



# Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

## The Gospel According to Jesus

*by Marc Turnage*

Welcome to Week Three of the Life of Christ! This week we're talking about "The Gospel According To Jesus.

Before we dive into that, let me remind you that Jesus is God's incarnation—in time, space, and culture. To understand His words, we have to enter into His world. That's important because as we enter his world, we begin to understand how his words can impact our world. So, as we're talking about the historical, cultural, and spiritual backgrounds of Jesus' world of Jesus, we are not trying to recreate that in our world. Instead, we're trying to understand Him in His world, so that His words can have a more significant impact on our world.

And so, today we're talking about the gospel according to Jesus. Usually, when we hear the term "gospel," we think about the story of Jesus and the Good News. But it's more nuanced than that. The ideas and the language of the gospel come to us out of several passages in the Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40, 41, 52, and 61. Chapters 52 and 61 are going to be particularly important for what we're looking at today.

In the Judaism of Jesus' day in the first century, these passages were not just understood to proclaim good news like, "Hey, there's something positive out there in the world!" Instead, the good news is about the proclamation of God's redemption. These passages were understood as connected to the proclamation of God's redemption. When we read, "to proclaim the good news" in the New Testament, it is always tied with the proclamation of God's redemptive work.

In Isaiah 52:7, we find the statement, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger, bringing good news, proclaiming peace and

salvation, saying to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" This passage mentions not only the good news and the proclamation of the good news, but it marries it with the reign of God.

Understand that, for Jesus, there was an intimate connection between the proclamation of the good news and God's reign—the Kingdom of Heaven that we'll be speaking about on another week. When we come to the gospels and ask the question, "How did Jesus understand the gospel? He's obviously proclaiming the good news before the gospels were even written, so what was the gospel according to Jesus?" We find it articulated in two passages: one in Luke 4 the other in Matthew 11. We will take a look at both of those today.

Please remember, whenever we read the Gospels, that the land of Israel and the Jewish people in the first century were living under Roman authority. Every time you read the gospels, you must remember that this is a people living under foreign, pagan oppression. And by the first century, all Jews agreed on three basic assumptions:

- There is only one God, and he's our God.
- We are his chosen people.
- Only when we are free can we truly worship God.

Notice the connection between their freedom and their ability to properly worship God. You'll often hear people say, "Well, the first-century Jews were only looking for political redemption," but that's just not true! Jewish Redemption is always bifocal. It has a worldly component to it, but it's also still about spiritual revival and the spiritual manifestation of God's people, properly worshipping God the way he intended. Roman rule challenged their assumptions:

- If there's only one God, and He's our God, why are we being ruled by pagans?
- If we are His chosen people, then why are we being subjected to foreign authority?

Every Jew saw the Roman rule of Israel as unnatural, so when we hear Jesus speaking to the crowds and ministering to people, we need to keep this ideology always in the background. The question will come, "Then how will redemption be achieved?" We'll talk about this more when we speak about the Kingdom of Heaven, but this is the backdrop to the episode in Luke 4 when Jesus goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Let's look at Luke 4:16ff:

"And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and he went to the synagogue as his custom was on the Sabbath day."

Incidentally, the Sabbath is Saturday. It runs from Friday night at sundown until Saturday night at sundown. Luke's language here will be exact in describing what went on in synagogues in first-century Israel. Archaeologists have discovered several first century synagogues in Israel, though they haven't found the one in Nazareth.

Every one of the contemporary synagogues looks more or less the same: it is a hall with benches around the walls, making the center of the hall focal. This center point is where the person who would read the Scripture would first read it and then teach on it. This scene is what Luke describes in this passage, and so the Bible says, "and he stood up to read."

In the first century, the Jewish people would read through the five books of Moses over a three-year period, breaking up the passages week by week. Luke assumes this when he writes, "he stood up to read." Luke, however, does not give us the passage from the five books of Moses that Jesus read. Instead, he focuses on the reading from the Prophets, "and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah."

Notice this little detail: Jesus can read. This fact tells us that He actually had a formal education. So let me set the stage for you here. Torah scrolls in the ancient world were written only with consonants; there were no vowels. In addition to that, there were no punctuation marks, either! And the Torah reader had to stand up and read without making mistakes. That assumes a great deal of learning and formal education!

It would be like if I gave you your Bible with all the punctuation marks and vowels removed and said, "Why don't you stand up in front of New Life today and read our Scripture passage? Oh, and by the way, don't make any mistakes." That's where Jesus was. He had a formal education, and He's standing up to read a passage from the five books of Moses, then He'll receive a copy of the prophet Isaiah's scroll. The act of reading in the synagogue was part of the sermon and part of the interpretation. That's going to be important for what we see Jesus doing here.

He finds the place where it was written in Isaiah 61: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

If you compare this reading with the text of Isaiah 61, you will notice two things that stand out. The first is that Jesus stops reading in the middle of the verse to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. In Isaiah, the acceptable year of the Lord is equated with the day of vengeance of our God, but Jesus puts a period there and speaks only about the acceptable year of the Lord.

The second thing that He does is He inserts the phrase, "to set at liberty those who are oppressed." That phrase comes to us from Isaiah

58. Please know that Jesus, as the reader in the synagogue on this day, was allowed to skip among the passages in the prophets to read what He wanted to read, so He not only reads Isaiah 61, but He also reads Isaiah 58.

Isaiah 61 is a tremendous promise of God's anointing of His Messenger to proclaim the good news to the poor and the recovery of sight to the blind. However, we must also keep in mind that He's talking to a people who not only want spiritual redemption. They want Rome gone. They want the acceptable year of the Lord to be the day of vengeance of our God!

But Jesus stops reading in the middle of that verse. He then adds Isaiah 58. He did that because Isaiah 61 and Isaiah 58 are the only two passages in the entire Old Testament that have the phrase "the favor of the Lord." Isaiah 58 speaks about the favorable *day* of the Lord, while Isaiah 61 speaks about the favorable *year* of the Lord.

Understand that a teacher like Jesus often will see two passages of Scripture that have a common language as juxtaposed—one almost becomes the lens through which you read the other.

So, what is Isaiah saying in Isaiah 58? He says that the fast which the Lord has proclaimed is not to put sackcloth and ashes on and starve your bodies. Instead, the fast that God listens to is to clothe the naked, bring the homeless into your home, and care for the poor and those in need. And when you do that, then your righteousness will go before you, and the Lord will be your deliverer.

Jesus' sermon is in how He reads these two texts together. So what He is ultimately saying to this group in the synagogue in Nazareth that day is that *this is the day of God's visitation. Still, it's not about seeking the vengeance even against my enemies. Instead, it's in showing charity to those who are less fortunate.* If we want redemption to come and God's good news to break forth in the world, we need to share with those who don't have. We need to look out for those who are destitute.

Ultimately Jesus is going to use two examples in this passage, the first about Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath and the second about Naaman and Elisha. He shows two instances of God being merciful to those outside the Covenant Community of Israel. What was His message? Be merciful as God is merciful. If you want redemption to come, it will not happen through vengeance and force of arms. Redemption will come through obedience and caring for the less fortunate.

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The second passage we are looking at today is in Matthew 11, where John the Baptist is in prison and will eventually be beheaded by Herod Antipas. John had been preaching about the One who was to come; expecting a judge who brings redemption for the righteous and judgment and vengeance on the wicked. And as he sits in prison, he hears of Jesus' word and works, so he sends his disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or do we look for someone else?" In other words, "If you're the judge and the one to come, where are the fireworks? Where's the breaking out of God's reign?"

Let's look at Jesus' response to John's question in Matthew 11:

"Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blessed is he that is not wrong concerning me."

Notice that the details Jesus gives John about his ministry—the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the lame walking, and the poor having the good news proclaimed to them—all refer back to Isaiah 61 and Isaiah 58. This passage is what He reads in Luke 4 in the synagogue in Nazareth, saying, "Today is the day of God's visitation, but it's not about God's vengeance. It's about his mercy, and if you want redemption to come, if you want the culmination of things, be merciful as God is merciful."

***Be merciful, as  
God is merciful.***

Too often, we simplify the gospel to meaning merely the story of Jesus, and we forget that for Jesus, the gospel is more than just telling about His life and death and resurrection. We forget that the gospel is the good news proclaimed to those who suffer and to the poor. It's the healing of the blind and the deaf and the lame. It's the raising of the dead. It's the calling on us to show mercy to others, not seeking vengeance. It's calling upon us to share our food with the hungry and clothe the naked.

Often you'll hear people say, "Well, that sounds like a social gospel!" The reality is that when we read the New Testament, and we try to understand the words of Jesus as he meant them, there is a social aspect to the gospel. However, it's not only social; it's not about being nice and philanthropic. It's about seeing the connection between how I treat others and my yearning for God's reign and redemption.

When Jesus looks at his coming and what that means, He frames it not just around a cult of His personality but also around His followers obeying and doing what He said.

Now that we understand what Jesus meant by the gospel, how do we bring that into our families, our workplaces, our friendships, and even among those we may not like so much? How can we better proclaim the good news in our world today?

**Question** Now that we better understand what Jesus meant by the Gospel, what practical habits can we create to alleviate suffering, help the poor, bring life and healing, show mercy, and share resources in all areas of our lives?

**Family Chat** Talk about three practical ways you can share the good news of Jesus in your school, family or neighborhood.

**Take Action** Set your heart and determine to do this week what you just talked about.