

Simply Jesus

The Life and Ministry of God's Son

Inductive: Lesson 1

Introduction

The message of the Gospel is simply this: Believe and be saved! And while the word “gospel” is not to be found in the New Testament in connection to any particular book, it is by definition the “good news” of Jesus Christ. But why four different accounts; wouldn't one have been sufficient? There seems to be no doubt as to the reality of one Gospel message, and four uniquely different presentations; four perspectives but one Christ; four truthful accounts of Him represented by varying views but all with one purpose. They all testify through the written word of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, forming the foundation of the “good news” we have come to call Christianity. From the opening verse of Mark's Gospel, which speaks about “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” to the very end of John's account, which says, “there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one . . . could not contain the books that would be written.”

The well respected Bible scholar, Dr. H. G. Weston wrote regarding the first four books of the New Testament that we may think of the Gospels as providing for our deepest spiritual needs: Matthew—our need for righteousness, Mark of sanctification, Luke of redemption, and John our need for life as God meant for us to live it. As we read through each Gospel account in our study this year we will see that there is much that is identical (particularly in the first three which make up the “Synoptic Gospels,” because they can be viewed together), but there is also a great deal that is different. These differences do not represent disagreement but rather the fact that each writer was moved by the Holy Spirit to present a unique and truthful picture of our Lord. The message is simple, the truth is clear, the time is now to listen and respond to the call that was issued over two thousand years ago: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!

There are four interesting passages in the Old Testament containing the word “behold” that tie to the primary interpretation regarding Christ in each of the Gospels: “Behold your King” (Zechariah 9:9) represents the Gospel of Matthew; “Behold My Servant” (Isaiah 42:1) indicates Mark's; “Behold the Man” (Zechariah 6:12) represents Luke's; and “Behold your God” (Isaiah 40:9) relates to John's Gospel.

It has also been pointed out that we have contained within the four Gospel accounts four statements by Christ regarding His very purpose in coming. Matthew: “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (5:17); Mark: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (10:45); Luke: “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (19:10); and John: “I have come in My Father's name” (5:43), “That they may have life . . . and have it more abundantly” (10:10).

Did You Know

Matthew's Gospel account is considered the "most Jewish" of the four accounts. Each of the writers had specific things to say about Jesus Christ and each, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, selected the words and works of Jesus to convey his particular perspective and emphasis. Matthew begins his gospel by placing Jesus within the story of salvation, starting with the Lord's genealogy. He states that Jesus is the Son of Abraham and Son of David, the fulfillment of all God's promises to His people. He highlights the teachings and events that put forth Jesus' claim as the Messiah. Matthew's focus throughout is on the Kingship and Kingdom of Christ (Note: All of the parables found in Matthew with the exception of three refer to the "kingdom of heaven"—a phrase repeated over thirty times). His is the only Gospel to use the word "church," explaining the inclusiveness of the "good news" message and that the Great Commission extends to everyone around the globe.

Matthew was both a Jew and a Christian; one of the twelve Apostles. His Jewish given name was Levi (son of Alphaeus, Mark 2:14). At his conversion and call as a disciple he was given the name Matthew, meaning "the gift of God." By trade, Matthew was a tax collector working for the Roman government and, as a result, was considered an outcast by his own people. Once he decided to follow Jesus, he opened his house and invited other fellow tax collectors and "sinners" to come and dine with Jesus and listen to Him teach. He mentions very little about himself in his writings and the New Testament is nearly silent on his life, but he is believed to have led missionary journeys to the Jews dispersed throughout Syria, Persia, Ethiopia, and even Greece following the Lord's resurrection and ascension to heaven. His influence continues to this day wherever and whenever his Gospel account is read or preached.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Matthew 1:18-25; 2:1-23, Luke 1:1-80; 2:1-52, John 1:1-18. You will be asked to record your first impressions immediately following your reading.

First Impressions: Group Discussion

Reflect on Luke 1:1-80 passage.

Respond by recording your first impressions from your initial reading of the text. Be prepared to share one of your impressions with your discussion group.

- a. Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah, "Your wife Elizabeth will have a son" (vv. 5-25)

- b. Gabriel's appearance to Mary (vv. 26-38)

- c. Mary's visit to Elizabeth and her song of praise to God (vv. 39-56)

- d. John the Baptist's birth (vv. 57-80)

Luke 1:26–56 NKJV

Christ's Birth Announced to Mary

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,
27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name
was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with
you; blessed are you among women!"

29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting
this was. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.

32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the
throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom
there will be no end."

34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

35 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. 36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this
is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible."

38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

And the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,
40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it happened, when Elizabeth
heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy
Spirit. 42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and
blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord
should come to me? 44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the
babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of
those things which were told her from the Lord."

The Song of Mary

46 And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth
all generations will call me blessed.

49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.

50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty.

54 He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy,

55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, © 1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Heartbeat: Matthew 1:21 (Memory verse)

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS,
for He will save His people from their sins.

OBSERVATION: Look!

Pray. Read through the Bible passage several times, trying to get a big picture of what is going on.

Left Column (Facts): Following the writer in the order he tells the story, briefly describe who is involved, what is happening, when and where the events are taking place.

Right Column (Observations): Look more closely to observe details. Some questions you may ask:

- What do you know about the people involved in the story? What questions does the story raise? What sources of conflict do you see? What does Jesus identify as true and important to life?
- Put yourself in the Biblical character's shoes. What were his ambitions? How did the character relate to others or to God? What problem did he think he faced? Did Jesus identify a different problem in his life? What did he discover about God? How did he respond?
- Are there any words that you are not familiar with? Look up the definition.
- Are there words or phrases that are repeated or emphasized? Why do they seem to be key?
- Identify comparisons, such as "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven..." What do you know about leaven (yeast)? Identify contrasts, such as "You have heard it said...but I say to you...".
- Extra: Record information you may find in Bible dictionaries, maps, handbooks, or encyclopedias. Understanding the culture/time in which Jesus lived will help you discover the meaning of the text.

Luke 1:26-38: Christ's Birth Announced to Mary

What does it say? (Facts from passage)

What do I see? (Personal research/observations)

Luke 1:39-45: Mary Visits Elizabeth

What does it say? (Facts from passage)

What do I see? (Personal research/observations)

Luke 1:46-56: The Song of Mary

What does it say? (Facts from passage)

What do I see? (Personal research/observations)

INTERPRETATION: What Does It Mean?

Pray. The more time you take to observe the passage, the more you will have a basis for understanding what God's Word means. Interpretation *always* seeks to answer the questions, "What was God saying to the original audience?" and then, "How does that same truth relate to life today?" Asking yourself questions will help you see the spiritual lesson in the text: What does this teach me is true about God? What does it teach me is true about mankind? Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a condition to the promise? Is there an example I should follow or avoid? A spiritual lesson is a timeless truth that points to God and speaks to the heart of man. ***Stating the lesson in a sentence of 10 words or less will help you keep it simple and memorable.***

APPLICATION: How Does it Apply to Me?

Pray. **Practicing Biblical truth day-to-day** is the only way to grow in Christ and reflect the glory of God. To apply the spiritual lesson you have learned from the text, you have to take deliberate action. Take the time to examine yourself, and ask: Does this spiritual lesson point out error in my thoughts about God? Does it point to error in my attitude or actions? How does this lesson relate to my home life, my work, my relationships, how I spend my time, etc? What change is required? What practical steps will I take to make that change? ***Write your application in the form of a question to help make it personal.***

Example: Luke 1:26-38

Lesson: God works the impossible in the woman surrendered to His Word.

Application: In what practical way will I surrender to God's Word so that He can work what seems impossible in my marriage?

(My action: Practice speaking only words that are encouraging)

Luke 1:26-38

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Luke 1:39-45

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Luke 1:46-56

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Take A Closer Look: Jesus Christ is Born in Bethlehem

Review Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-25.

Amid the noisy hustle and bustle of Bethlehem's overcrowded streets no one even seemed to notice the young couple that had slipped into town along with so many other weary travelers there to register for the government census. It was business as usual, except that no rooms could be acquired for the night. The only shelter Joseph was able to provide for his now very-pregnant wife was that of a stable setting which housed the innkeeper's animals. For bedding he drew together some straw and hay, but even the look and smell of that stable would have seemed a welcome sight after the hardship of being "great with child" and journeying one hundred miles on the back of a donkey.

It was into this very rustic and humble environment that glory was unveiled and Deity became a man. Here Mary "brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). Immediately following Jesus' birth, an angel from the Lord appeared to some shepherds taking turns watching over their flocks in the night. Suddenly the glory of the Lord flooded the hillsides with light! Imagine your surprise and your response to this incredible sight as you consider theirs.

Luke 2:1-20

1. What was the shepherds' initial response to the angel's appearance?
2. What message did the angel come to bring?
3. What did the angel declare would be the impact of this news? Add Matthew's words in 1:21-23 with Luke 2:10-11. Why would this message bring joy to people everywhere?
4. What was to be the "sign" for the shepherds when they looked for Him?

These lowly shepherds were the first to hear the "good news" proclaimed, backed up by a heavenly choir singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (v.14). Wasting no time, they hurried to find the Child just as the angel had said. Then they became the first ambassadors for Christ, making "widely known" what was told them.

5. Note the initial responses to the "good news" brought by the shepherds.
 - a. All those who heard it (v. 18) -
 - b. Mary's response (v. 19) -
 - c. Shepherd's response (v. 20) -

Personal: When did you first hear the message of the "good news" of Jesus Christ? Who announced the message to you? How did you respond?

Behold & Be Transformed

What truth of God did you receive by beholding His Son through your study?

How does beholding (looking upon) Him, motivate you to change your thoughts, habit, attitude, speech or actions?

Pause . . . What is the most significant lesson you have learned this week?

Ponder . . . How will you put it into practice?

Pray... Write out your prayer, asking God to help you reflect His Son by being obedient to His Word.

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