

Teachings of Jesus

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Keith Chuvala, Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com

Introduction

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

Jesus' Story: The Gospels

Most of what we know about the life and ministry of Jesus on Earth comes from the first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, a.k.a The Gospels. There are also post-resurrection events recorded in the book immediately following the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and we also gain insights from New Testament epistle writers, especially Paul.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, the common language of most countries around the Mediterranean Sea in the 1st century. Just as English is the “language of aviation” today, Greek was the language most shared by different countries and cultures, and could be thought of as “the language of trade” or business in that day. Stories about Jesus’ life and ministry were shared among believers orally at first. The Gospels were written years, even decades, after Jesus ascended into heaven. It is thought that Mark was written first, then Matthew and Luke, and finally the Gospel of John, which is believed to have appeared as we know it as late as 95 A.D.

All four Gospels are anonymously written in the sense that none includes the author's name. In the early years of Christianity, the Gospels were accompanied by a number of other Christian writings, most of which have not been preserved. The 27 books that we now have in the New Testament were formally recognized by the Synod of Carthage in 397 A.D. Whether the men recognized as authors literally wrote the words themselves, dictated them to others, or only spoke the words which were recorded by other means, is not known. Authorship, attribution, and authenticity were important factors considered, along with wide-spread or universal acknowledgement and acceptance by the church at large.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called *synoptic* Gospels because they are very similar, being written as fairly straightforward historical narratives. They are not completely uniform in those narratives, offering differing perspectives and details.

Mark, the shortest of the four, is written in a relatively unsophisticated style, with an urgency to the wording that leads us to believe the author was young, or certainly younger than the other

writers, and we know from Acts of the Apostles that Mark was, indeed, a young man who actually grated on Paul's nerves at one point.

Matthew has numerous marks of an account written by a Jew and for a Jewish audience. Matthew, one of the 12 disciples, captures many teachings in detail (e.g., the beatitudes and the sermon on the mount) that would be more naturally emphasized in a Jewish community raised on the Torah and Talmudic teachings, as well as those that were personally most impactful to a man who was called by and spent so much time with Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke (along with Acts), we are quite certain, was written as an "amicus brief" for the Emperor and court authorities in Rome by Paul's physician and traveling companion, in order to accurately relay the details of Jesus' life and ministry as background information to help court officials understand the theological and historical context for the events he would recount in Acts. Luke was not one of the 12 disciples, but is known to have spent time with Mary, Jesus' mother, and also would have had either direct interaction with, or indirect influence by, the likes of Peter, James, John, and Mark, as well as Paul.

The Gospel of John is very much different from the synoptic Gospels in the way it presents and interprets the events of Jesus' life on Earth. While the synoptics portray Jesus traveling about and preaching in parables about the coming kingdom of God, John presents a more spiritual and meditative picture of Jesus; the sort of insights that likely were borne of decades of meditation and study regarding his experiences with Jesus much earlier in life.

Despite the marked differences in approach, John and the synoptics present many of the same events of Jesus' life, including His trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.

The differences between the Gospels do not lead us to think one is a more "correct" portrayal of the events of Jesus' life. Instead, each of the four is a unique view of Jesus, drawn from different eyewitnesses, recounted stories of the events, and different traditions. So we are indeed fortunate – blessed! – to have these four "lenses" through which we can view the life and teachings of Christ.

Jesus: The Early Years

Although we number the years of our calendar from the "beginning" of Jesus's life, scholars believe Jesus was actually born between 6 and 4 B.C. Matthew and Luke tell us Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a "suburb" of Jerusalem, in what is now southern Israel. Jesus was born into a traditional Jewish family and remained faithful to Judaism all His life. His father was a carpenter, and he had siblings (Matthew 13:55)

Other than those general points, very little is known of Jesus' youth and young adult life other than that it was spent in Nazareth, in the region of Galilee. The only event recounted for us from this time is from when he became separated from his family, and "amazed" the scholars at the temple at age 12 (Luke 2:41-51). It makes sense that Luke is the writer chosen to recount that tale, as he no doubt heard it

from Mary. A loving mother would certainly remember, and talk about, the time she thought she had lost her son!

Fast-forward to about age 30, when Jesus began His public ministry after being baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Subsequent to that, he selected 12 disciples who would learn from Him, be equipped and inspired by Him, and 11 would be responsible for carrying on his ministry after Him. The 12th would even be the “trigger man” for the events leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion, perhaps the hardest and most counter-intuitive thing Jesus ever talked to His disciples about. Along with his disciples, Jesus traveled through the regions of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, teaching in synagogues and speaking to crowds of people, who seemed to follow wherever He went. He preached about the kingdom of God, repentance, and love for all people. The gospels also tell us how He healed the sick wherever He went and performed many other miracles beyond those that are recorded.

Jesus' public ministry lasted about three years, and though He had many followers among the Jews, He had enemies, too. Jesus was consistently critical of hypocrisy among the religious leaders of His time. He called them out on their greed and sin to the point that these “religious” leaders plotted to kill Him, and eventually forced the Roman governor, Pilate, to order His crucifixion on the eve of Passover in about 30 A.D.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus rose from the dead the following Sunday, and that He remained on Earth another 40 days before ascending into heaven. Jesus Himself proclaimed that He was the Son of God, the Christ (Messiah), whom the Jews was been waiting for. He taught that His own death and subsequent resurrection were part of God's wonderful, if mysterious, plan of salvation for all people.

Jesus the Teacher

It is impossible to read the Gospels without getting a sense of the intensity and passion of Jesus' teaching. It is often noted that He spoke with rare authority on spiritual matters, often leaving his detractors tongue-tied and looking rather foolish. Some of His teachings are hard, perhaps even disturbing. He spoke of loving God above all other things, caring about all other people as much as we care about ourselves, the coming kingdom of God and eternal life. These and other teachings push us out of our comfort zone; He doesn't allow much room for pious complacency, and absolutely none for self-righteousness and hypocrisy!

Jesus often employed parables as engaging, relatable, didactic devices, using familiar images of nature, agriculture, and culture, to teach universal spiritual truths (Mark 4:33-34). At times many people -- including His disciples -- were left somewhat baffled by the parables. The Gospels tell us that Jesus explained His parables to his disciples in private, but some of those explanations are not actually recorded in those writings. Like the disciples, we may not immediately understand the application of a parable, but they are memorable, and prompt us to consider their meanings. These were not mere lectures to be memorize and regurgitated; they were life lessons and eternal truths designed to evoke a deeper, more meaningful response in the hearts of those He taught.

Even His own explanation regarding the use of parables is constructed to push us to understand:

And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven..." (Mark 4:10-12ff)

He expands on this in the verses that follow... *with more parables!*

Jesus the Savior

Many people, even unbelievers, acknowledge Jesus the historical figure and spiritual/moral teacher. For Christians, though, Jesus is much more than a good teacher. He is the Christ (Messiah), the Savior, the Son of God, who came to Earth to redeem us from sin, establish His spiritual kingdom of God, and to offer the promise of eternal life. While we do not see Him in bodily form, He is present with us through the power of His Holy Spirit, speaking to us through the Bible, each other, and our consciences. He strengthens us with His love.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26-27)

Major Topics

If we enumerate all the parables, the range of topics Jesus taught about is quite expansive. But many of His teachings fall into one of a handful of major categories. Those include:

- God's Love
- Loving God
- Loving Fellow Man
- The Kingdom of God
- Ethics and Morality

Where Jesus Taught



In Jesus' day



Today

Events in the Life and Ministry of Jesus

Event	Date (approximate)	Location	Reference(s)
Jesus is born (commemorated on Christmas Day)	6-4 B.C.	Bethlehem	Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-18, Luke 2:1-20
Jesus grows up in Nazareth		Nazareth	Matthew 2:19-23, Luke 2:39-52
Baptized by John the Baptist	26 A.D.	River Jordan	Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-23, John 1:29-39
Turns water into wine at the wedding in Cana (first miracle)	26 A.D.	Cana	John 2:1-11
Talks with the Samaritan woman at the well -- many Samaritans become believers as a result.	27 A.D.	Sychar	John 4:5-42
Chooses the 12 disciples	28 A.D.	Capernaum	Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-15
Preaches the Sermon on the Mount	28 A.D.	Capernaum	Matthew 5:1-48, 6:1-34, 7:1-29, Luke 6:20-49
Raises a widow's son from the dead	28 A.D.	Nain	Luke 7:11-17
Quiets the storm	28 A.D.	Sea of Galilee	Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25
John the Baptist beheaded by order of Herod	28 A.D.	Machaerus	Matthew 14:1-12, Mark 6:14-29, Luke 9:7-9
Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes -- feeds 5000 men plus women and children with 5 loaves of bread and two fish.	29 A.D.	near Capernaum	Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14
Walks on water	29 A.D.	Sea of Galilee	Matthew 14:22-23, Mark 6:45-52, John 6:16-21
The Transfiguration -- Jesus' face shone like the sun	29 A.D.	Caesarea Philippi	Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13, Luke 9:28-36
Raises Lazarus from the dead	29 A.D.	Bethany	John 11:1-44
Restores sight to two blind men	30 A.D.	Jericho	Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43
Withdraws temporarily from public ministry with disciples because of threats to His life.	30 A.D.	Ephraim	John 11:54-57
Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)	30 A.D., Sunday	Jerusalem	Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:29-44, John 12:12-19
The Last Supper	Thursday	Jerusalem	Matthew 26:17-29, Mark 14:12-25, Luke 22:7-20, John 13:1-38
Arrest, trial, and crucifixion (Good Friday)	Friday, Passover Eve	Jerusalem	Matthew 26:47-75, 27:1-66, Mark 14:43-72, 15:1-47, Luke 22:47-71, 23:1-56, John 18:2-40, 19:1-42
Resurrection from the dead (Easter Day)	Sunday	Jerusalem	Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-10
Appears to disciples	Post-resurrection	Jerusalem	Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25
Ascends to Heaven	40 days after resurrection	Mount of Olives	Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:44-53