

## JESUS IS THE WAY

- A. Introduction: We're living at the end of this age and the return of Jesus Christ is near. Jesus warned that in the years leading up to His return there will be false christs and false prophets—and they will deceive many. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. We've spent the better part of this year looking at Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible—who He is, why He came to earth, and what He accomplished while He was here. Our goal is to become so familiar with the genuine Christ that we can easily recognize and reject false christs, false prophets, and false gospels.
    - a. Recently, we've been discussing the fact that a false Christianity is developing. And, it will welcome the ultimate false christ (the world's final ruler, a man known as the Antichrist).
    - b. This pseudo gospel deemphasizes sin and exalts the innate goodness of man. It declares that all are welcome in God's family no matter what they believe or how they live as long as they are sincere and trying to be a good person.
      1. It is a social gospel that defines true Christianity as endeavoring to fix up society by working to end poverty, help the marginalized, and eradicate injustice in the world. It claims to be more tolerant, more loving, more inclusive, and less judgmental than orthodox Christianity.
      2. We're witnessing the development of what Paul wrote in II Tim 3:5. Prior to Jesus' return people "will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly" (NLT). (Jesus personally taught Paul the gospel that he preached, Gal 1:11-12).
    - c. Even though this growing religion is contrary to orthodox Christianity in its basic beliefs, it can sound Christian to those unfamiliar with the Bible because it uses Christian terminology and cites Bible verses. However these passages are taken out of context, misinterpreted, and misapplied.
  2. In the last few lessons, we've talked about the importance of learning to read verses in context so that we can rightly interpret their meaning. We've focused on historical and cultural context—specifically the fact that everything in the Bible was written by someone to someone about something. Specific verses cannot mean something to us that they would have never meant to the original hearers and readers.
    - a. We've covered a lot of information and could say much more. But in this lesson, we're going to bring our topic to a close. In the New Year, we'll do a series on our greatest protection against deception—becoming a regular reader of the Bible, especially the New Testament.
    - b. Consider one thought before we begin tonight's lesson: Not only could each point I make tonight be made into a lesson, everything I'm going to say is based on what we've covered over the past 29 weeks. If you're just joining us, the previous lessons are available on our website.
- B. Let's begin by considering what the term gospel meant to the people who first heard Jesus use it. When He took on flesh and was born into this world two thousand years ago, He came to real people who were living real lives and looking for specific information from Him—1<sup>st</sup> century men and women (Old Covenant Jews).
1. Based on the writings of their prophets these people knew that this present age (the world as it is, marked by sin, corruption, and death) will come to an end. And, they were expecting God to send a Messiah who would bring His kingdom to earth and restore the conditions of Eden. Dan 2:44; Isa 51:3; etc.
    - a. Jesus' first audiences further knew that when God's kingdom comes, the wicked must be removed because only the righteous can enter His kingdom. Ps 37:1-2; 9-11; 22; 28-29; etc.
      1. Mark 1:14-15—When Jesus began His public ministry, His opening words got everyone's attention. He proclaimed: The time is fulfilled or completed and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel or good news.
      2. The word repent had to do with turning from sin. Jesus' audience knew that something had to be done with their sin since the prophets said only the righteous can enter God's kingdom
    - b. Jesus proclaimed the gospel or good news in the historical context of men and women who were

looking for a remedy for sin and as well as the righteousness needed to enter the kingdom of God.

1. The good news is that Jesus is the remedy. A gospel that doesn't acknowledge man's sin or his need for a Savior—like what is now being proclaimed in many quarters—is not the true gospel.
2. The good news makes sense only if you understand the bad news. All human beings are guilty of sin before a holy God and doomed to eternal separation from Him—not just in this life, but in the life to come. And there is nothing we can do on our own to rectify our condition.
  - A. Almighty God, motivated by love, has acted on our behalf. He entered time and space, took on a human nature, and died on the Cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Rom 3:23
  - B. When anyone acknowledges Jesus as Savior and Lord, believing in Him and His sacrifice, that person is cleansed of sin. God justifies Him or declares him righteous and God's kingdom is opened to him or her. That's the good news. Rom 3:24-26; Rom 5:1; etc.
    1. Jesus' audience didn't yet know all the specifics. Remember, Jesus' earth ministry was an interim period in which He gradually prepared Old Covenant men and women to receive what He would provide for them through the Cross.
    2. Jesus introduced, but did not elaborate on, many topics such as justification and the new birth. They would be explained in detail after His resurrection in the epistles.
2. Sincere Christians today are vulnerable to deception and false gospels in part because the gospel that Jesus brought is no longer clearly articulated and explained in many churches.
  - a. The message has been influenced by and absorbed 21<sup>st</sup> century western world success principles.
    1. The gospel has become: Jesus came to give you a good life, help you fulfill your potential, and make you a success in life. Many sermons are little more than positive motivational pep talks.
    2. Much of the popular teaching today makes it sound as though God's greatest concern is your personal happiness—meaning that all He wants from you is to give you the desires of your heart and fulfill your dreams so that you will be happy.
  - b. Let's go back to that word repent in Jesus' opening statement. Repent literally means to change the mind. It's used of turning from sin and implies a feeling of sorrow and regret. The idea is that a change of mind produces a change of purpose that results in a changed life.
    1. The essence of sin is doing it our way instead of God's way. Jesus died to change the bent and direction of our life—from living for self to living for God.
    2. II Cor 5:15—He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them. (NLT)
  - c. When we read the gospel accounts of what Jesus required of the men and women who wanted to follow Him, we find that what He told them is very different than what is often preached today.
    1. Jesus said nothing about simply asking Him into their hearts, inviting Him into their lives, or letting Him become their best friend. Jesus asked for and expected their lives to change direction, from serving self to serving Him, with a total commitment to Him no matter the cost.
    2. The gospel that Jesus preached was aimed at changing the focus of our lives. We now live to please God and not ourselves. We change the direction of our life from self focused to God focused and other focused. We live, not just for this life, but for the life to come. Matt 6:19-21
3. Consider an example of the kinds of things Jesus said as He prepared His audiences for the coming of His kingdom—both the reign of God in human hearts through new birth and His reign or kingdom established on earth at His Second Coming. (Each one deserves its own lesson.)
  - a. Matt 16:24-25—Jesus said that if any man wants to follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross. He said that if you hold on to living your life your way you will lose it.
    1. Jesus didn't mean that we (they) have to sell our worldly possessions and walk the roads of Palestine with Him. No one now can do that now because He's no longer here in the flesh.

And slaves (among others) in that time and culture couldn't do it. Yet Paul will later instruct them on how to deny self and follow Jesus in their particular circumstances. Eph 6:5-8

2. To deny self means to stop living only for your good and your glory. To take up your cross means that just as Jesus' Cross was His place of complete submission to the will of His Father (Matt 26:39-42), so our cross is that same place of total submission to the will of God. We turn from doing our will our way to His will His way. We obey His Word.
- b. The modern emphasis on the idea that, above all, God wants us to be happy has led some people to conclude that He doesn't care about our behavior as long as we are happy. But God wants us to be holy (I Pet 1:15-16). And true happiness is eternal life with Almighty God.
    1. Matt 16:26—Note Jesus' next statement. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world (all his dreams and desires fulfilled) and he loses his own soul (ends up in hell)?
    2. Almighty God doesn't exist for us. We exist for Him. We were created to bring Him honor and glory. Eph 1:12—So that we who first hoped in Christ—who first put our confidence in Him—[have been destined and appointed] to live for the praise of His glory! (Amp)
    3. Our good and His glory are not mutually exclusive. However, the place of true happiness for human beings is in total surrender to the Lord, doing His will His way. That's our created purpose. Any gospel that puts man's good above God's glory is not the true gospel
- C. As Jesus proclaimed His gospel and prepared 1<sup>st</sup> century people to receive the righteousness that He would provide through the Cross, He had to make it clear that righteous actions do not earn us salvation from sin.
1. Consider one example, a wealthy young man who came to Jesus asking: Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Matt 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27
    - a. Jesus' initial response was: There is none good but God. Jesus wasn't disparaging Himself. He was stating that God Himself is the standard for human behavior. Remember, Jesus was preparing the people for that fact that they needed a higher standard of righteousness than what was preached and practiced by their religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes. Matt 5:20
    - b. Then, Jesus directed the young man to the Law of Moses, specifically the Ten Commandments—not because we earn salvation from sin through keeping commandments, but to expose the man's sin to him so that it could be dealt with.
      1. The Law was a school master given to bring men to Christ by showing them their inability to live up to God's standard without His power. Rom 3:20; Gal 3:24; Rom 8:3-4; etc.
      2. Notice Jesus quoted only the commandments that deal with how to treat your fellow man (5-10)—all of which the man said he had kept. And Jesus did not dispute his assessment of himself.
    - c. Jesus responded: You lack one thing (Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven (Matt 19:21).
      1. This comment can make it sound as though salvation is earned by giving to the poor. That can't be the case because it contradicts numerous other Bible verse. Eph 2:8-10; Titus 3:5; etc.
      2. Remember that in His earth ministry, Jesus didn't spell everything out. He wasn't teaching them “how to be saved” as we now understand it. He was broadening their understanding that true righteousness is inward and that righteous actions are an expression of a changed heart.
      3. Jesus had already made it clear that righteous actions done to be seen of men and disconnected from a desire to glorify God are meaningless. Remember the Pharisees.
  2. Through His words, Jesus was setting this young man up in order to help him see his need for a Savior. The man had broken the commands relating to God (1-4) by making money (wealth) his god. The issue was that his love for his possessions was greater than his love for God. How do we know this?
    - a. Matt 19:22—The young man walked away, sorrowful—not because he was opposed to helping the poor—but because he had great wealth (was very rich, Luke 18:23). As a good Old Covenant man

this rich young ruler was no doubt a tither like the Pharisees. But, according to Jesus, his trust was in his wealth and not in God. Mark's account makes this clear (Mark 10:24).

1. Notice that Luke placed this incident shortly after Jesus' parable about a Pharisee who trusted in his good works as the basis of his righteousness (including giving money). Luke 18:9-14
  2. Remember the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus exposed the false righteousness of those who gave alms to win the praises of men, storing up treasure on earth rather than in Heaven. The Pharisees trusted in the power of money rather than the power of God. Matt 6:1-18
- b. When we put all three accounts together (Matthew, Mark, Luke) this is what Jesus said to the young man: If you want to be perfect, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you'll have treasure in Heaven. Take up your cross and follow me.
1. Remember also that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His audience to be perfect as your Father in Heaven. Matt 5:48—You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect [that is, grow into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity] (Amp).
  2. The word perfect is the same Greek word uses in both Matt 5 and Matt 19. It is an adjective that means finished. It comes from a noun that means to set out for a definite goal or purpose.
    - A. Jesus' audience didn't know it yet, but He would soon go to the Cross, pay for sin, and open the way for sinners to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through new birth. This new birth is the beginning of a process that will ultimately make believers in Jesus perfect or complete in our entire being. Rom 8:29-30; I John 3:2
    - B. Right now, we're finished works in progress, fully God's sons, but not yet fully conformed to the image of Christ. But He who has begun a good work in us will complete it. Phil 1:6
  3. Any gospel that doesn't proclaim a supernatural transformation in our heart, character, and behavior by the indwelling power of the Spirit of God through Jesus is not the true gospel.
- c. Mark 10:21—Notice that Jesus' motivation behind why He treated the young man as He did was that He loved him. Yet, in His love, Jesus made the man sorrowful when He told him something that he did not want to hear and asked him to do something that he did not want to do.
3. Matt 19:22-26—Jesus turned to His disciples and told them that it is hard for a rich man to enter Heaven—not because he is rich, but because it's easy to trust in wealth more than God. Jesus compared it to a camel going through the eye of a needle (a common proverb denoting something that was impossible).
    - a. It probably developed out of the fact that there were two gates in cities—a large main gate and a low narrow gate known as the needle's eye. At night only the smaller gate was opened. For a camel to go through, the load it was carrying had to be removed and the animal walked through on its knees.
    - b. Jesus' disciples were amazed, astonished, and bewildered. It was a common idea in the culture at that time that wealth was evidence of God's favor. So they asked: Who then can be saved? Jesus responded: What is impossible for man, is possible with God.
- D. Conclusion: There's only one way to produce the righteousness needed to enter God's kingdom, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the Cross. He is the way to Heaven.
1. As the world grows darker, there will be increasing pressure against the true gospel of Jesus and the righteousness that only He can provide. It's becoming more and more common to hear people say that Jesus is not the only way to Heaven and that anyone who holds to such a teaching is a bigot.
  2. But we must hold to the truth—not just for our sake—but for the sake of all who, like the rich young ruler, need to hear the truth so that they too can be brought to genuine faith in Jesus Christ.
  3. If ever there was a time to know Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible, to understand who He is and why He came and be able to articulate it to those around us, it's now. May our hunger to know Him be increased as we study His Word. Come Lord Jesus, come!