only superficially attached to the vine.

To the external eye there is a connection. There is even leafy growth. But something is missing. They are not adequately tied into the vines vascular system. **They are incapable of bearing fruit.** They are fit only to be cut off and destroyed.

Every gardener understands this principle. **Fruitless branches are detrimental to the vine.** They take sap away from the fruit bearing branches. Wasted sap means less fruit. Even after careful pruning these branches will remain barren. There is no way to make them bear fruit. John 15:2 says of these branches that they are taken away. The Vinedresser doesn't recycle or rehabilitate them; he removes them and destroys them.

**Spiritually, the equivalent of a fruitless branch is a phony Christian—someone who professes faith in Christ but does not really know him.** Their relationship to him is entirely superficial. They do not have his life flowing through them, so they cannot bear spiritual fruit by any means. These are the branches Jesus threatens with removal. *These are the Judas branches.*

Jesus had never been fooled by Judas' duplicity. Jesus knew the heart of Judas and he never counted Judas as a true disciple. Although Judas appeared as if he were truly one of them, Jesus knew better. **Judas was a fruitless branch.**

It was not that Judas had salvation and then lost it. Our Lord said of the true sheep: *I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand*—John 10:28. Furthermore, Jesus said in **John 6:37** that **all branches that abide in the true vine will never be removed.**

A person can be in the family tree but not a true Israelite. **Read Romans 9:6** where Paul wrote: they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel. **Likewise, one can be a branch on the true vine without really abiding in Christ.**

Throughout Scripture we read warnings to those who associate themselves with Jesus but whose faith is a façade.

**Such people appeared to be in Christ but do not truly abide in him.** The Vinedresser will remove them from the vine.

**1 John 2:19** reminds us: *“they went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they are not of us.”*

Fruitless branches represent counterfeit disciples.

Fruitless branches do not abide in Christ, they are not truly united with him by faith. They are Judas branches. They can bear no genuine fruit. **In the end, the Father removes them to preserve the life and fruitfulness of the other branches.**

The imagery of burning suggest that these fruitless branches are doomed to hell. **Like Judas, they are hopeless apostates.** They may be prominent church members. **They may have acquired much spiritual knowledge.** They may be teachers of doctrine, even scholars. **They may have gone through all the rituals.** But they are not real believers, & God will remove them.

Tragically, multitudes fit this category. **Read Philippians 3:18–19.**

Do not misunderstand or miss Jesus' warning in this passage... Our Lord was teaching... them to understand the treachery of Judas. In short, the faith Judas pretended to have was a sham. His commitment to Jesus was superficial. He was a fruitless branch.

John 15:1–8 is a sobering passage. **Barren branches have nothing to look forward to** except fiery judgment. **Fruitful branches, those actually abiding in the true vine, by contrast, are in the hands of a loving and gracious vinedresser.** As he carefully prunes there may be some pain in the cutting. But, we can be certain that he is doing it for our own good so that we will bear much fruit for his glory.

## Part FOUR: Jesus Explains His Gospel

### Chapter 17: The Call To Repentance

We now turn our focus to the rich doctrinal content of the message Jesus proclaimed. We will explore the principal themes that flavored his discourses, and weigh the popularized gospel of today against the Savior's own teaching.

**Most of the current controversy regarding the gospel hinges on the definitions of a few keywords:**

1. Repentance
2. Faith
3. Discipleship, and
4. LORD.

We will study those terms and see how Jesus himself used them.

We begin with a chapter on repentance, because that is where the Savior began. Matthew 4:17 records: ***“from that time Jesus began to preach and say, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** The opening word of that 1st sermon characterized the theme of Jesus' entire earthly ministry. **He described his own objective this way: to call sinners to repentance**—Luke 5:31. Repentance was a recurring motif in all his public sermons.

Jesus stood boldly before the stiff-necked multitudes and proclaimed,  
unless you repent, you will all likewise perish...  
(Luke 13:3 & 5)

The Missing Note

**It is not fashionable in the 21st century to preach a gospel that demands repentance.**

“The doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today” – H. A. Ironside. **Many preachers today act as if the necessity of repentance invalidates the freedom of grace.**

Ironside recognized **the dangers of an incipient easy-believism**. He wrote: shallow preaching that does not grapple with the terrible fact of man's sinfulness and guilt, calling on all men everywhere to repent, results in shallow conversions; who give no evidence of regeneration whatsoever.

## The Discarding of Repentance

The Ryrie Study Bible (**watch out!**) includes a synopsis of doctrine that lists repentance as a "false addition to faith," when made a condition for salvation—except for when repentance is understood as a synonym for faith.

**This theological position, and those like it, have redefined repentance.** They write it off as simply a change of mind about who Christ is. **This kind of repentance has nothing to do with turning from sin or abandoning self.** It is truly devoid of any recognition of personal guilt, any intent to obey God, or any desire for true righteousness.

**That is not the kind of repentance Jesus preached.**

The Gospel according to Jesus is as much a call to forsake sin as it is a call to faith.

**From his 1st message to his last, the Savior's theme was calling sinners to repentance.** This meant that they turned from sin and self to follow him. The message he commands us to preach is the same: repentance for forgiveness of sin – Luke 24:47.

What is Repentance?

Repentance is a critical element of conversion. **Do not dismiss repentance as simply another word for believing.**

1st Thessalonians 1:9 highlights 3 elements of repentance: a **turning to God**, a **turning from evil**, and **the intent to serve God**. No change of mind can be called true repentance if it does not include all 3 elements. The fact of the matter is a true change of mind will result in a change of behavior.

Repentance is not merely shame or sorrow for sin. It is a redirection of the human will to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead.

Nor is repentance merely a human work. **Righteousness is a sovereignly bestowed gift of God** (Acts 11:8; cf. 5:31). Moreover, if God is the one who grants repentance, it cannot be viewed as a human work – 2nd Timothy 2:25.

**Repentance is not a pre-salvation attempt to set one's life in order.**

**The call to repentance is not a command to make sin right before turning to Christ in faith. Rather, it is a command to recognize one's lawlessness and hated, to turn one's back on it and lead to Christ, embracing him with wholehearted devotion.**

Repentance is not a mental activity; genuine repentance involves the intellect, emotions & will

Intellectually, repentance begins with a recognition of sin—that we are sinners, that our sin is an affront to a holy God, **that we are personally responsible for our own guilt.**

**Repentance that leads to salvation must also include a recognition of who Christ is,** understanding his right to govern our lives.

**Emotionally, genuine repentance often accompanies an overwhelming sense of sorrow.** One can be sorry without being truly repentant.

**Judas, for example, felt remorse but he was not repentant. The rich young ruler went away sorrowful but he was not repentant.** It is difficult to imagine a true repentance that does not include at least an element of contrition – **not sorrow for getting caught; not sadness because of the consequences; but a sense of anguish for having sinned against God.**

**Volitionally, repentance involves a change of direction, a transformation of the will.**

It constitutes determination—to abandon stubborn disobedience and surrender the will to Christ.

**Genuine repentance will inevitably result in a change of behavior.** The behavior change is not itself repentance, but it is the fruit of repentance.

## Real repentance alters the character of the whole man.

*"Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, and that you are hell-bound... You renounce the world whatever the cost, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ. The whole world may call you a fool and you may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference. That is repentance." – Martyn Lloyd Jones*

## Repentance is not a one time act.

### The Fruits of Repentance

When Jesus preached: *"Repent!"* - His listeners new he was calling for far more than simply a change of mind or a new perspective on who he was. Repentance to them meant a complete surrender of their will and an inevitable change of behavior—a new way of life, not just a different opinion.

**If repentance is genuine, we can expect it to produce observable results.**

In other words, there must be a sincere change in one's lifestyle. A person who has genuinely repented will cease doing evil and begin to live righteously.

Radical change was also what the apostle Paul considered proof of repentance. Acts 26:19–20.

## The Gospel and Repentance

Repentance has always been the foundation of the New Testament call to salvation (**Acts 2:38**).

No message that eliminates repentance can properly be called the gospel, for sinners cannot come to Jesus Christ apart from a radical change of heart, mind, and will.

**Matthew 21:28–31** is a parable Jesus used to illustrate the hypocrisy of a profession of faith without repentance.

**Jesus described only 2 kinds of religious people: those who pretend to be obedient but are actually rebels, and those who begin as rebels but repent.**

The Pharisees lived under the delusion that God approved them because they made a great show of their religion. The problem was that it was only a show. They were like the son who said he would obey but did not. Their claim that they loved God and His law amounted to nothing. Those Pharisees were like many today who say they believe in Jesus but refuse to obey him. Their profession of faith is hollow. Unless they repent, they will perish.

**Tax collectors and harlots have an easier time than Pharisees getting into the kingdom because they are more likely to recognize their sin and repent of it.** There is no salvation apart from the repentance that renounces sin.

Many today hear the truth of Christ and immediately respond as to the son who said he would obey but did not. Their positive response to Jesus will not save them. The fruit of their lives showed they have never truly repented.

A faith that obeys is true repentance, manifested by the righteousness it produces.

### Chapter 18: The Nature of True Faith

**Sinners may come to Christ just as they are—solely on the basis of repentant faith—and he will save them. See John 6:37... "The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."**

The erosion of the gospel in our day has given this truth an insidious twist. Sinners today hear not only that Christ will receive them as they are, but also that He'll let them stay that way!

Multitudes approach Christ thinking he will not confront their sin. They have been deceived by a corrupted gospel.

They have been told that faith alone will save them, but they neither understand nor possess real faith.



The faith they are relying on is only intellectual acquiescence to a set of facts. It will not save.

Eternal Life From Dead Faith?

## **Not all faith is redemptive.**

James 2:14–16 says: *“faith without works is dead and cannot save.”* **James describes false faith as pure hypocrisy, mere intellectual agreement, devoid of any verifying works—no different from the demon's belief.** There is more to saving faith than merely conceding a set of facts.

## **Faith without works is useless.**

Yet some in contemporary evangelicalism refuse any kind of relationship between faith and works.

In fact, it is commonly believed that faith and commitment are innately disconnected. The typical idea of faith relegates it to a momentary act that takes place in the mind, a decision to believe the facts of the gospel—nothing more in a response to a divine initiative. Herein lies the fallacy of today's popular approach to evangelism.

Too often today the gospel appeal is packed into a wholly inadequate explanation of what it means to believe.

**The modern definition of faith eliminates repentance;** it erases the moral significance of believing; it makes an ongoing trust in the Lord optional.

**Modern easy-believism has made faith itself a wholly human work, a fragile, temporary attribute that may or may not endure.**

**2 Timothy 2:12** says, *“if we endure, we shall also reign with him, if we deny Him, He also will deny us.”* **Endurance is the mark of those who will reign with Christ in his kingdom.** Clearly, enduring is a characteristic of true believers, while disloyalty & defection reveal a heart of unbelief.

Faith as Scripture Describes It

We have seen already that repentance is granted by God; it is not a human work. Likewise, **Faith is a supernatural gift of God. Read Ephesians 2:8–9.**

**Jesus said in John 6:44,** *“no one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him.”* See also Acts 3:16, Philippians 1:29, 2nd Peter 1:1, Romans 3:11, in Romans 9:16. **God draws the sinner to Christ and gives the ability to believe. Without that divinely generated faith, one cannot understand and approach the Savior.** Again, see 1 Corinthians 2:14 and Matthew 16:17.

The familiar words of **Habakkuk 2:4**, "*the righteous will live by faith*" (cf. Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38), speak not of a momentary act of believing, but a living enduring trust in God. Hebrews 3:14 emphasizes the permanence of genuine faith.

## The durability of faith is proof of its reality.

(see 1 Corinthians 1:8 & Colossians 1:22–23)

The faith God graciously supplies produces both the volition and the ability to comply with his will—Philippians 2:13. **Thus faith is inseparable from obedience.**

**There are 3 elements to genuine faith:** an intellectual element, which is a **positive recognition of the truth**; an emotional element, which includes a **deep conviction and affirmation of the truth**; and a volitional element which involves a **personal trust in Christ as Lord and Savior, including a surrender to Christ... faith is not true faith if it lacks this attitude of surrender to Christ's authority.**

The person who has believed will yearn to obey.

Because we retain the vestiges of sinful flesh, no one will obey perfectly, but the desire to do the will of God will be ever present in true believers. See **Romans 7:18**.

**A concept of faith not producing surrender of the will corrupts the message of salvation.** Paul spoke of the gospel as something to be obeyed in Romans 10:16 and 2nd Thessalonians 1:8. **The result Paul sought in his ministry of evangelization was obedience by word and deed** – see Romans 15:18.

**To believe biblically was synonymous with obedience** (John 3:36, Acts 6:7, Hebrews 5:9 and throughout Hebrews 11). In fact, all the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 showed their faith by obedience.

Obedience is the inevitable manifestation of true faith.

In **Titus 1:15–16** we see that **perpetual disobedience proved one's disbelief.**

Actions that deny God speak more loudly than words that proclaimed him.

The reformers said: "***We are justified by faith alone, but justifying faith is never alone.***" Spurgeon said: "*Although we are sure that men are not saved for the sake of their works, yet we are equally sure that no man will be saved without them.*"

**Righteous living is an inevitable byproduct of real faith**—Romans 10:10.

All true believers understand the plea of the demon possessed boy's father, *I do believe; help my unbelief*—Mark 9:24. **Those who believe will desire to obey, however imperfectly they may follow through at times.**

So-called faith in God that does not produce this yearning to submit to his will is not faith at all.

The state of mind that refuses obedience is pure and simple unbelief.

Faith As Jesus Presented It

**The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 revealed the character of true faith.** These traits are not just and unobtainable legal standard. These are characteristics common to all who believe.

**The foundational characteristic of faith is humility—a poverty of spirit, a brokenness that acknowledges spiritual bankruptcy.**

Genuine believers see themselves as sinners.

That is why they mourn - with the sorrow that accompanies true repentance – verse 4. It crushes the believer into meekness—verse 5. He hungers and thirst for righteousness—verse 6. As the Lord satisfies that hunger, he makes the believing one merciful—verse 6, pure in heart—verse 7, and a peacemaker—verse 9. The believer is ultimately persecuted and reviled for righteousness—verse 10.

**That is the description Jesus offers of the genuine believer.** Note that the obedience of faith is more than external; it issues from the heart.

The obedience that comes from faith does not simply adhere to the letter of the law, but to the spirit of the law as well.

In Matthew 18:3 Jesus used a child as the perfect picture of obedient humility, an object lesson about saving faith. **Jesus used this illustration to teach that if we insist on retaining the privileges of adulthood—if we want to be our own boss, do our own thing, govern our own lives—we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.** But if we are willing to come on the basis of childlike faith and receive salvation with the humility of a child, with a willingness to surrender to Christ authority, then we are coming with the right attitude.

Jesus says the same thing in a different way in John 10:27–28. **Who are the true sheep?**  
**Answer: the ones who follow.**

Faith obeys. Unbelief rebels.

The direction of one's life should reveal whether that person is a believer or nonbeliever. **There is no middle ground.**

*"He who does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." - John 3:36*

## Chapter 19: The Promise of Justification

The most unsettling aspect of the sermon on the Mount was this shocking statement: "*Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect*" – **Matthew 5:48**.

If the gauge of righteousness is absolute perfection, what hope is there for anyone?

Jesus said, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. If you believe that establishes an impossible standard, you have understood the message.

**Salvation is impossible for sinful humanity. We have no redeeming resources of our own.** We cannot atone for our sins. **We cannot even believe without God sovereign enablement** – see **John 6:44 and 65**.

### We cannot manufacture faith out of human will.

The doctrine of justification by faith launched the Reformation and put an end to the dark ages. The reformers came to realize that God's righteousness, revealed in the gospel, is reckoned in full to the account of everyone who turns to Christ in repentant faith. God's own righteousness thus becomes the ground on which believers stand before God.

The book of Romans includes a lengthy explanation of justification. Paul demonstrates that as far back as Genesis, God graciously saved people by giving his righteousness to them because of their faith. **No one has ever been saved through the merit system** – salvation has only by grace through faith ever since the Garden of Eden. Abraham is the prime example—*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*—Romans 4:3

#### What Is Justification?

Jesus rarely use the word justification. **Nevertheless, justification by faith was the underlying theme of the message he preached.**

Look again at the parable of the Pharisees and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–13.

**The parable reveals that justification is instantaneous.** There was no time lapse—no works of penance, no ritual, no sacrament, no confessional exercise, no meritorious deeds before he could be whole in God's eyes.

**The tax collector was justified by faith on the spot.**

Justification may be defined as an act of God, whereby he imputes to a believing sinner the full and perfect righteousness of Christ, forgiving all unrighteousness, declaring him or her perfectly righteous in God's sight, thus delivering the believer from all condemnation.

That definition contains several elements: imputed righteousness, forgiveness of sins, a new standing before God, and a reversal of God's wrath. Those all indicate that justification is a legal verdict. **This reality takes place in the court of God, not in the heart of the sinner.**

In other words, **justification is an instantaneous change of one standing before God, not a gradual transformation that takes place within one who is justified.**

There are 2 serious errors to avoid.

First, do not confuse justification with sanctification. Roman Catholic theology makes this error. Sanctification is the work of God whereby he sets the believer apart from sin. Sanctification is a practical reality, not simply a legal declaration. **Sanctification involves a change in the sinner's character, not just a new standing before God.** Catholic theology renders instantaneous justification impossible. Worse, this view substitutes the believer's own imperfect righteousness in place of Christ's unblemished righteousness, as the basis of justification.

Second, an equally dangerous error: do not separate justification and sanctification so radically that you allow for one without the other. This error is known as antinomianism.

**God will not justify those he does not sanctify.**

**God does not offer justification as a standalone means of salvation. Election, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, and even glorification are all integral facets of God's saving work.** Read Romans 8:29–30.

Justification cannot be isolated and made to represent the sum of God's saving work. Yet that is exactly the error that is rampant in contemporary theology.

#### Imputed Righteousness

**The cornerstone of justification is the reckoning of righteousness to the believer's account.** This is the truth that sets Christian doctrine apart from every form of false religion.

**Imputed righteousness is a necessity of salvation.**

Theologian James Buchanan wrote: ***"A divine sentence of condemnation can only be reversed by a divine act of remission."***

No amount of doing good can make up for even one sin. The person who has sinned owes an impossible debt.

A righteous God cannot simply overlook sin or act as if it never occurred. There must be atonement for sin. Romans 6:23 tells us: *the wages of sin is death.*

Yet atonement alone does not solve the problem. Even if it were somehow possible for sinners to atone for their sins and obtain forgiveness, **they would still stand before God without merit.** They would still lack the perfect righteousness God requires.

Christ's imputed righteousness solves the dilemma.

**Our sins were put in Christ's account when he bore them on the cross. Now his righteousness is reckoned to our account. His perfect righteousness thus becomes the ground on which we stand before God.**

Forgiveness of Sins

Justification also guarantees the forgiveness and remission of sins.

It is not the kind of forgiveness that merely excuses or disregards wrongdoing. If God simply ignored sins, he would compromise his own holiness. Instead, **the penalty sin demands was fully paid in the death of Christ.** We are therefore justified as a gift by his grace...

**Christ alone atoned for our sins.**

The enmity has been removed. **The full price was paid,** so God can receive believing sinners with no taint on his own righteousness.

Reversal of God's Wrath

**Justification is the polar opposite of condemnation.**

One of the most blessed biblical truths is found in **Romans 8:1** which promises: *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* If God's demeanor toward us were determined by our own behavior, no one could escape his wrath; for all of us are sinners—even the most mature saint in Christ. But we who are in Christ need not fear condemnation; we have been justified.

Justification offers the only possible relief from the guilt of sin.

Justification and the Life of the Believer

Martin Luther's remedy for antinomianism was preaching the law of God, because he rightly understood that those who comfort themselves with the promise of justification, while living in open unrighteousness are thereby shown that theirs is a false security.

**Biblical salvation is not merely a one-time legal transaction.**

However, justification is a one-time legal transaction that serves as the eternal turning point. Justification is what makes us heirs according to the hope of eternal life—Titus 3:7. Thus, justification is the very heart of the Gospel according to Jesus.

## **Chapter 20: The Way of Salvation**

**No passage in all of Scripture attacks modern-day easy-believism with more force than Matthew 7:13–14.** This text is the conclusion of the sermon on the Mount and it amounts to the Savior's own presentation of the way of salvation. How different it is from the trend of modern evangelism! **There is no encouragement in these words for those who think they can be saved by a casual acceptance of the facts about Jesus Christ:**

*"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."*

At this point our Lord brings the Sermon on the Mount to its evangelistic climax. **These closing verses are pure gospel, with as pointed in invitation as has ever been issued.** Jesus is preaching... and his message is urgent.

### **Each person inevitably must make a choice.**

**Deuteronomy 30:19: *"I have set before you life and death, the blessing and a curse. So choose life in order that you may live."***

What to do with Jesus Christ is a choice each person must make, but it is not just a momentary decision, it is a once for all verdict with ongoing implications and eternal consequences.

Jesus himself demands a deliberate choice of life or death, heaven or hell. **The Lord requires that each person choose between following the world on the easy, well-traveled road or following him on the difficult road.** You will not find a plainer statement of the Gospel according to Jesus anywhere in Scripture.

Here are 2 gates, 2 roads, 2 destinations, life and distraction; and 2 crowds, the few and the many.

**The Lord goes on to describe 2 kinds of trees, good and corrupt; 2 kinds of fruit, good and bad; 2 kinds of builders, wise and foolish; and 2 foundations, rock and sand—Matthew 7:16–27.**

**Jesus demands a decision.**

We all are at the crossroads and each individual must choose which way he or she will go.

## Two Gates

"Enter by the narrow gate," Christ says, using an imperative verb that conveys a sense of urgency, a demand for action now. It is not enough to stand and appreciate the gate – **one must enter**.

**There is only one gate that opens to Jesus**. Listen to the words of John 10:9 where Jesus said: "I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved." Listen also to Jesus in John 10:1 when he says: **"anyone who does not enter by the door is a thief and a robber."** Lastly, remember the truth of John 14:6 as Jesus describes himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the father but through me."

## **Jesus is the only Gate to heaven! Every other choice is wrong.**

There is no room for the kind of broad ecumenical tolerance our humanistic culture fancies.

## There are not many good religions; *there is only one*.

There are **only two options**... the true and the false, the right and the wrong.

**All the world's religions are based on human achievement**. Biblical Christianity alone recognizes divine accomplishment as the sole basis of salvation. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3 & 20; Romans 3:10–24.

The only choice is between the multitude of religions based on human achievement and the one religion of divine accomplishment (Romans 4:4-5).

The narrow way and the broad way do not contrast religion with paganism... The choice is between divine accomplishment & human achievement. Both systems claim to be the way to God.

**The wide gate is not marked**: "This way to hell," it is labeled: "Heaven" - the same as the narrow gate. It just doesn't go there.

Satan is a master of religious deception. He disguises himself as an angel of light... 2 Cor. 11:14.

## Satan paints his gate so that it looks like the door to heaven.

Many commentators say that the best contemporary expression of the narrow gate is a turnstile. **No one comes into the kingdom of Christ as part of a group**. Many Jews in Jesus day based their hope of heaven on their national lineage. And many contemporary churchgoers base their hope on their church membership. Jesus refutes all those ideas. It is not enough to be born in a Christian family or to ride the coattails of a believing spouse.

## Believing is an individual act.



**Entering the narrow gate is not easy.** In Luke 13:23 someone asked Jesus, “*Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?*” **His answer annihilates modern easy-believism:** “*Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able*” (v.24).

The Greek word for “**strive**” **implies an agonizing, intense, purposeful struggle.** It is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 of an athlete battling to win a victory. It is also used in 1 Timothy 6:12 of the Christian who “ *fights the good fight of faith.*” **It is a struggle, a battle, and extreme effort.** There is almost a violence implied. **Entering the kingdom is like going into battle.** **Matthew 11:12** offers the words of Christ: “*the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.*”

How does that fit the modern, popular teaching that says: becoming a Christian is only a matter of believing some facts or praying some prefabricated prayer?

**Many of our "converts" are on the wrong road because they took the easy way through the wrong gate!**

Salvation is not easy. In **Jeremiah 29:13**, God says: “*you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart.*”

**Jesus cannot be made to accommodate any kind of cheap grace or easy-believism. The kingdom is not for people who want Jesus without any change in their lives.**

Many who approached the gate turn away when they discover how narrow it is. **Did you ever try to get through a turnstile with an armload of suitcases?** That is the imagery Jesus' words evoke. The narrow gate is not wide enough for superstars who want to enter with all their valuables.

The rich young ruler searched until he found the gate. But when he saw that entering meant he had to leave his baggage behind, he turned away.

**Extra baggage will not make it through.** However, there is good news...

Although the gate is narrow, it is wide enough to accommodate the worst of sinners  
(1 Timothy 1:15)

Receiving Christ does not mean we can merely add Jesus to the refuse of our lives. **Salvation is a total transformation:** “*If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, the new things have come*” - **2 Corinthians 5:17.**

This is the whole point of salvation: it produces a changed life.

## Two Ways

The 2 ways are closely identified with the 2 gates. One is broad and open, and the other is hard and narrow. Psalm 1:8 also speaks of these 2 ways. The choice is the same. The broad way is certainly easier. You can just stroll and roam. There are hardly any boundaries. There is tolerance of every conceivable sin—*as long as you are religious.* This road requires no character. See Ephesians 2:2 and Proverbs 16:25.

**God's way, by contrast, is a constricted road, a narrow path that leads to life. There is no space for any deviation, no room for the self governed multitudes.**

As we have noted, our Lord did not prompt people to make snap decisions to follow him without counting the cost. Nor did he necessarily invite eager inquirers to jump on his bandwagon. In fact, he often seemed to encourage potential followers to turn away.

**In John 6:64, Jesus challenged the faith of those who called themselves disciples.**

Consequently, *in verse 66 we are told, as a result of this, “many of his disciples withdrew, and walked with him no more.”* Jesus turned to the 12 and said: Will you also go away?

Jesus did not want casual followers,  
but people willing to give up their lives for him.

Luke 14 describes how Jesus handled the fawning masses. He said: *“if anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple—whoever is not willing to give up all that he possesses cannot be my disciple.”*

**The Lord makes the narrow path hard by demanding that those who really want to follow him step out of the crowd and pick up a cross – an instrument of torture and death.**

Try preaching that at the next revival meeting and see how many come down the aisle! But perhaps the people who would come might understand the commitment that is required.

Those on the narrow way should also expect persecution.

**The road is hard. But Jesus never presented Christianity as a soft option for weak, feeble souls.**

**When a person becomes a Christian that person is then and they are declaring war on hell... and hell fights back.**

Following Christ can cost your life in both a physical and spiritual sense.

The fainthearted and compromisers need not apply.

Does that sound like a horrible road to travel? It isn't. Christ himself leads the way in supplies the strength needed to finish the course. See Philippians 4:12–13 and Matthew 11:30.

#### Two Destinations

The choice between the 2 gates in the 2 ways is a choice for eternity.

**The broad road that starts out so easy ends up in hell.**

#### Two Crowds

Finally, there are 2 groups of people traveling to different roads. **There are the many, & the few...** **It is a tragic fact that multitudes of religious people are headed for hell.** Even in the Old Testament, true believers were only a remnant, never the majority... The living remnant has always been a little flock, a few souls who labor in the power of God. The rest of humankind takes the broad road... **but the majority is seldom right.**

Jesus said: *“men loved darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.”* – John 3:19.

It is easy to fall in step with the crowd.

You can even add Jesus to all your treasured sins and possessions so you can feel religious. The great tragedy is that there are multitudes who think they are heading for heaven. Instead, they will end in distraction and damnation, victims of satanic delusion.

**The popular evangelistic message of our age actually lures people into this deception.**

Easy-believism obliterates the offense of the cross (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23 & Galatians 5:11).

Though it presents Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, it says nothing of the small gate or the narrow way. Its subject is the love of God, but there is no mention of God's wrath.

Easy-believism sees people as deprived, not depraved.

**The modern church is full of love and understanding, but there is no mention of a holy God who hates sin.**

Liberal theology requires no summons to repentance, no warning of judgment, no call for brokenness, no expectation of a contrite heart, and no reason for deep sorrow over sin.

It is a message often accompanied by false promises of health, happiness, and material blessing.

**This is not the Gospel according to Jesus.**

The gate is small, the way is narrow, and few are those who find it.  
How could Jesus be any clearer?

## **Chapter 21: The Certainty of Judgment**

Those who decried lordship salvation as heresy have fallen into precisely the error Rome tried to pin on the early reformers. **Many teach that justification by faith makes holiness nonessential.** They see practical sanctification as desirable, even pivotal, but nonetheless unrelated to the matter of justification and unnecessary for eternal salvation.

**While acknowledging that every believer is justified, they want to make room for believers who might not be sanctified.**

While justification and sanctification are distinct the logical concepts, **both are essential elements of salvation.** *God will not declare a person righteous without also making him or her righteous.*

**A person cannot pick eternal life while rejecting holiness and obedience.**

Scripture challenges those who define salvation as a purely judicial act with no practical consequences. Hebrews 12:14 speaks of the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

Sanctification is a characteristic of all who are redeemed,  
not a condition for their receiving salvation.

**Those who lack true faith can never be holy.**

Many who think they are saved but live unholy lives will be shocked to discover in the final judgment that heaven is not their destiny. **It is hard to picture a more horrifying scene than that described by Jesus in Matthew 7:21–23.**

Those who think of salvation apart from practical righteousness, will have a difficult time with this warning from Jesus.

Notice the key phrase in verse 21, identifying the kind of person who will inhabit heaven. It is he who does the will of my father. **Notice, it is not the one who says but rather, it is the one who does the father's will.**

The lesson here is that if a person lives a life of disobedience, it doesn't matter what he says or what good things that person has done.

**He or she is an unbeliever in danger of eternal damnation.**

## Saying Without Doing: the Sin of Empty Words

**Note that the many who will be turned away in judgment are not pagans. They are “religious people.”**

They are the same “many” we met in Matthew 7:13, who took the wide gate. Paul said people like this “*hold to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power*” – 2nd Timothy 3:5. **They are people trying to earn God's favor through external works rather than living out the righteousness that is based on faith** (cf. Romans 10:5-10).

**They are hypocrites who say the right things but do not do them from the heart.** They know the right words and might appear good on the outside, but their character does not match.

They are like many in the church today who affirm sound doctrine but are not saved.

**They know about Jesus' Lordship can even give verbal assent to it, but they do not submit to him as Lord.** They're like those to whom Jesus spoke in Luke 6:46 saying, “**Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?**” They are fervent, pious, and respectful. They have been busy doing things in the Lord's name—even wondrous things, all the while thinking they are serving him with zeal. But their words are empty.

**Real faith is as concerned with doing the will of God as with affirming true doctrine.**

Jesus spoke the words of **Matthew 7:21–23** as a warning to people who think they are saved but do not live in obedience to God. **Unlike preachers today who go to excessive lengths to avoid upsetting anyone's assurance, our Lord was determined to destroy the falsehood of all who falsely thought they were redeemed.** Jesus often challenged such people. His message stands in stark contrast to the gospel of today. **The pattern of modern evangelism is to give people a pleasing and easy message; take them through a simple formula; get them to pray a prayer, sign a card, or whatever; then tell them they are saved.** Such an approach actually fights against the Holy Spirit.

**It is not our job to certify people's salvation.**

**Periodic doubts about one's salvation are not necessarily wrong.** Such doubts must be confronted and dealt with honestly and biblically.

Scripture encourages spiritual self examination.

In **2 Corinthians 13:5** Paul wrote, “**test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!**” That admonition is largely ignored – and often explained away today.

It has become quite popular to teach professing Christians that they can enjoy assurance of salvation no matter what their lives are like.

**Doing so encourages people living in hypocrisy, disobedience, and sin by offering them a false assurance. We are commanded to examine ourselves at least as often as we celebrate the Lord's supper—1 Corinthians 11:28.**

There are several categories of deceived people in the church.

There are **hypocrites**, those who merely try to appear religious. Others are **superficial people** who call themselves Christians but have no ongoing interest in living out the implications of faith. Still **others are heavily involved in church or religious activities; they know the facts of the gospel but are not obedient to the Word of God. *They go to church looking for good feelings, blessings, experiences, healings, miracles, or ecstatic gifts. They are committed to the church, but not the Word of God.***

**Many who have identified themselves with Christ and Christianity will be turned away at the judgment.**

**Note carefully that preaching, prophesying, casting out demons, and doing miracles—even under the guise of orthodoxy—are not proofs of true salvation.**

God often does work through unsaved people.

Mighty works may also be done by Satan's power.

**The magicians of Egypt were able to duplicate some of the miracles Moses performed.** The evil sons of Sceva in Acts 19 cast out demons. Matthew 24:24 prophesies that false Christ's and false prophets will come in do signs and wonders.

Satan will do almost anything to deceive an unbeliever into thinking he or she is saved.

**Miracles and prophecies and mighty wonders are not the same as a holy life.** Without true holiness, no one will see God—Hebrews 12:14. Because God is holy, those in whom he dwells will progress more and more toward holiness. If you are stalled, or if you are slipping in the opposite direction, it is right that you examine yourself.

Pursuing the standard of perfection does not mean we can never fail. It means that when we fail we deal with it. **Those with true faith will fail—and in some cases, fail frequently – but a genuine believer will, as a pattern of life, be confessed in sin and coming to the Father for forgiveness – 1 John 1:9.**

Perfection is the standard; direction is the test.

**If your life does not reveal growth in grace and righteousness and holiness, you need to examine the reality of your faith.**

## Hearing Without Obeying: The Sin of Empty Hearts

**Read Matthew 7:24-27 carefully.** What seems at 1st to be a very simple story about 2 men building 2 houses is in fact **a powerful commentary on people who have heads full of knowledge but hearts empty of faith.** It contrasts those who obey and those who do not. The difference between the 2 is a matter of eternal consequence.

**This is a final reiteration of the central theme of the Sermon on the Mount.** Christ's words are aimed at those who profess to know God, who think of themselves as part of the kingdom, but whose lives did not reveal the character of the King.

The only difference Jesus mentions is the foundations on which they were built.

Obeying the words of Christ is equivalent to building on solid rock.

### **The validation of salvation is a life of obedience.**

**If one does not obey Christ as a pattern of life, then professing to know him is an empty verbal exercise.** Think for a moment about this: one man builds his house the quick, easy way, while the other builds the hard way. **Building on sand requires no preparation.** You do not have to dig. You just slap it up, bringing quick results but not lasting ones.

Much of modern evangelism is building on the sand.

**It allows no time for conviction of sin, no opportunity for deep repentance, no chance to understand why we must come to grips with the reality of our lostness, and no occasion for the Holy Spirit to work.**

*"There are some who say they are saved before they have any feeling sense that they are lost."  
- A.W. Pink*

Contemporary Brands of Christianity have become superficial, tolerant of people who have not dug deep and put in the right foundation.

**The Day of Judgment is coming!** That is what the wind, rain, and flood in verses 25–27 are speaking of. **God is sending the storm of judgment.** Some will stand and some will fall.

This illustration is marvelously consistent with the warning of verses 21–23. In both cases, the test of true faith is whether or not it produces obedience.

**Thus the Sermon on the Mount ends with a devastating warning of judgment:**  
***"...and great was its fall."***

The Gospel according to Jesus clearly calls for a radical difference – not merely a new option.

**What was the result of the sermon? A great revival? Thousands of conversions? **No!****

If anyone repented, it is not mentioned.

All they did was analyze Jesus' style! Exactly what he had counseled them not to do. In today's vernacular, we would say **the Sermon on the Mount blew their minds**. This was not a negative reaction; these people admitted they had never heard such wisdom, never seen such depth, never understood such rich truth. **No one had ever issued such fearful warnings about hell.** No one had ever confronted the religious leaders like that!

**Jesus spoke with such boldness!**

But it was not a saving response offered by the crowd; they had already started building on the sand. There was no repentance, no expression of obedience—only analysis.

And that's where it ends.

Genuine faith cannot hear the Lord's words and walk away without acting on them. The faithful will build their house on solid Rock.

## **Chapter 22: The Cost of Discipleship**

Let me say again unequivocally that **Jesus' summons to deny self and follow him was an invitation to salvation, not an offer of a higher life or a 2nd step of faith following salvation.**

**Every Christian is a disciple.**

In fact, the Lord's Great Commission was to: *“Go into all the world and make disciples—teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded.”* See Matthew 28:18–20. **That means the mission of the church, and the goal of evangelism, is to make disciples.**

Disciples are people who believe, those whose faith motivates them to obey all that Jesus commanded. The word “disciple” is used consistently as a synonym for biblical believer.

**When Jesus called disciples, he carefully instructed them about the cost of following him.** NOTE: He turned away anyone who was reluctant to pay the price – such as the rich young ruler. He warned all who thought of becoming disciples to count the cost carefully.

*“Large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.”* - J Stott



A Christian is not one who simply buys fire insurance, just to escape hell.

**True believers have a faith that expresses itself in submission and obedience.**

## **Christians follow Christ.**

Christians are committed unquestionably to Christ as Lord and Savior. They are humble, meek learners. When we fail, we seek forgiveness and move forward. That is our spirit and redirection.

**The call to Christian discipleship explicitly demands that kind of total dedication.**

Christianity is full commitment. No one can come to Christ on any of the terms.

Read **Matthew 10:32–39** carefully.

Our Lord gave no more definitive statement on discipleship than that. There he spells out in the clearest possible language the cost of discipleship. The words are principles of discipleship applicable to us all.

This was not an invitation to a higher kind of relationship, but a reminder of what had already been established when they believed. **Our Lord was continuing to teach them the meaning of faith and salvation, and constantly reminding them of the commitment they had made when they chose to follow him.**

These words apply to you and to me as well. Luke 14:25–35 contains similar words—an even stronger language – Jesus spoke not just to the 12 but to the multitudes that came to hear him.

Matthew 10:2 refers to the 12 as **apostles**. That means **“sent–ones.”** Their basic training being complete, **Jesus sent them out to preach.** In this parting charge to them, however he uses the word disciple, not apostle. **His words apply to every disciple.**

### Confessing Christ Before Others

A characteristic of every genuine believer is that he or she will profess faith in Christ unreservedly. Paul wrote “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.*” – Rom. 1:16.

**The heart of real discipleship is a commitment to be like Jesus Christ.** That means both acting as he did and being willing to accept the same treatment. **It means facing a world that is hostile to him and doing it fearlessly.** It means confessing before others that Jesus is Lord.

The word **“confess”** means to affirm. It is a statement of identification, faith, confidence, and trust. We are to confess Christ before men. **This emphasizes the public character the confession, and its meaning cannot be avoided.** In Romans 10:10 we read, “*...with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*”

**If the heart truly believes, the mouth will be eager to confess.**

**Confession is prompted and energized by God.** Again, confession is characteristic of true faith; it is *not* an additional condition of salvation, nor is it a cause agent.

1 John 4:15 says that the mark of a true Christian is one who confesses Jesus as the son of God. **This does not mean a disciple will always stand up for the Lord.** Peter denied the Lord 3 times on the night he was betrayed.

**A moment of failure does not invalidate a disciple's credentials.** We have all failed. **But if we are true disciples, we will not purposely keep our faith hidden from everyone all the time.**

**Churches are filled with people masquerading as disciples but denying the Lord and some very disturbing ways.** *Matthew 25:31–46 details what will happen in the judgment.* This passage describes the **separation of the sheep and the goats at the end of the tribulation.** But it's principle applies to individuals in every phase of God's judgment. **Those who fail to live in a way that is consistent with faith in Christ are sent to eternal punishment.**

### Getting the Priorities Straight

A second hallmark of a true disciple is loving Christ even more than one's own family...  
–Matthew 10:34–37.

**The Lord is saying we must be unquestionably loyal to him, even above our families—and especially above ourselves.**

*Why is the language so severe? Why does Christ use such offensive terms? Because He is as eager to drive the uncommitted away as he is to draw true disciples to himself.*

### Taking Up the Cross

***Those who are not willing to lose their lives for Christ are not worthy of him*—Matthew 10:38. They cannot be his disciples—Luke 14:27.** These statements cannot be made to accommodate the casual approach, the “conversion” that is in vogue in our generation. **Jesus is not asking people to add him to their lives. He wants disciples willing to forsake everything – even willingness to die for his sake if necessary.**

**Matthew 10:38 does not mean bearing the cross of “a difficult situation,” a chronic disease, or a nagging spouse.** That is not what the word “cross” meant to Jesus, nor his first century audience. It did not call to their minds the idea of long-term difficulties or troublesome ordinance.

When Jesus said, **“take up your cross,”** to them, they thought of **a cruel instrument of torture and death.** They thought of dying in the most agonizing method known to man. **The people Jesus spoke to understood that he was calling them to die for him.** They understood the call was to surrender to him as Lord in every sense.

**The Bible does not teach salvation by martyrdom.**

The Lord was not advising the disciples to try to get themselves killed for him. He was simply saying that genuine Christians do not shrink back, even in the face of death.

**The true disciple is the one who chooses to serve the Lord even at great personal expense.**

Again, this is not absolute in the sense that it disallows temporary failures like that of Peter. But even Peter did ultimately prove himself to be a true disciple. The time came when he willingly gave his life for Christ sake.

**Luke 9:23** records the words of Christ: *"If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."*

Notice the word "**daily**."

**The life of a disciple invites persecution and therefore must be a life of daily self-denial.**

## **Faith is not an experiment.**

**Faith means taking up the cross daily, giving all for Christ each day. It means no reservations, no uncertainty, no hesitation.** See Luke 9:59–61.

Faith means nothing is held back, nothing purposely shielded from his Lordship...

**Faith calls for painful severing of all ties with the world, a sealing of the escape hatches, a ridding oneself of any kind of security to fall back on in case of failure.** Genuine believers know they are going ahead with Christ until death.

Jesus said in **Luke 9:62** that **once a true believer puts their hand to the plow, they will not look back!**

## **Chapter 23: The Lordship of Christ**

Scripture never speaks of anyone "making" Christ Lord, except God Himself (Acts 2:36). Jesus is Lord of all and the biblical mandate is not to "make" Christ Lord, but rather, to bow to His lordship.

**Those who reject His lordship or give Him mere lip service are not saved** (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3 & Luke 6:46-49).

**All who believe the Word of God will agree that Jesus is Lord.** He is ever and always Lord, whether or not anyone acknowledges His lordship or surrenders to His authority.

**Jesus frequently made his Lordship the central issue with unbelievers.** Everything he said to the rich young ruler, for example, demanded recognition of his Lordship. And in Matthew 7:21–22 as well as Luke 6:46–49, he challenged the bogus profession of those who called him Lord but did not really know him, and he made it clear that obedience to his authority is a prerequisite of entry into the kingdom.

**Clearly, the Lordship of Jesus is an essential part of the message of salvation.**

Jesus is God

To say that Jesus is Lord is to acknowledge that he is Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:16-17). Only unbelievers dispute this truth.

**When we hear Christ express emotion, we are listening to the heart of God.** And when he gives a directive, it is the command of God.

Jesus is Sovereign

**As God, Jesus is our sovereign Lord.**

Jesus never engaged obstinate unbelievers in dialogue.

Jesus did not argue theology with people. He simply appealed again to his own authority as God.

The fact that the Jewish leaders could not kill him before his time was further proof of his sovereignty. See John 5:22-23 and John 10:17–18.

**In the final judgment, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Christ as Lord,** to the glory of God the father (**Philippians 2:11-12**). That does not mean, of course, that all will be saved, but that even those who die in unbelief will be forced to confess the Lordship of Jesus.

Jesus is Savior

Although he is sovereign God, Jesus took on himself the limitations of human flesh – John 1:14, except that he never sinned—Hebrews 4:15. He emptied himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross—**Philippians 2:7–8**.

**He suffered the guilt of our sin:** he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness – **1 Peter 2:24**.

**The death of Christ for us was the ultimate sacrifice.**

**Jesus paid the penalty of our sin in full and opened the way for us to have peace with God.**

**“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”** – Romans 5:8.

**Salvation belongs to those who receive him, but they must receive him for all that he is—the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords** (1 Timothy 6:15).

Jesus is Lord

Scripture consistently affirms the Lordship of Christ in every way. He is called Lord no less than 747 times in the New Testament. The book of Acts refers to him as Lord 92 times, while calling him Savior only twice.

Preaching in the early church made the Lordship of Christ the heart of the Christian message.

The centrality of Jesus’ Lordship to the gospel message is clear From the way Scripture presents the terms of salvation. **Those who tried to separate believing in Christ as Savior and yielding to him as Lord have a difficult time with many of the biblical invitations to faith**, such as Acts 2:21 ("Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved") or Acts 2:36 " let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." See also **Acts 16:31 and Romans 10:9–10.**

All those passages indisputably include the Lordship of Christ as part of the Gospel according to Jesus. His Lordship includes the ideas of Dominion, authority, sovereignty, and the right to govern. If those ideas are implicit in the phrase "confess Jesus as Lord" (Romans 10:9), then it is clear that people who come to Christ for salvation must do so in obedience to him—that is, a willingness to surrender to him as Lord.

Any person living in rebellion against Christ's authority does not acknowledge him as Lord in any sense—Titus 1:16.

**The signature of saving faith is surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The definitive test of whether a person belongs to Christ is a willingness to bow to his divine authority.**

Jesus himself pointed out the paradox of those who called him Lord but did not really believe it in Luke 6:46. **Acknowledging who Jesus is merely equates one with the demons who do the same** – James 2:19.

This in no way establishes a gospel of human works. It is the Holy Spirit who enables a person to confess Jesus as Lord.

**Jesus could not be Savior if he were not Lord.**

Apart from his Lordship, every aspect of his saving work is impossible. When we come to Jesus for salvation, we come to the one who is Lord over all.

Any message that omits the truth that Jesus is Lord cannot be called the gospel. It is a defective message that presents a Savior who is not Lord, a redeemer who does not demonstrate authority over sin, a weakened, sickly messiah who cannot command those he rescues.

Those who refuse Him as Lord can not use Him as Savior.

You cannot hold on to sin with one hand, and take Jesus with the other.

## **Part FIVE: Jesus Fulfills His Gospel**

### **Chapter 24: The Triumph Is Complete**

A Show of Strength...

All this worlds so-called holy men contrast sharply with the One who really did walk on water... **Jesus Christ. His greatest display of spiritual authority was when he died on a cross.**

That is hard to comprehend nevertheless true. **Jesus did not fall victim to anyone or anything.**

**He had come for the specific purpose of dying to atone for sin—Luke 19:10 and John 1:29.**

**His crucifixion was a vivid display of his authority over circumstances, men, and even death.**

Far from being a tragic end to his earthly ministry, it was the culmination of all he had set out to do.

**The biblical truth is often overlooked.**

For centuries, people have argued about who was to blame for killing Jesus. Certainly, the Jewish leaders who condemned him were culpable. They were by no means innocent. And the Roman government must share the guilt. They executed an innocent man.

**But Jesus was not ultimately a victim of either Rome or the Jewish leaders. Acts 2:23 declares, Jesus was delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. Amen!**

**The death of Christ was an act of the Son's submission and obedience to the father's will. Listen to the bold statement Jesus makes in John 10:17–18... *"I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from my Father."***

Do not think for a moment that anyone could kill Jesus against his will.

### Control Over Every Detail

Throughout the crucifixion, Jesus Christ was on a divine timetable. Step-by-step, each detail of Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled. **Psalm 22** and **Isaiah 53** in particular outlined prophetically the specific features of his death.

It Is Finished!

These 3 words, when read in **the Greek**, comes through in only one word - "**tetelestai.**"

**Tetelestai! was not the groan or curse of a victim; it was the proclamation of a victor.**

It was a shout of triumph: IT IS FINISHED!!!

**The work of redemption was done.** *Nothing was left.* **The ransom was paid.** The wages of sin were settled. Divine justice was satisfied. The work of Christ was thus accomplished. **The Lamb of God had taken away the sins of the world – John 1:29.**

**There was nothing more on earth for him to do except die so that he might rise again.**

A crucial footnote: ***when Jesus said, it is finished, he meant it.*** Nothing can be added to what he did. Many people believe they must supplement his work with good deeds of their own. They believe they must facilitate their own redemption through religious rituals, good deeds, or whatever else they can accomplish through their own efforts. But **no works of human righteousness can expand on what Jesus accomplished for us (Titus 3:5).**

The beginning and the end of our salvation was consummated by Jesus Christ, and we can contribute nothing.

What would you think if I took a magic marker and tried to add more features to the Mona Lisa? That would be a travesty. It's a masterpiece! No one needs to add to it.

In an infinitely greater way, that is true of Christ's atoning work. Nothing we can do would in any way add to what he accomplished on our behalf at the cross. ***Having finished his work, our Lord bowed his head, and gave up his spirit – John 19:30.***

There was no jerk, no sudden slump. He bowed his head.

The Greek word used here evokes the picture of gently placing one's head on a pillow. In the truest sense, **no man took Jesus' life from Him. He laid it down of his own accord.**

Jesus died in complete control of all that was happening to him.

## **Even in his death He was Lord.**

To the human eye Jesus looked like a pathetic casualty, powerless in the hands of mighty men.

But the opposite was true. **He was the One in charge**. He proved it a few days later...

He is still in charge!

This, then, is the gospel that our Lord sends us forth to proclaim:

*That Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate,  
humbled himself to die on our behalf.  
Thus He became the sinless sacrifice  
to pay the penalty of our guilt.  
He rose from the dead to declare with power  
that He is Lord over all,  
and He offers eternal life freely to sinners  
who will surrender to Him in humble, repentant faith.  
This gospel promises nothing to the proud rebel,  
but for broken, penitent sinners,  
it graciously offers everything  
that pertains to life and godliness.*

**" For you have received everything you need for life and godliness!"**

- 2 Peter 1:3