
FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRUthe**BIBLE**

WHY FOUR GOSPELS?

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

INTRODUCTION

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Have you ever wondered why the Bible gives us four Gospel records? Why the repetition? Or why not more?

Scholars attempt to “harmonize” the Gospels into one account. It is amazing how outstanding minds will trim the corners in an attempt to reconcile any disparity they think they’ve found in the Gospel records. Reading many of these harmonies is like trying to fit a size four shoe on a lady with a size seven foot—it’s just difficult to do! You’ve probably heard the story about the lady who, when asked by the salesclerk what size shoe she wore, said, “Well, I can get on a four, but five is my size, and since six feels so good, I always buy a size seven.” Let me tell you, that’s how harmonized Gospels sound. We do not need a harmony today—we need a *disharmony*.

The four Gospel records diverge and are vastly different—and for good reason. Each was written for a particular purpose to meet the need of a separate segment of the world population. We need to recognize this and let the Gospels conform to this very natural pattern. If the Holy Spirit had wanted one Gospel, He would have given us one Gospel. But He gave us four so they might meet the needs of mankind.

When Christ came, there were four major divisions in the human family. These divisions were not strictly racial or national, although they basically followed that pattern. Rather, they were cultural divisions based on thought patterns. There are four separate ways of looking at life; likewise, there are four levels of civilization. I believe that to this day you can still put all of mankind under one of these major divisions. Each presents certain specific human needs, each has certain expectations, and there is a Gospel to meet the need of each segment. We'll see that each performed a tremendous mission, and that God used these divisions of the human family to communicate His message ... which is for *all* mankind.

THE RELIGIOUS MAN

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

In Christ's day, religion was reduced to a ritual and a law. It was a legalistic system—and that was all. It was so dead that though in the beginning of His earthly ministry He said, "Do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise" (John 2:16), He concluded His ministry by saying, "Your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38), and He walked out. He turned His back on religion.

I am afraid there are those today, even in fundamental circles, who try to make Christianity just a matter of following little rules and regulations, learning the right vocabulary—and that is what makes them Christian. May I say to you, Christianity is a Person, and that Person is Christ. It is not a religion at all; it doesn't even conform to the meaning of the word "religion."

Religion does not satisfy the heart of man. One dark night, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus with a question. (The religious man always thinks he has the answers until a few questions are asked and he comes into

contact with Jesus Christ.) That night Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born [again]?" (John 3:4). Yet Nicodemus represented religion at its best.

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

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

"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

–Matthew 11:28, 29

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

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."

–Matthew 23:13

Religion shuts men out from God. So the Gospel of Matthew was written to tell how our Lord came to meet the need of the religious man.

THE STRONG MAN

The second division is the Roman Empire, representing the strong man. For one millennium, the Romans ruled the world by strict rule of law and justice. Our laws are partially based on theirs. Dr. D.S. Gregory wrote of the Romans:

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

From *Key to the Gospels*

Mark wrote to meet the need of this group.

Mark is the Gospel of action. The word that occurs more than any other is the little conjunction "and." A teacher I had in rhetoric class would have failed me if I'd turned in a paper with as many "ands" in it as does Mark's Gospel. But Mark didn't fail. He wrote what the Romans wanted to hear—"Jesus did this ... and He did that ... and He did the other thing." The Roman wanted to know that. He believed that law and justice, as was represented by Rome, got action throughout the world. And it did—under Roman rule, it was death for anybody that resisted. No one could flee, because Rome had a secret service that reached out over three continents and the islands of the sea. The Gospel of Mark was written to meet the need of that man.

It is also the Gospel of miracles. Our Lord said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve"—to do something—"and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). One day a little Jew—crippled, ill, and heart-sick—stumbled down the Apian Way into Rome. He had already written, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power [not *exousian*, delegated power, but *dunamis*, dynamite power] of God to salvation ..." (Romans 1:16). Do you want to know if it was dynamite or not? Read Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He says the Gospel

Paul brought in was one of the factors that shook Rome to its foundations. It couldn't stand up against it. My friend, the Gospel of Mark is brief and written for the man of action.

THE THINKING MAN

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

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

Our Lord came to save the thinking man. After our Lord's resurrection when He met with His disciples, Luke said, “He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Aristotle was a great teacher, Socrates was a great teacher, Plato was a great teacher, but not like Jesus. Our Lord could open men's understanding to comprehend spiritual truth, and He still does this today. You and I give out the Word of God, but understanding comes from Him. He is still the Great Teacher.

THE WRETCHED MAN

The last major division of the human family was the races of the mysterious East. An English poet who spent a lot of time in the Orient said, “East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet.” Although it has an aura of mystery to those of us in the West, there is one thing we know about it:

It is a place of squalor, misery, and poverty. Thousands of people there die from starvation, but right beside that unspeakable poverty is untold wealth. Yet both the rich and the poor are wretched. And out of that mysterious East, for some strange reason, there came wise men saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have ... come to worship Him" (Matthew 2:2). They had a need, and they were looking for someone to meet that need. John wrote a Gospel for this particular mind:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. –John 20:30, 31

They don't need poverty, and they don't need wealth; neither has solved any problems. What they need is *life*. Jesus said, "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

These four groups—represented by the Hebrew, the Roman, the Greek, and the resident of the Orient—were well separated in that day. However, the world today is a melting pot. Technological advancements have made it so that when a man took his first step on the moon, the world saw it. Races today mingle and mix in thousands of places. Now all you have to do is to walk down the streets of a great, throbbing city and you will find all four groups:

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

There is the **strong man**. When I go out to lunch, I overhear the conversations of the bank clerks and young executives that fill the place. You would think the president of the Federal Reserve Bank was speaking to the head of the New York Stock Exchange to hear some of those young people talk. They are sure of themselves and on their way up. They do not think they need a Savior. You may be that strong person, thinking, "Preacher, you're not talking to me. I have what I want. I have a bank account and a fine family—I don't need Christ." Yes, you do. You don't rule the world; the Roman did, and even he needed Christ.



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

Then there is **the wretched man** in our midst today. Oh, he may have a few dollars in his pocket, but he is miserable. There are a lot of wretched people in this world—in all walks of life.

Christ “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). I hope you see your need of Him today. If you do, I'm here to tell you that He can meet your need, whatever it is. And most of all, He can save your soul. God had you in mind when He gave mankind a written record. He prepared one of the four Gospels specifically for you.

MATTHEW

WRITTEN FOR THE RELIGIOUS MAN

Years ago, the public was subjected to the news of one of the most brutal and shocking crimes of the twentieth century: The mass murders committed by Charles Manson and his band of followers. A group of young people, some barely out of their teens, participated in cold-blooded, wholesale slaying from what looked like a passionless and senseless orgy of blood. The most offensive and disgusting factor to me is that the leader of this group of young degenerates called himself Jesus Christ! This blasphemous assumption revealed that he was a religious leader operating a depraved and disgusting religion. There are still many like that abroad in our land today.

This was the final product of a society that boasted of its freedom, new morality, and its abandonment of the Judeo-Christian ethic. This was nothing new, of course, because the pattern had been duplicated many times before. The antediluvians, way back near the beginning of mankind, engaged in great wickedness, evil, corruption, viciousness, vileness, and violence. Paul lists a catalog of things that would characterize a coming generation.

Among them are “unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good” (2 Timothy 3:3). This is what happens when depraved human nature is free to do its thing. It looks as though we’ve arrived, does it not?

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

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

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

Religion has always been the greatest curse of mankind. If you doubt that, look at India today—it’s got religion. So does Africa. The United States of America is filled with religion, too. But religion has been a curse to mankind, and it always deals with externalities—with rituals, liturgy, forms, rules, regulations, ceremonies, laws, ordinances, rites, orgies, and incantations. After all, God gave just one religion, the Mosaic system, and He gave it to the nation Israel. This nation represented religion in the day that Christ came to this earth and Jerusalem was the religious center of the world.

Christianity is a *Person*, and you either have that Person or you don't have Him. To have Christ is salvation—that is not a religion.

The Gospel of Matthew is written primarily to the nation Israel, and therefore to the religious man. You need a background of the Old Testament to understand Matthew. There is a movement in the Gospel of Matthew. It's like a swinging door that swings back into the Old Testament, gathering up more Old Testament prophecies than any other Gospel, and then it swings into the New Testament farther than any other one since only in the Gospel of Matthew is the church mentioned.

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

As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow me." So he arose and followed Him. –Matthew 9:9

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

The Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew—the only New Testament book to be written in that language. How do we know this? Well, Papias, one of the early church fathers and a bishop in Asia Minor who lived toward the end of the first century and into the second, turned to Christ under the preaching of Philip and Bartholomew. He was an associate of Polycarp, the martyr, and was contemporary with Justus of Jerusalem and Ignatius of Antioch. He tells us, "Matthew wrote the Oracles (of the Lord) in the Hebrew tongue, and every one interpreted them as he was able." Eusebius, historian of the third century, also wrote:

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

It is interesting to see that Irenaeus and Origen confirmed this as well. These were church fathers in whom we have great confidence. And then Jerome—who came along much later but lived in Palestine and is considered, I think, the most learned of the Latin fathers—made this statement:

Matthew the publican, called Levi, who composed a Gospel in the Hebrew tongue for the special use of those Jews who had believed in Christ, and no longer followed the shadow of the Law, after the revelation of the substance of the Gospel.

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

God had prepared these people over the long haul. Two thousand years before Christ came, there was a man named Abram living in idolatry in Ur of the Chaldees, for the whole world

had gone into idolatry. God told him, “*Leave this, and come to a land which I’ll show you.*” God made certain covenants with him, promising him a land, a nation, and that he would be a blessing to the nations of the world—because after the Flood and the Tower of Babel God had to bid goodbye to the human family. (See Genesis 12:1-3.) But He said to them, in essence, “*I’ll be back, because I’m going to prepare salvation for the world.*” So He prepared the descendants of Abraham, drew them aside from the stream of humanity, segregated them, put them in a place where He could school and train them. Then He scattered them throughout the world for a purpose. There is *purpose* in what our God does.

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

The first dispersion took place at the time of Jacob and his family. Seventy people went down to Egypt with Jacob. When they came out, they numbered probably a million and a half. Jacob went down to Egypt at God’s direction, and there in the brickyards God forged in the fires of slavery these people into a nation. Then He took them out into the wilderness and there He gave them the Mosaic system, a religion. He kept them in that wilderness, training them and giving them the experience of forty years with the Law. Then, at the end of it, Moses wrote Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is not a repetition of the Law, but the interpretation of the Law with forty years’ experience. God also gave the ancient world a doctrinal statement most theologians say is the greatest in the Old Testament: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Or let me translate it a little differently: “Jehovah our *Elohim* (plural), our

A white lamb stands in a grassy field, looking directly at the camera. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a setting or rising sun, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere. The lamb's wool is bright white, and its ears are perked up. The background is a blurred expanse of green grass and a bright, glowing sky.

TO HAVE CHRIST IS

salvation.

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triune God, is one Jehovah.” God was saying through the Hebrew people and to a world of polytheists, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3).

The Hebrews bore that witness and had an influence. Have you ever wondered about the Greeks and their tremendous civilization? When Homer was writing about the gods upon Mount Olympus and the wars at Troy, David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, was singing praises to God. It is recognized today that the Hebrews so influenced the Greeks that many intelligent Greeks repudiated the gods on Mount Olympus and became monotheistic. Both Socrates and Plato wrote that way. Out yonder in the far east, Zoroastrianism (modern Parsiism) arose after the Babylonian captivity. Out of the ancient world they testified to the Oneness of God. Where did they get it? From Israel. “Hear, O Israel: Jehovah, our triune God, is one Jehovah.”

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

Pharaoh, in Egypt at the time of his greatest crisis, had Joseph as his prime minister—and it's a good thing he did. Daniel was prime minister to the rulers of two of the great world empires—Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Apparently, he influenced them to such an extent that they came to a knowledge of God. Later, a Persian ruler had a Jewish consort by the name of Esther and a prime minister by the name of Mordecai. Also, a Persian king had a secretary of state by the name of Nehemiah. This was during another critical period in the history of the world when the power passed from the East to the West.

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

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

Matthew wrote to show that Jesus was the Messiah and that He fulfilled the letter of the Law and the prophets in His coming to this earth. He said Jesus was going to initiate a kingdom on earth, but it must conform to the *intent* of the Old Testament—there

must be not just an outward form, but an inward change. I wish the amillennialists under whom I studied in seminary understood what our Lord really meant when He said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). Of course it’s within—you don’t rub it on the outside like lotion; it has to begin in the heart. Matthew makes it very clear that the kingdom is to be peopled with folk who’ve been changed from within. They must have a capacity for God, but Messiah must die to make that possible. That religious leader, Nicodemus, came to Jesus by night to talk about the kingdom. Our Lord said, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). But He also told him that “the Son of man [must] be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:14, 15). He must die to make the kingdom possible.

The Gospel of Matthew opens with these majestic words about the birth of Jesus:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. –Matthew 1:1

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

Next, the genealogy is given to explain why Joseph could not be Jesus’ father. Actually, the value of the genealogy is not to show how Jesus could be born of a virgin, but how He could not be born any other way—because Matthew makes it very clear that Jeconiah is in that genealogy (see Matthew 1:11, 12). Those who knew the Old Testament were aware there had been a curse pronounced upon that line, and *no one* in that line could sit upon the throne of David (see Jeremiah 22:24-30). How can Joseph have a son to sit upon the throne of David? He can’t. However, he can be the husband of Mary, who is also in the line of David through another route—David’s son, Nathan. And, by being her husband, Joseph can give to Jesus the royal and legal rights to the throne of David. Israel needed to know that, and Matthew wrote this for that reason.

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

Daniel gave that marvelous prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, which gives the time that Messiah would be cut off (see Daniel 9:24-26). All Israel should have been sitting on the curbstone in Jerusalem, waiting to receive Him as the Triumphal Entry came by. The Old Testament had even predicted the star. Old Balaam said, “A Star shall come out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17). And the wise men came out of the East where Balaam had been, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2).

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

The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. –Isaiah 60:3

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

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

For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet, Isaiah, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.'" –Matthew 3:3

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

Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount as does no other Gospel writer. Why? May I say to you that it's given for people under the Law, for those who have a religion. Have you ever noticed that the liberal always is drawn to the Sermon on the Mount? I've talked to a number of men and women who say the Sermon on the Mount is their religion. But I haven't found anybody yet who's keeping it. You'd better change your religion, friend, unless you keep it. Our need is not religion; we need a Savior. And the Sermon on the Mount is religion—it is the ethic that Christ gave. Do not despise the Sermon on the Mount, just realize that you don't keep it and be honest about it. Our Lord also gave the dynamic Matthew records later. Matthew is not attempting to give you a chronological life of Christ. Rather, he clusters together a group of miracles our Lord performed to show you that the One who gave the ethic on top of the mountain had the power to execute it down below. He is the One Matthew is presenting.

Matthew shows that the Sermon on the Mount deals with the outside of man. Why? Because the people have already been dealt with on the inside. Man has to be changed from within. After three years of ministry, our Lord took these men who had been with Him all that time up to Caesarea Philippi where He questioned them: "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matthew 16:13). They answered, "Well, there are all kinds of reports going around."

(And they've been going around ever since.) Then He asked, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). That's the same question He asks you today. Simon Peter said what any Jew in that day must have said when he came to know Him: "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The Lord Jesus answered,

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

–Matthew 16:17

Then He mentions the church for the first time; the church is His immediate program now.

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

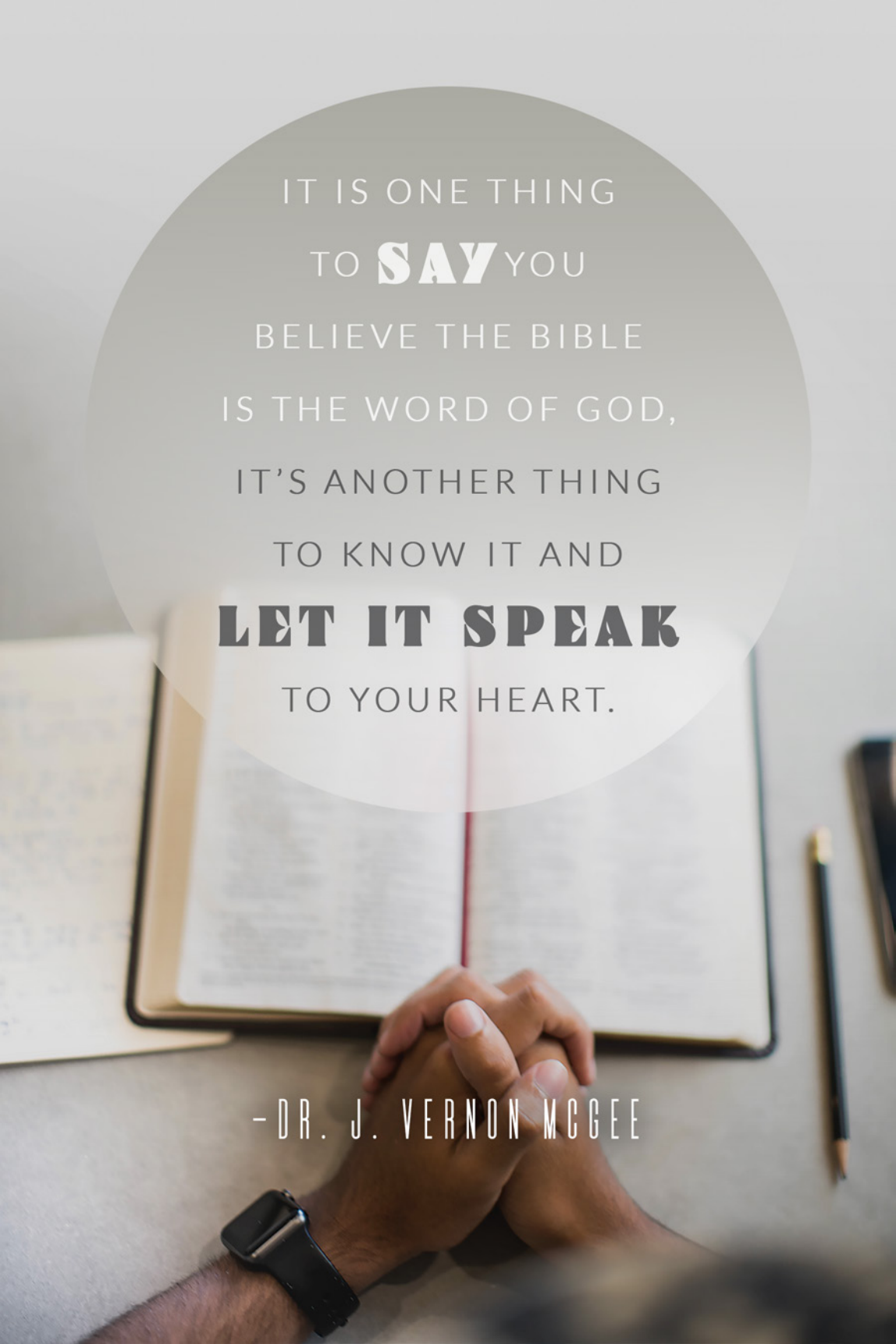
From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. –Matthew 16:21

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

Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

–Matthew 16:22

How wrong was Peter's reaction? That type of talk is satanic. It is so wrong that our Lord said, "Get behind Me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23). Then, according to Dr. Luke, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. And Matthew, for the benefit of these people, repeats five times that on the way to Jerusalem He said He was going there to suffer and die. Again and again, He gave this forewarning to them. You see, at the very beginning of His

A photograph of a person's hands clasped in prayer over an open Bible on a desk. The hands are in the foreground, with a black watch on the left wrist. The Bible is open in the middle ground, showing text on both pages. The background is a light-colored desk with a pencil and a pen visible on the right side. A large, semi-transparent white circle is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

IT IS ONE THING
TO **SAY** YOU
BELIEVE THE BIBLE
IS THE WORD OF GOD,
IT'S ANOTHER THING
TO KNOW IT AND
LET IT SPEAK
TO YOUR HEART.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

ministry, He did not tell His disciples about His death. Now you see why—they weren't ready. They had a religion; they did not think they needed a Savior to die for them.

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

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, and mercy and faith.” –Matthew 23:23

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

“Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.” –Matthew 23:24, 25

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

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

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” –Matthew 21:42

They have rejected Him, but He will become the chief cornerstone. He will yet rule on this earth. He is still the Savior of the world. You and I are going to have to deal with Jesus Christ someday. Every person will. Saved or lost, we will stand before Him.

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you [the nation Israel] and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” –Matthew 21:43, 44

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

“Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.” –Matthew 21:45, 46

Then our Lord gave a commission:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. –Matthew 28:19, 20

I think when the disciples heard Him say these words that day on the Mount of Olives, they remembered Isaiah’s prediction of Him: “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). The gospel they were to carry to the ends of the earth is a gospel that can reach inside and transform individuals who will trust Jesus Christ.

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

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

MARK

WRITTEN FOR THE STRONG MAN

When the founding fathers first came to the shores of what's now the United States, they did not come with the intent to make war or rape the land of its wealth. They truly came in peace. Felicia Dorothea Hemans states it poetically:

The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England

*Not as the conqueror comes,
They, the true-hearted, came;
Not with the roll of the stirring drums,
And the trumpet that sings of fame;
What sought they thus afar?
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of seas, the spoils of war?—
They sought a faith's pure shrine!
Aye, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trode.
They have left unstain'd what
There they found—
Freedom to worship God.
That was their mission.*

Mark wrote his Gospel to the strong man, and at that time the strong man was the Roman Empire. For almost a millennium, the Romans brought peace to the world. But it was a peace obtained by a philosophy different from that of our founding fathers, who set out to create a nation with the freedom to worship God. Roman methods were contrary to ours and contrary to the Word of God. Rome was part of the image Daniel interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 2:40) and typified by iron. And Rome was indeed as hard as iron. The Romans were men of will and strength. They undertook the Herculean task of ruling the world. They believed in human power expressed in law and order, and they would subordinate the individual to the state in their attempt to attain a universal state. They built highways over the territories they conquered to give them ready access in their quest to rule the world. They promised to those they conquered law, order, and protection. And the iron heel of Rome was put down on mankind.

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

From *Key to the Gospels* by D. S. Gregory

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

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

So although Rome brought peace to the world, it was a frightful peace. This gives us a picture of the tremendous empire that was ruling the world when the Lord Jesus Christ was born.

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

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

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. –Romans 1:16

God sent a message to that segment of the world population of that day—the Gospel of Mark. John Mark is the writer, and this young man was evidently schooled in Roman thought. He himself apparently was a man of action, though he certainly was a coward at the beginning (see Acts 13:13). But he made good. His Gospel is actually Simon Peter’s account. Evidently John Mark got the facts from Simon Peter, who was likewise a man of action—he liked action better than he liked logic. This is the man the Spirit of God chose to be the first one to go to a Roman soldier, a centurion, and preach the gospel.

...

**God never asks a sinner
to do but one thing:**

**Take his place
beneath the cross.**



- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

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

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all." –Acts 10:34-36

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

Now follow Peter as he continues his message to the Roman centurion:

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good [That's interesting because it is what the Roman thought he was doing and believed in doing—going about doing good.] and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed him openly." –Acts 10:38-40

This, you see, is the way Peter gave the gospel to a Roman and fellow man of action.

Most of the church fathers concur that Simon Peter is the one who gave the facts to John Mark. Let me give just a couple of quotations to support that statement. Papias, associate of Polycarp, heard the words of the apostles from those who were

their followers. He writes: “Mark, the interpreter of Peter, wrote carefully down all that he recollected, but not according to the order of Christ’s speaking or working.” And Tertullian, one of the great minds of North Africa (he was from Carthage), wrote that the Gospel “Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter’s, whose interpreter Mark was.” We find Eusebius says the same thing, and Clement says there was a group of Roman knights that requested Simon Peter to leave in writing the things he had taught them, and that it was John Mark who wrote for him.

It was DaCosta, in his book on Mark, who said the style of Mark’s Gospel is very much like the commentaries of Caesar. Mark is brief and blunt. Forty times the word “straightway” occurs. His most-used word is “and.” Jesus did this ... *and* He did that ... *and* He did the other thing. That’s Mark’s Gospel.

Fitting for the Gospel of action, John Mark’s account is the Gospel of miracles. Of the physical miracles Christ performed, 12 are recorded in the Gospel of Mark. There are five nature miracles: He stills the storm, He feeds the five thousand, He walks on the sea, He feeds the four thousand, He curses the fig tree. And then there were ten spiritual miracles of casting out demons. Mark records only one supernatural miracle—Jesus raised the dead. (You need only one to prove who Jesus is!)

Jesus is the King, the almighty conqueror here. He eclipses all the conquerors and the Caesars of Rome, and He corrects what was wrong in them. And when you march through Mark, you’re marching with a Man of power who can reach men of power. Therefore, you do not have a logical or chronological order in Mark. He moves in rapid succession from miracle to miracle, culminating in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The first chapter of Mark is, without doubt, one of the most remarkable chapters in the Word of God. All the facts that are here we find in the other Gospels, but they are not told as Mark tells them. Notice how he begins:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

–Mark 1:1

Wait a minute, Mark, tell us about His birth. No, there is no baby in Bethlehem in Mark's record. What did Caesar care for babies? If you'd like to know whether or not he cared for them, he signed the tax bill that commanded everybody to go and register. It was the winter season, and probably somebody with a heart protested, "Why do it at this time? There are many women with babies." He probably said, "What do I care about babies? One born every minute. I'm not interested in them." In other words, you'll not find any baby pictures of the caesars. When I was in Rome, I went around to take a look. There were statues of the caesars. And, friend, I wouldn't want to be in there at night. Even in chiseled stone they're a fearsome-looking crowd. There is no baby there. So the Gospel of Mark does not open with a baby in Bethlehem—that would have been weakness to the Roman mind.

As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You."—Mark 1:2

The second verse reveals another tremendous fact: There is no genealogy here. After all, the Roman couldn't care less about Abraham and David. The Roman's question was, "What can Jesus *do*? That's what we want to know." When a man comes to your house to do a job for you, you ask him whether or not he is able to do the job. Suppose he says, "My ancestors came over on the *Mayflower*." What do you care? You want to know whether he can fix the T.V. May I say to you, the Roman wanted to know what Jesus could do; he cared nothing for His ancestry.

Mark begins with John the Baptist, who introduces this One. John steps out as the voice crying in the wilderness, making this tremendous statement the Roman wouldn't miss:

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.—Mark 1:4

The Roman at this point would have thrown up his hands and said, "No one can forgive sins, not even Rome. We give justice and law to the world, but we do not give mercy." Rome never

exercised mercy. It was always justice. Sins were not forgiven. If you broke the law, you paid the penalty. And here is One who is talking about the remission of sins!

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

“There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.” –Mark 1:7

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

“I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” –Mark 1:8

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

Notice what happens:

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

This is action, friend—“straightway” and “immediately” are used 40 times in this Gospel.

And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. –Mark 1:10

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

Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” –Mark 1:11

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

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

Now notice the temptation of Jesus, particularly the urgency:

Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

–Mark 1:12, 13

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

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

He's marching now. Notice:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." –Mark 1:14, 15

What a message! Now our Lord is calling His followers:

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

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

Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. –Mark 1:21

He is working on the Sabbath day. When they questioned Him about it later, He said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). In other words, "We've got a man down in the ditch, and we're getting him out. We're redeeming him."

And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. –Mark 1:22

He spent that entire morning in the synagogue teaching.

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

But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them. –Mark 1:30, 31

There's none of this hocus-pocus healing when He heals. People didn't stagger back or fall over; they stood up and walked off.

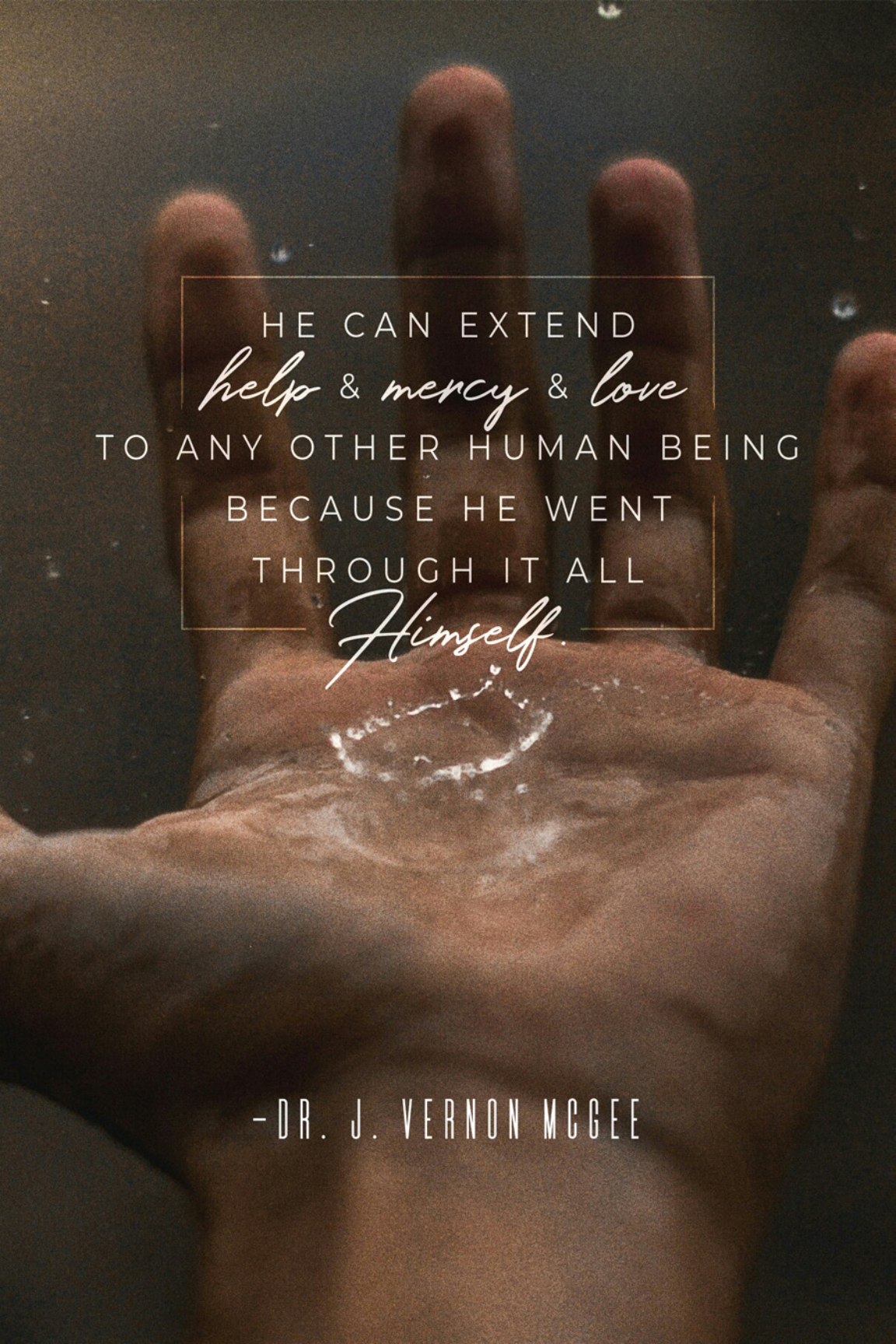
Well, I suppose after a day like this He will take the evening off. But no.

At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. –Mark 1:32, 33

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

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

Early the next morning He got up and went out to pray. He had another busy day ahead of Him. When He came into Capernaum, He healed a leper, and that leper disobeyed our Lord. Jesus told him, "*Don't tell anyone.*" But he told everybody, and the crowd came so that Jesus couldn't do the work He had come to do. He was not primarily a miracle worker; He had come on another mission. His purpose was not to perform miracles but to prepare



HE CAN EXTEND
help & mercy & love
TO ANY OTHER HUMAN BEING
BECAUSE HE WENT
THROUGH IT ALL
Himself.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

those who were around Him for the fact that He was going to the cross to die. Because of the crowds, He had to withdraw from Capernaum.

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

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” –Mark 2:5

Even the scribes who were there said, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7). And Rome said, “*Even God can’t forgive sins. Who is this man now saying He’ll forgive sins?*” Well, He is the Son of God. The world at this time was sick and tired of justice. I hear a great many people say today, “All I want is justice from God.” No, you don’t. You’d be in jail if you got justice. My friend, what you and I want is mercy. And that is what Rome wanted in that day; it’s what Rome wanted to hear.

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

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. –Romans 3:23

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

Being justified freely [without a cause] by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed. –Romans 3:24, 25

In other words, Paul is saying Jesus is the mercy seat for our sins. There was a poor publican who prayed, “O God, make a mercy seat for me to come to.” And many in the Roman Empire

were weary of hearing about justice and law. Now here comes the message of a mercy seat where men can come and be forgiven. Yet righteousness and justice are maintained because this One (what a contrast to Caesar He is!) died for His subjects. No Roman caesar ever did that!

Handed over to a Roman centurion one day was a prisoner. There might have been a hundred to three hundred prisoners there that day. But this one was different, and the centurion soon found that out. To begin with, in this business of nailing men to crosses he had been cursed in every language of the Roman Empire—but not by this Man. He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). The Roman centurion looked up and said, “*He is different. I’ve never heard that before.*” And then he witnessed the events that took place there. Three hours, Mark says, were in light, and man did his worst. Three hours of darkness followed, in which God did His best, for in that last three hours the cross became an altar on which “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” was offered (John 1:29).

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

So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!” –Mark 15:39

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

Many a time in that great Colosseum in Rome the gladiators would come up to Caesar’s box and say, “We who are about to die salute you.” They were laying down their lives for their emperor.

In contrast, Jesus, the Son of God, was laying down His life for His subjects. Paul said, "...that He [God] might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

After World War II, our nation became the most powerful in the world. We had a glorious opportunity to influence the world for good and for God. We didn't do it. Americans began to travel throughout the world, and there appeared a book titled *The Ugly American*. The proud, arrogant, cursing, swaggering, and drinking American was seen on every continent. "America is a Christian nation," he said, but he took God's name in vain and lived as though God did not exist—*he* didn't need Him. Americans turned to Washington instead of to worship; believed in government, not God; went to the bureaus instead of to the Bible.

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

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

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

Is there any hope for us? Yes. I hand you today the Gospel of Mark. It is the one for the strong man, the one who thinks he does not need God. The Roman finally came to the position, when his empire caved in, that he did not have the solution. And there went out over that empire the greatest movement the world has ever seen. It was greater than the Reformation. Literally millions turned to Christ. Why? Because they learned of the Man Christ

Jesus, who died for their sins. Because of His sacrifice, He could offer mercy and still be just. Today His offer is the same. He alone can solve the problems of your life.

Although He will save you by faith alone, when you become His He will be a greater dictator than Caesar ever was. He says:

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” –Matthew 10:37

He also said:

“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” –Mark 8:34

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

LUKE

WRITTEN FOR THE THINKING MAN

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

There was at that time a very brilliant young scholar in Cambridge by the name of William Ramsay. He was an agnostic and wanted to disprove the accuracy of the Bible. He knew Luke wrote a historical record of Jesus in his Gospel and he knew of Paul’s missionary journey in the Book of Acts. This brilliant young scholar also knew all historians make mistakes and many of them are liars. In Will and Ariel Durant’s book, *The Lessons of History*, appears this statement:

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

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

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

I have great respect for Luke personally. He is the only Gentile who wrote or made any contribution to the canon of Scripture. He wrote two books, Luke and Acts. You may say to me, "How do you know he was a Gentile?" I think we have good evidence that he was. Paul, who knew him as a close companion, when giving a list of early church saints of that day, names a group of those who were "of the circumcision" (Israelites). He concluded this list by commenting, "These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me" (Colossians 4:11). That is, those named were Israelites who had been a comfort to Paul. But there are others to mention: "Epaphras, who is one of you" (Colossians 4:12)—the Colossians were Gentiles. Then in verse 14 he wrote,

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white lace dress and a necklace, is riding a bicycle. She is holding a book in her left hand. The background is a bright, overexposed outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on the image.

OH, WHAT WE
NEED TODAY IS LIFE,
NOT RELIGION.

Life!

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

“Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.” So in the list of Israelites he did not mention Luke, and when he mentioned Gentiles he included Luke. This leads me to believe that Paul, who knew him intimately, knew he was a Gentile.

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

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

Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis.

–Acts 16:10, 11

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

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

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

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

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed. –Luke 1:1-4

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

"Eyewitness" is the Greek word *autoptai*. Does that sound like a word you have heard before? *Auto* is the same word you find in "automobile," meaning that which is of itself. And from *opsomai* we get our word "optic." It means "to see," and "to see for

yourself” would indicate an eyewitness. Although that is a good translation, we miss something in the translation because it is a medical term, and it means to make an autopsy.

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

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

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

Now Luke had another purpose in view when he wrote his Gospel. He presents the perfect, divine Son of God. In the Gospel of Matthew, He is the Messiah who fulfills all the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is the King, and as you go through the Gospel of Matthew you think of the words King Lear uttered, according to Shakespeare: “Ay, every inch a king.” He is King in Matthew, but He’s the Redeemer here. In the Gospel of Mark, He’s the mighty Conqueror, the virile Ruler of this universe, the

only One who can rule it. But in the Gospel of Luke He is our Great High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And today He can extend help and mercy and love to any other human being because He went through it all Himself.

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

In the fourth century BC, Greece placed on the horizon of history the most brilliant and stimulating display of human genius the world has ever seen. To this day no age has even approximated it. They attempted to bring humanity to the place of perfection. Dr. Gregory wrote of them:

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

They thought they would develop the perfect man. You find it in their art and in their statuary. They attempted to produce the perfect man physically. And no one has ever sculpted or painted like Phidias and Praxiteles. They not only attempted to make him the beautiful person, but also mentally developed—to make him a man of reason, a thinking man. They produced Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in that period. And there is no system of philosophy in the world not indebted to these three men. Not only that, they produced literary giants. If you chose ten of the most outstanding poets, you would have to put Homer with them. Also, they produced the playwrights Euripides and Sophocles, and the most golden orator of all, Demosthenes. They attempted to attain the universal man. The world-man was the one they were after. Also, they made their gods in the likeness of themselves. They

made beautiful statues of Apollo, Venus, Athena, and Diana. They deified, however, all of man—his noble qualities but also his base passions, such as in Aphrodite (you talk about sex—the Greeks knew something about it, too), Cupid, Bacchus, and Pluto. Not only did they make lovely Graces, but the avenging Furies, because they were making a projection of mankind. This was the culture they produced.

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

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

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

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

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” –Acts 17:22, 23

They didn’t know Him. The cultivated Athenians were skeptics—they called Paul a babbler and mocked him when he spoke of the Resurrection. And Paul wrote to the Corinthians that

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

It was then “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman,” to redeem them (Galatians 4:4). And down a Roman road came Paul with the gospel in a universal language. God had raised up Rome to build roads so the gospel could penetrate that great empire. Over those roads went a global gospel about the perfect Man who died for the men of the world. The vehicle was the Greek language. And down yonder in Alexandria in Egypt, during the third century before Christ, 70 scholars got together and translated the Old Testament into Greek so that one of the best manuscripts we have today is that Septuagint. Also, the New Testament was written in Greek.

Augustus Neander made this statement:

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

This is the picture: The religion of Israel could produce only a Pharisee, the power of Rome could produce only a caesar, and the philosophy of Greece could produce only a global giant that was a baby at heart. And Dr. Luke wrote to the Greek mind. He said, “*Here is your perfect Man, Jesus of Nazareth. Here is the universal Man. Here is the One you’ve been looking for. Here is the One who can solve your problems if you’ll come to Him.*” In the fullness of time, God sent His Son.

A silhouette of a muscular man stands with his hands on his hips, facing away from the camera. He is positioned in the center of the frame, set against a dramatic sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is a mix of deep blue and orange, with the sun's glow reflecting on the water's surface. The man's silhouette is dark and well-defined, showing his broad shoulders and muscular back. The overall mood is one of strength and contemplation.

TAKE A STAND FOR GOD
AND SEE HOW IT FEELS.

—DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

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

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." –Luke 1:35

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

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

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I will bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."
–Luke 2:10

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

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." –Luke 2:11

Greece was sinking, Rome was sinking, Israel was sinking. And Dr. Luke says, “*He’s the Savior for all men.*”

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

And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. –Luke 2:7

George MacDonald, in his lovely poem “The Holy Thing,” said,

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

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

Dr. Luke is not through. He was not only the obstetrician, but he also became the pediatrician. He’s the only one who tells us anything about the boyhood of Jesus. He gives us the incident that took place when He was a boy:

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.... Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

–Luke 2:42, 51, 52

He put his stethoscope down on Him and gave his report. Jesus increased in wisdom—mentally, He was all right. He didn’t need to go to a psychiatrist. He increased in stature—physically, He was growing. I don’t like it when people say He carried all the diseases in this world in His body. He did not. He was an example of perfect humanity. When He went into the temple that day to cleanse it, they saw His muscles, and that crowd of money changers went for cover because they were afraid. They saw that

He was physically able to put them out. Also He increased “in favor with God and men.” He grew spiritually as any other boy might grow.

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

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, “Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’” Having said this, He breathed His last. –Luke 23:46

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

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

“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here?” So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence. –Luke 24:39-43

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

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

Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they

might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." –Luke 24:44-47

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

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

wake up to the fact that we are not nearly as smart as we think we are. We are going to face the fact that science cannot solve the problems of the world.

The thinking man needs a Savior.


JOHN

WRITTEN FOR THE WRETCHED MAN

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

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. —John 1:11, 12

We have no problem with the words themselves, but the simplicity of the language is deceptive. Because, actually, John’s is the most profound Gospel. Take an expression like this: “You in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). You could ask any child in the fourth grade the meaning of any one of those seven words—one conjunction, two prepositions and four pronouns—and he could give you a definition. But put them together—“You in Me, and I in you”—and neither the most profound theologian nor the greatest philosopher has ever been able to probe the depths of their meaning. “You in Me” we know means salvation, and “I in



**MAY I SAY
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**HE WANTS US
TO GROW.**

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

you” means sanctification, but beyond that none of us can go very far. We think, sometimes, because we know the meaning of words, we know what is being said. The words are simple, but the meaning is deep.

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

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

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

However, the more significant question is: *Why* did John write his Gospel? It was the last one written, probably close to AD 100. All the other apostles were dead, the writers of the New Testament were all gone, and he alone was left. In an attempt to answer this question, we find again a diversity of theories. There are those who say it was written to meet the first heresy of the church, Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed Jesus was God but not man at all and that the apostles did not actually see him, but only thought they did. Irenaeus expressly makes the statement that the purpose of John was to confute the Gnostic Cerinthus. But Tholuck makes it very clear this is not a polemic Gospel at all, and he is not attempting to meet that issue. Also, there are those who say it is a supplement to what the others had written, that he merely added other material. But Hase answers that by saying, "This Gospel is no mere patchwork to fill up a vacant space."

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

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

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

Accordingly, therefore, when we come to the Gospel of John, we find that he does not take us to Bethlehem. We will never grow spiritually by singing umpteen times "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

at Christmastime. John won't take us to Bethlehem because he wants you and me to grow as believers. So he takes us down the silent corridors of eternity, through the vast emptiness of space, to a beginning that is not a beginning at all: "In the beginning was the Word."

Some say this world came into being three billion years ago. I think it has been around a lot longer than that. What do you think God was doing in eternity past, twiddling His thumbs? May I say to you, He had a great deal to do in the past, and He has eternity behind Him. So when you read, "In the beginning," go as far back as your little mind can go into eternity past, put down your peg, and Jesus Christ comes out of eternity to meet you there.

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

Then come on down billions more years.

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. –John 1:3

Then John takes another step:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us –John 1:14

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

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. –John 1:18

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

Dr. Luke looked at Him under a microscope. Though John's method is altogether different, He comes to the same conclusion as did Luke. You could never call John's method scientific. The Christian who has come to a knowledge of Christ and faith in Him doesn't need to have the virgin birth gone over again and again—he already believes that. Therefore, when he comes to the Gospel of John, he finds sheer delight and joy unspeakable as he reads and studies it.

Unfortunately, though, he thinks the unbeliever ought to have it also. You'll find it is used in personal work more than any other Gospel. After all, doesn't the average Christian consider it the simple Gospel? Is it simple? No, it's profound. And it's for believers. It enables them to grow.

When I was a pastor in Pasadena, California, I had a doctor friend who, because of his position, was able to get together students at Cal Tech for a Bible class. Do you know what he taught? The Gospel of John. He told me, "You know, I really shook that bunch with the first chapter." I met him several weeks after that and asked him how the class was getting on. "Oh," he said, "they quit coming." Well, after all, they had been in a school where you pour things in a test tube, where you look at things under a microscope.

I said, "Why didn't you take the Gospel of Luke?"

"Because," he said, "I wanted to give them the simple Gospel." Well, he didn't. John is not simple, and it is for believers.

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

The Gospel of John is for those who already believe. When you come to chapters 13 through 17 you can write a sign over it—“For Believers Only”—and you could put under that “All Others Stay Out.” This section was never meant for an unbeliever. Jesus took His own into the Upper Room and revealed to them things that enabled them to grow. No other Gospel writer gives us that. Why? Because they’re the evangelists who are presenting Christ as the Savior of the world. Somebody asks, “But doesn’t John do that?” Yes, he does, but he is primarily writing for the growth of believers.

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

The first was one of the most dramatic, as He appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden. The second was to the disciples in the Upper Room, Thomas being absent. The third appearance was again to the disciples in the Upper Room, with Thomas present (these three appearances are recorded in chapter 20). Then (in chapter 21) we see Him appearing by the Sea of Galilee. Several disciples were out fishing, and He called to them from the shore, “*Do you have any fish?*” He is going to ask you that someday. Have you been doing any fishing recently? You catch them only by fishing according to His instructions. Then He prepared breakfast for them. I wish I had been there for that outdoor breakfast—it was a real cookout. And friend, He still wants to feed you in the morning—also during the day and in the evening—with spiritual food. Then He commissioned Simon Peter: “*Simon, do you love Me?*” (see John 21:15-17). Jesus did not say you have to be a graduate of a seminary to be able to serve Him. He asked simply, “Do you love Me?” That’s the one condition. Don’t misunderstand me. If you love Him, you will want training to prepare you for the ministry He has for you, but

He wants to know that you love Him. The reason multitudes of folk are not serving Him today is that they do not love Him. Then Peter was told that he was to be a martyr; but John, no, he will live on in order to write this Gospel, three epistles, and the Book of Revelation. These are the seven appearances John records, and all of them are for believers; they minister to us today.

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

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

The marvel is that this Gospel of John, so definitely designed to meet the need of believers, is also designed for the Eastern mind as is no other. Whom do I mean by Eastern? The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the uncounted millions in India and China. Even to this good day we know so little about that area of the world. For example, consider Tibet or Outer Mongolia—these are still mysterious to the western world.

Out of this land of mystery came the wise men. They were bringing gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—for Him. There are a lot of questions to be answered there. That splendor of the Orient we’ve heard so much about reveals unbelievable wealth,

THE ONLY PLACE YOU'LL
EVER GET ACQUAINTED
WITH HIM IS IN

His Book.



- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

and it is still there—ornate palaces, grandeur, priceless gems. It has so entranced the West that when Columbus started out for this country (we give him credit for discovering America, but he wasn't looking for our continent), he was trying to find a new route to the East in order to bring back some of its wealth. Right by the side of that wealth there is extreme poverty of the basest sort—dire destitution, millions living in squalor and misery. Their worldly goods consist of the rags they have on their backs. One hundred million will die of starvation in this next decade, we're told. The poor cry for help, and the wealthy have found no solution to the problems of life. The Orient gave freest rein to human desires, and yet there was no satisfaction. They've had the great pagan religions—Buddhism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Islam. Yet out of that area, with all they had, their wise men came, asking, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him" (Matthew 2:2). They needed salvation; no religion ever gave that to them. This is the reason people in the mysterious East have reveled in the Gospel of John as no others have. The Lord Jesus can meet the need of this type of mind, as John reveals.

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

John alone tells us about the night a religious ruler came to Jesus. Our Lord said to this religious ruler, who had everything and was religious to his fingertips, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). He needed to have a new life and get rid of the old

religion. Jesus said He had come not to sew a patch on the old garment, but He came to give them the robe of righteousness that would enable them to stand before a holy God. This is what that area of the world needed.

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

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

Out of the East comes the inspiration for these lines, which may be found in several languages (the author is unknown, but perhaps Sa'di of 13th century Persia):

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

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

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

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. –John 20:30, 31

The thing they needed above everything else was life.

When I watch the multitudes of Christmas shoppers, they look like spiritual zombies. They need life—and they’re buying presents. A lady once called me and said, “Dr. McGee, I used to attend your church, but I went into a cult. I’ve lost the glow I had, and I’m wondering today just where I am. You had some literature you gave me at that time. Would you please send it to me again? I want to get back.” The Gospel of John is for her. Oh, what we need today is life, not religion. Life!

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

The most wretched people at the Christmas season are in two groups. One is the unsaved person who tries to drink their way through Christmas. The other is the uninstructed Christian. Dwight L. Moody put it in his quaint way: “Some Christians have just enough religion to make them miserable.” There are a lot of Christians today who are compromising, pussyfooting, running with the hare and the hounds. They’re trying to go with all the crowds and please everybody. They live for the devil six days of the week and try to live for God one day of the week. Of

course, they lack that all-important sense of security. They have what the psychologist is emphasizing now: Insecurity. That's the reason a great many put the Bible under their arms, learn a few Christian clichés, join a little group, and lean on it—because they're insecure. They are not living for God or growing in grace and in the knowledge of Him. They're miserable. Some of you reading this now can put up a good front, but you're miserable down underneath.

A great psychologist voiced this same conviction. He says the so-called neurotic is a bona fide sinner; his guilt is from the past, and his difficulties arise not from inhibitions but from actions—actions that have been kept carefully concealed, unconfessed, and unredeemed.

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

The columnist Russel Kirk made this statement:

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

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

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

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

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

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

A person in a blue shirt and dark shorts stands in the ocean waves, looking out at the sea. The water is a vibrant turquoise color with white foam from the waves.

Dive into the Gospels

On the pulpit from which Dr. McGee preached for more than 20 years at the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, California, he had a plaque posted that only he could see. The plaque read: “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21). In essence, that is what Dr. McGee intended for this booklet you just finished reading. He wanted you to see Jesus.


HERE ARE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE NOW TOWARD THAT GOAL:

- 1 Read the four Gospels for yourself, one at a time.** You might try different translations (easily accessed on BibleGateway.com and BlueLetterBible.org). And don't just stop with reading them one time. Maybe read each Gospel over and again through the course of one month. And then next month, read the next Gospel repeatedly. It will surprise you what new things you observe.
- 2 Engage with each Gospel as you read.** Write down your questions, circle key words, etc. Perhaps read each Gospel in light of what you learned in this booklet regarding different audiences.
- 3 Take what you read from your head to your heart.** Begin each reading time by asking the Lord to teach you and show you something new about Jesus Christ. This is a request God will love to answer. As you learn new things, tell someone what you are discovering. Invite them to get to know Jesus Christ through these four unique perspectives.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from the TTB.org website. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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