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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

At the beginning of September the garden was still thriving, the leaves were still green, and there was still colourful flowers at the side of the house. What a difference a month makes! It is considerably colder now. Most of the garden has died off, the leaves are changing colour, and the flowers are all but gone. I am reminded of the words of Isaiah, as quoted by Peter:

"...All flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever" (1 Peter 1:24-25; cf. Isaiah 40:6-8).

The things of this world are temporary, as is our existence in this world. James describes our life as "...even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away..." (James 4:14). But the things of God endure. His word and the hope which it provides do not fade away or fail. What a blessing – the assurance of the goodness of God, that he will bless the faithful according to the eternal promises of His word, and that His word endures forever. May we dwell and rest in this hope.

We're thankful for your interest in GROW magazine. It is our hope this issue will be a blessing and encouragement to you. We appreciate our writers who have given their time, energy, and abilities to make this issue of GROW possible. If you find the content herein to be beneficial, we encourage you to share it with others. Forward this document, pass along the notification email, share a link to www.GROWmagazine.site on social media, or print a copy to hand to someone.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender
William J. Stewart

Jesus: The Man and Perfect Example (A Portrait of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke)

DAVID DANN | ATHENS, GEORGIA

What was Jesus like as a child? I've often thought about this question as once posed a similar question to a group of 5th-grade boys in a Bible study. I asked them, "What would Jesus be like if He was here and your age?" While the exercise was helpful, their answers revealed an (understandable) naivety and lack of understanding of who Jesus really was on earth. Their answers were a caricature of clichés about Jesus more than how He would have really behaved. They suggested, "He would only study his Bible all the time," and "He might skip school to pray." "Would He play games?" I asked. "Oh no!" they replied, "He wouldn't have time for that!" It was difficult for them to imagine Jesus living a physical life as a man on earth.

Would our answers of who Jesus was on earth be any closer to reality?

Paul says in **1 Corinthians 11:1**, "**Imitate me, as I imitate Christ.**" Even more, he says in **Galatians 2:20**, "**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**" Paul is saying he imitates Christ to the point where he can say, "It's not ME in me anymore, it's CHRIST in me."

Imitating Jesus, in large part, is what Christianity is all about. But we can only truly imitate Jesus if we know Him as He is. Too often, our perception of Jesus is hazy at best, and downright wrong at worst. We need to seek to see Him more clearly. This brings us to the gospels and their portraits of Jesus.

The 4 Gospel Portraits of Jesus

In all four gospels, we see great consistency in



1 via Aaron Burden | Unsplash.com

who Jesus was on earth: in character, in teaching, in attitude, and in power. However, we also see a different aspect of Jesus' identity emphasized in each gospel. While our exact characterizations of these differences might differ, the reality of four different portraits is clear. What are these four different viewpoints? I believe Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the promised Messiah or Christ, while Mark emphasizes Jesus as a sacrificial servant. It appears that Luke emphasizes the humanity and perfect example of Jesus, and John emphasizes the deity of Jesus.

The four living creatures before the throne of God in **Revelation 4:6-7** might be helpful to you in remembering these perspectives (see **Table 1**):

Revelation 4:6-7 "**Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.**"

Whether the Holy Spirit intended this in revealing this vision to John or not, I have found this passage to be a helpful mnemonic device. In order, the first living creature is like a lion. Matthew’s gospel presents Jesus as the “Lion of Judah.” Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament promises and prophesies for God’s anointed one (Messiah or Christ), who would be King over the Kingdom of God. The second living creature is like an ox or a calf. Just as the calf is an animal of sacrifice and the ox is a beast of burden, Mark presents Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and a patient servant of all people. The third living creature had a face like a man, and Luke’s gospel emphasizes humanity and the perfect example of Jesus on earth. The fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. In the Roman world, the Eagle symbolized divinity (it “flies” close to the gods), the Roman legions, and Imperial rule. “Worship the Emperor!” the Christians in Asian Minor were told, but John’s gospel shows that the emperor (or any other so-called “god”) is not divine—Jesus is!

The Hebrew writer reminds us that “...in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17) and “we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15). Though still God and fully divine, Jesus was born of a woman and lived as a man. We see this clearly in the Gospel of Luke. From the beginning of his gospel, Luke’s unique material for us emphasizes Jesus as the Son of Man, born of the woman Mary (see **Table 2**). Luke introduces His physical family and His humble birth. Luke provides unique material about His infancy, childhood, and genealogy (likely on His mother’s side). Luke includes His rejection in Nazareth “**where He had been brought up**” (4:16), which reminds readers of Jesus’ humanity. I would encourage you to reread Luke from this perspective.

Gospel	Revelation 4:7 Image	Jesus as...
Matthew	Lion	Messiah/King, “The Lion of Judah”
Mark	Calf (Ox – ESV)	Servant/Perfect Sacrifice
Luke	Man	Human/Perfect Example
John	Flying Eagle	Deity/God in the Flesh

(Table 1)

All four of the gospel accounts include all four of these facets of who Jesus was on earth, but each gospel seems to emphasize one more than the others.

The Gospel of Luke

An examination of Jesus in Luke’s gospel brings us back to our initial question, “What was Jesus like as a child?” Furthermore, “What was Jesus like as a man?” The Gospel of Luke is the *only* inspired record we have to answer the first question and perhaps the *best* inspired record to answer the second.

Some Material Unique to Luke’s Gospel (Chapters 1-3)	Reference
Announcement of Jesus’ birth to Mary	1:26-38
Mary’s visit to Elizabeth	1:39-56
Birth of Jesus (with shepherds, manger, etc.)	2:1-20
Presentation in Temple	2:21-38
Childhood Visit to Jerusalem	2:41-52
Genealogy of Jesus (likely from Mary back to Adam)	3:23-38
Rejected at Nazareth on the Sabbath	4:16-30

(Table 2) Adapted from Mark Allan Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels* (p. 86)

In living His life as a human being, Jesus provides us with the example of how we should live. Compared to the other gospels, the Gospel of Luke is filled with more practical teaching and illustrative accounts from Jesus’ own experience on day-to-day topics of Christian living like money, prayer, our priorities/counting the cost, and compassion

towards the outcast (unclean, lepers, widows, Samaritans, etc.). Jesus' example isn't just for men, either, as women are featured more often and prominently in Luke's account than in the other gospels.

Though many examples could be highlighted, notice specifically three areas where Jesus provides us with His example:

Jesus: An Example of Growth

Like imagining Jesus as a child, perhaps it is odd to think of Jesus growing. Still, Luke's gospel (and only Luke's gospel) says that the boy Jesus "increased" in four areas.

Luke 2:52 "Jesus increased in wisdom (*Mentally—RM*) and in stature (*Physically—RM*) and in favor with God (*Spiritually—RM*) and man (*Socially—RM*)."

God created human beings with all four of these aspects. Though the spiritual part of us is the MOST important, all four are important to God. The other three (Mental, Physical, and Social) are matters of stewardship, influence, and growth. What are we doing with this life that God has given us? Are we using this physical life to develop qualities that impact our spiritual life, like patience, common sense, sound reasoning, wisdom, strong relationships, and self-control? We should be because that's what Jesus did, and we strive to imitate Him! We should learn from His example that "growth" should be something that happens in all parts of our lives.

Jesus: An Example in Teaching/Learning from Everyday Life

Parables were one of the primary teaching methods of the Master Teacher. Jesus often uses these simple stories from everyday life to draw spiritual applications in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

However, the Gospel of Luke has both the most parables recorded and the most unique parables recorded in any of the gospels. Jesus, the man, reminds us that the created world should point us to God. Scoffers look at the Bible and say we've made God like man. An

easy response for the Christian: it only stands to reason that an all-powerful God would create a world that would teach us about Him! God created a world filled with examples, illustrations, and shadows of His true nature. We should learn from Jesus' example to see God and the spiritual application in all things—even the material things of this life. Especially for those who are parents, we should use the illustrations around us to teach our children about God and His qualities.

Jesus: An Example of Forgiveness

There are several sayings of Jesus as He was crucified that are only found in Luke (**23:28-31; 43, 46**). Two of these unique sayings deal with His forgiveness.

To the mob, Jesus says in **Luke 23:34** "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." To one of the robbers on the crosses beside Him, Jesus says in **Luke 23:43** "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Matthew 27:44 tells us that *both* robbers reviled him, along with the chief priests, scribes, and elders. So, what changed in the second man recorded in Luke's gospel? According to the combined texts of all four gospels, Jesus had only said one other thing on the cross, "Father forgive them; they know not what they are doing." That statement, combined with the inscription above His head, must have turned the hard heart of this (by his own admission) *guilty* man. You can imagine him listening to the prayer of forgiveness and thinking, "Wow. I want that, too!" The good news—the gospel—has the power to change hearts!

Never underestimate the power of forgiveness: the power it can have in your heart when you forgive and move forward *and* the power it can have on others when they see that heart in you.

Never underestimate Jesus' power to forgive. No sin is too great, and no life is too far from God to be out of reach of Jesus' forgiveness. Even in the "eleventh hour" (**Matthew 20:1-16**), His forgiveness is available.

This was Christ's desire and why He was willing to come and live as a man. He desires the rejoicing that comes when one who is "lost" is "found." **Luke 15** contains three parables unique to this gospel that describe the joy of finding "lost" things: finding a sheep, finding a coin, and finding a son. Twice Jesus emphasizes the joy in heaven "**over one sinner who repents**" (**15:7, 10**) before describing the willing forgiveness of a father (God) to his prodigal son (us). We should learn

from Jesus' example and be ready and willing to forgive.

What was Jesus like as a child? What was He like as a man? Luke's gospel shows us that He was very much like us, experiencing the joys and pain and temptations of life, "**yet without sin.**" Having His beautiful and powerful example, let us strive to be like Him.

Fellowship and Brotherly Love in the Early Jerusalem Church: Congregational Profile

JOHN HINES | HAYNESVILLE, LOUISIANA

Fellowship

When, in our modern vernacular, we use the term fellowship, we often talk about doing activities with others who share our faith and the ability to get along with one another. Our modern term for fellowship is usually based on shared interests, commonalities, and a personal like of those you have fellowship with. However, this is not how this term is used in the New Testament.

The New Testament fellowship is the familial relationship that is the result of us being made one in Christ Jesus. By being baptized into Christ (*1 Corinthians 12:12-13*) and participating in the memorial supper (*1 Corinthians 10:16-17*) and continuing in righteous living (i.e., walking in the light, *1 John 1:7*) we have a deep kinship that transcends our many differences. This is not a fellowship based on shared interest and commonalities or a personal liking of each other, but on sharing the most fundamental thing in our lives; our love and submission to Jesus.

Brotherly love is the set of actions that are to grow out of this deeper reality of fellowship. We are united and made one in Christ, and because of that, we are to have deeds in keeping with this fellowship. The modern religious world views fellowship as a result of time spent together. The Bible teaches that fellowship is a result of our relationship with Jesus and should produce a brotherly love that makes us want to spend time together.

But how did the early church grow and nurture this fellowship? How did that fellowship manifest itself in their actions? Was their unity based on their commonalities, or was there something more to it?



2 via Gerd Altmann | Pixabay.com

Background

Similarities and common ground in the church

The early church was composed entirely of those with Abrahamic heritage. They also all shared a common faith, Judaism, before becoming Christians. When it comes to unity and getting along, these are often major contributing factors. The crowd to whom Peter and the apostles preached on the Day of Pentecost were united in their purpose of worshiping God already. What a great start to this unity!

Differences and challenges to unity

In reality though, these were not always contributing factors to the success of unity. In fact, they can be detractors. The early church had major hurdles to overcome, and their differences and challenges to their unity were far more numerous and daunting than their commonalities.

Even though all these people were of Jewish descent, they did not share the same language or culture. Yes, they were Jewish, but they came from all different parts of the world, bringing their own culture and language to the early church. This causes division and prejudice in the church even today! What enabled them to make this church work and even thrive?

Political differences were huge among the Jewish society in the first century. There would have been people who were Pharisees, some would have been Zealots, some would have

been employed by Rome, and some would have been apolitical. Politics is a huge division point among Christians today. Many Christians are free and easy with their judgments on one another based on their political party. How did the early church overcome this point of contention?

Maybe the most dramatic challenge to unity and fellowship in the early church was their past sins. Since the gospel was open to all and preached to all, there would have been some that would have had no real affiliation or connection to the events surrounding Jesus's arrest, trial, and crucifixion. There were also some who would have been dramatically opposed to all the things that were done to Jesus. And, out of the abundance of God's love and forgiveness, there would have been some who were at his arrest, voted against him in his kangaroo trial, and were active in his crucifixion. How would any church overcome these obstacles?

Fellowship and Unity in a Challenged Congregation

Luke first describes for us the actions that each individual took in their personal devotion to God and secondly the actions that they took towards one another to maintain this unity of the Spirit and to have a bond of peace.

Personal Devotion

Before Luke gets into the actions that each Christian took towards one another to grow and maintain their fellowship, he first describes four things to which individuals devoted themselves that laid a solid foundation for their efforts towards one another.

“Devoted themselves to the apostles teaching” v. 42

This is a key and fundamental factor of the success of the church in Jerusalem. The individuals devoted themselves to the truth. The church in Jerusalem held the preaching, teaching, and application of truth forth as the rallying point of their unity together. Only with this personal devotion to doctrine could this church overcome all its obstacles to be the

light that shined in the dark world and spread the gospel to all creatures.

Many people are willing to sacrifice the truth in order to have some semblance of harmony and unity among their church members. Churches have stood for less and less to try to have a facsimile of peace. A devotion to truth has to be the cornerstone for our local congregation's unity and fellowship. We must never abandon truth in order to get more people in the door.

“Devoted... to fellowship” v. 42

One of the simple facts about the success of the church in Jerusalem was their devotion to making it work. It was not as if the early church was ignorant of the differences and the challenges that would have threatened to rip this brand new community apart. They recognized the value of what they had, and they devoted themselves to making this venture work.

It would seem as if many people today believe that fellowship, peace, and brotherly love are things that just happen with little to no effort on our part. Maybe we view them as something that happens on occasion or when opportunities arise rather than areas for constant growth and improvement. For us to make our local congregations work, we cannot just let fellowship happen. We have to work at it and devote ourselves to it.

“Devoted... breaking of bread and prayers” v. 42

These are two more elements of corporate worship. These early Christians devoted themselves to meeting together and taking the Lord's Supper and praying. Worship is a voluntary action. For the church in Jerusalem to be a success, the Christians had to be personally devoted to meeting together, taking the Lord's Supper, and prayer. Their unity and oneness in God are the basis for their fellowship together. Only through constant and persistent devotion to worship did this church thrive.

Far too often people want to skip their personal devotion to worship and expect the local

church to succeed and for themselves to have a deep and meaningful fellowship with other Christians. As is exhibited for us in the Jerusalem church, a personal devotion to worshiping with other Christians is essential to fellowship. It is through worship, and humbling ourselves before God, that we can then look around with the proper perspective and view our brethren with the love, care, and selflessness that we need to maintain fellowship.

Actions Towards Others

Christianity is not a deserted island where we have a close and personal relationship with God and little to no interaction with His family. As John is quick to say, if we have fellowship with the Father, then we also have fellowship with one another. If we love God, then we must love the brethren. That love must be shown in actions and deeds, not just in words and talk.

“All who believe were together” v. 44

For the Jerusalem church to build itself up in love, grow closer in fellowship, encourage one another, grow in the faith, or obtain any measurable change, they had to spend ample time together. To try to achieve any of those things while separated or barely being together would be nearly impossible.

Yet, many today hope, pray, and expect their local congregation to grow and thrive with very little input on their part. Sometimes this is by sheer neglect, sometimes this is by misplaced priorities, and sometimes this is the effect of church-hopping or excessive travel. To grow in fellowship, we must have time together and be together. Growth requires time on task.

“Had all things in common... [sacrificing] as any had need” v. 44-45

There were some special needs in the Jerusalem Church. Israelites from all around the world traveled into Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Once they had learned the gospel, the new Christians were unwilling to go back home and leave the teachings of the apostles and the fellowship of the brethren.

This generated considerable need for Christians to support one another. They saw the value of their brethren as more important than their earthly wealth.

Sharing and sacrificing are great ways to grow close to one another. It shifts one’s focus from the internal to the external by focusing on the needs of others. How much can we grow as a congregation if we spend more time shifting our focus towards the needs of our brother, both physically and spiritually, and viewing them as more important than our worldly goods?

“Attending temple together” v. 46

The saints in Jerusalem, with all of their diversity, had to find a way to worship together. They were made one in Christ. They were made a part of His body. While they were personally devoted to acts for worship, they had to be collectively united in their corporate worship.

Some Christians today plan to be in heaven with other Christians whom they cannot stand to be around, whom they might refuse to assemble together with to worship God in the same building while on earth. How can we expect to be together in heaven, and worship God eternally, while not getting along here? Just like the church in Jerusalem had to figure out a way to get over their differences and to be united in their worship, we too have to figure out how to bury the hatchet, overcome obstacles, and praise God with a united voice. Far too often we are content to simply move membership to another congregation, rather than working through our problems and differences. Fellowship and brotherly love are non-optional.

“Breaking bread in their homes” v. 46

In the context of verse 46, the breaking bread in their homes was the sharing of common meals. The fellowship and the brotherly love that was demonstrated among this diverse group of early Christians extended beyond talk and beyond the assembly of saints. It extended to their homes via hospitality. They

demonstrated that this new life is one that is categorized by an inclusion of other saints into daily life.

Our fellowship and hospitality should extend beyond those that we feel naturally close to. Many Christians don't want to share time with other Christians, and some do not want to invite certain Christians over, and yet we expect to all be invited to sit at God's table together!

Summary

The early church in Jerusalem provides critical insight into a functioning congregation that is full of potential reasons for disunity. We see that they first individually devoted themselves

to God, His truth, and His worship. They then devoted themselves to the actions that would bind them together as a local congregation. It was a combination of these two things that made the church grow, and eventually spread like wildfire.

For our local congregations to grow, we must follow the pattern of the New Testament Church in Jerusalem. We must first be devoted to God, His truth, and His worship. Then we must overcome our differences and do the things that maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” – 1 John 3:18

Psalm 61 – A Prayer: Returning to God’s Shelter

TIM MCPHERSON | BOUNTIFUL, UTAH

Psalm 61 is a prayer we all need to pray. When do we say we need God the most? We need God in times of despair, in times of great sorrow or trouble, when we are possibly feeling distant or separated from God. **Yes, many times in life we feel helpless.** Who can we turn to? I turn to God. We so desperately express our need for a greater strength beyond mortal wisdom or human counsel. We look longingly for that time of Almighty God’s care. The enemy is trying to tug us away from God. Although the enemy seems to have pulled us away and we may feel in despair, we truly can draw nearer to God.

Many experts feel that with all the circumstances alluded to in the psalm that it was composed by David when he was driven into exile during the rebellion of Absalom while he was still beyond the Jordan (2 Samuel 17:22) and when his life was yet in danger (Psalm 42:1-11 and Psalm 43:1-5). He was destitute, driven from the temple, from the land of Canaan, and greatly sought the shelter of God in his despair. The psalmist depicts himself in exile, he feels he is at **“the end of the earth”** (Psalm 61:2). This prayer utters the expressions of a persevering and longing expectancy to be closer to God and to have God’s strength in his life.

It is possible that circumstances, not sin nor things of our own doing, but unforetold events, have caused us a tremendous despair and brought a longing desire to cast our cares on Him. We seek His power and His might to make right what is wrong. We feel helpless, but we believe in the providence of God and His willingness to rescue our life. We want to wrap ourselves in the wings of God’s security (Psalm 61:4). The psalmist expresses this desire. We desire God because of the havocked nature of life and its trials. We feel the cliché saying, “I’m holding on by a thread.” As the famous hymn says, “Where do I go, oh where do I go,



3 via Fotorech | Pixabay.com

seeking a refuge for my soul?” This Psalm gives assurance to us that **we have the greatest source of strength to overcome this despair.** If your circumstances seem desperate, remember that God has been your friend in the past, has aided you, and has displayed His marvelous mercy and grace. And once again, **even now**, we lean forward into the loving arms **of a protective God. God will always be there for you.**

Some people have called this psalm a “A Prayer when Overwhelmed.” Indeed, it is! We could well say that David is experiencing what we all experience: exasperation, and utter frustration! He is overwhelmed as Verse 2 expresses.

*From the end of the earth I will cry to You, **When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.** (Psalm 61:2, **NKJV**)*

He is seeking God’s SUPPORT! He states that he is looking for **“The Rock That Is Higher Than I.”**

We should have the support of others: godly parents, church members, and most of all your spouse. But we need greater help and assistance. This statement mentions something that helps beyond what man can do

or offer. It is an expression of faith. You see, it is stating that when I cannot find shelter from here, I can find shelter from above. It is stating, "Lead me to a rock that is higher than I." Meaning, as Barnes states, "The idea is, that he had no strength in himself; that if he depended on himself, he could not be safe. He was, as it were, in a low vale, exposed to every enemy. He wished to be put in a place of safety. To such a place of safety – to Himself – he prayed that God would lead him. We need one much higher than we are to save us. A Saviour – a Redeemer – on the same level with ourselves could not help us. **We must have one that is supreme over all things;** one that is divine."

Yes, indeed, other references could be given to that great Rock which saves our soul (Matthew 16:16-18, Matthew 7:24, Romans 9:33, 1 Corinthians 10:4, 1 Peter 2:8).

A songwriter, Erastus Johnson, used these words in Psalm 61 to write a marvelous hymn we sing. As I read a little about this man's life, I could see **he certainly felt the tremendous need for God in his own life.**

Reading a quote on his life, "**His health failed, and threatened with the loss of his sight, was compelled to give up preparation for the ministry. On the advice of his physician, he took a sea voyage, embarking on the ship Gold Hunter en route from New York to California. The crew of the ship mutinied just before rounding Cape Horn and as Johnson was the only person on board who knew anything about navigation, other than the captive officers, he was pressed into service to take the ship on to its destination, San Francisco. This he was able to do successfully.**" I can see him saying, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I" as he took control to navigate a ship that had been abandoned. Not to mention his eye problems and health issues. Please allow me to include the lyrics which verbalize this great theme and which can be applied to our lives:

Vs.1 - O sometimes the shadows are deep,
And rough seems the path to the goal,
And sorrows, sometimes how they sweep
Like tempests down over the soul

Chorus: O then to the Rock let me fly
To the Rock that is higher than I
O then to the Rock let me fly
To the Rock that is higher than I!

Vs.2 - O sometimes how long seems the day,
And sometimes how weary my feet;
But toiling in life's dusty way,
The Rock's blessed shadow, how sweet!

Vs.3 - O near to the Rock let me keep
If blessings or sorrows prevail,
Or climbing the mountain way steep,
Or walking the shadowy vale.

Some say the Psalm can be divided into two parts of four verses each.

1. **Prayer for support and restoration** to God's dwelling-place (Psalm 61:1-4).
2. **He appeals to the experience of answered prayer** and to the certainty of God's promises to the king and looks forward with confidence to a life of thanksgiving for God's mercy (Psalm 61:5-8).

I see in Verse 3 (below) **an immediate reference to God's prior help.** He had the absolute knowledge of the great presence of God **in times past** which gave him perfect confidence for the future. "You have been" meant to David that He will again be a great shelter.

For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy. (Psalm 61:3, NKJV)

God has proven Himself to be there always. In the past God had often been David's "Shelter" or "Refuge" (Psalm 18:2; Psalm 44:7; Psalm 44:11; Psalm 48:3). Throughout the Psalms we absolutely see God providing "a shelter in a time of storm" (Isaiah 4:6). Of course, this is with application to the Messianic age of Christ and the church. As one person stated, "This Psalm has affinities with Psalm

20, 21, 27, 42, 43, 63, and with Proverbs.” It has also been said that in later times Psalm 61 was naturally adopted as a prayer of the nation in its dispersion. Obviously, David was encouraged by many past experiences and past deliverances and AGAIN calls on God for further deliverance. Past experiences serve a great benefit for trusting God implicitly, completely, and utterly. They should always engage us to keep close to Him and encourage us to hope for new mercies in the time of stress. Therefore, David did not resort to anything else but the strong hand of God.

I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah (Psalm 61:4, NKJV)

Conclusion: Let us use this beautiful Psalm to have full confidence and assurance that our prayer will be answered. Yes, our life will be assisted by God, and as the Psalm confidently states, “His life will be prolonged for many generations” (Psalm 61:6-7). As a result of this confidence, David expresses His gratitude to God and asserts that he will always follow God, forever!

So I will sing praise to Your name forever, That I may daily perform my vows. (Psalm 61:8, NKJV)

Fruit of the Spirit: Shining Love, Joy, and Peace

T. SEAN SULLIVAN | PARAGOULD, ARKANSAS

Introduction

As Christians, we are responsible to “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). This is an interesting directive which is clarified by Paul’s next inspired statement. In Philippians 2:16a, Paul says, “*holding fast the word of life.*” This is where we are instructed in proper “shining.” We learn from this that God provides the instructions for shining as we should.

A life transformed by obedience to the will of God will be noticed in this world of darkness. Others will take note of the true changes and the intensity of those changes when we let them shine. Galatians 5:22-25 speaks of the wonderful results found in submitting to God, denying the flesh, and focusing on what is best for your soul. In this first lesson, we will focus on the life of “*love, joy, and peace.*” We will consider how these blessings brighten our walk and the quality of our shine on those around us.

Shining the Light of Love

When we embrace God’s love for us, we will begin to demonstrate proper love toward others and our example will take on a greater brightness. Love is a choice, it is not “a sparkly feeling” nor is it “magic”. Love is a determination to appreciate and reflect our appreciation. We can often speak the words of love with great ease, but it is the actions of true love that require diligence.

Jesus taught us to love enough to see the needs of others. The fullest expression of Christ’s compassion is found in the fact that He saw fit to come to earth and give Himself for us. However, there is more to learn from His



compassion. Jesus looked at the struggling masses who had no hope and “...*had compassion on them because they were like sheep having no shepherd*” (Matthew 9:35-36). If we are going to apply love in this life, we must have compassion for the souls of our fellow man. They are lost and dying (Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23a). We, as Christians, know the gospel and how to obey it, because we have obeyed it; we know that the gospel of Christ is only one hope of freedom from sin (Romans 6:23b) and we need

to tell others about it. The Scriptures have always set an example that says, those who do the will of God also tell others how to do the will of God! The brethren in Thessalonica are a great example of this pattern (1Thessalonians 1:6-8). If we love, as we should, we will purpose to love others enough to share the gospel with them. If we are determined to shine the light of love, we will be a great blessing to others around us.

Before we move on from this point, please know that “others” does not only mean alien sinners trapped out there in the doom of darkness. Our light of love needs to be seen by our children, our family, and our brethren too. Every day, we need to rise and shine the light of love.

Shining the Light of Joy

If, for a moment, we were to equate “happiness” and “joy”, we would know that most people are drawn toward happiness more than they are to sorrow. For reasons that escape my understanding, some Christians approach their life with a large dose of gloom.

Whether it is their mistaken idea of humility or that they miss the world and its ways, they are certainly not reflecting the life of a Christian by projecting gloom.

Be happy knowing your value in God's eyes. God placed such a high value on us that He gave us His Son to remedy our self-inflicted wound of sin (John 3:16; Hebrews 9:22-28; 1 Peter 1:18).

If God believes you are worthy of joy, and He does, then start shining joy. When you are faced with trials, shine, "...if God is for us who can be against us..." (Romans 8:31-39). In John's gospel, three times Jesus stated concern for our joy and wanting our joy would be full (John 15:11; 16:22; 16:24). Later, in John's first epistle, John wrote to encourage their "joy" to be "full" (1 John 1:4).

True joy is knowing who you are: a soul who needed salvation and found it (Romans 6:16-18). True joy is knowing where you are going and the confidence of knowing how to get there (John 14:1-6), it is a level of unwavering joy that shines bright in this world of darkness. When you shine as you should others will be drawn to the life of obedience too (Matthew 5:16). If we are determined to shine the light of joy, we will be a great blessing to others around us.

Before we move on from this point, please know that "others" does not only mean alien sinners trapped out there in the doom of darkness. Our light of joy needs to be seen by our children, our family, and our brethren too. Every day, we need to rise and shine the light of joy.

Shining the Light of Peace

It certainly seems that today, more than ever, others need to see the shining light of peace. The world is so busy chasing "the next _____" (there are countless things that fit into that blank.) There is no end to the pursuit of worldly things. With this endless want there is no satisfaction and certainly no peace. We,

however, should be the living proof of an obtainable life of peace.

True peace is seeking and finding God, our Creator (Acts 17:27). True peace comes from being reconciled to God (Romans 5:1-11, "*We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*"). True peace is knowing you are His child, He is your Father (1 John 3:1). True peace is looking forward to Heaven and knowing that you are doing what it takes to be welcomed there (Matthew 7:21; 25:21).

As Christians, we have access to the greatest peace— "*the peace of God*" (Philippians 4:6-7). God directs us toward His peace by directing our way of thinking (Philippians 4:8-9). We are to refuse the way of the world and trust God's direction; God instructs us to be at peace. In fact, He says, "*be anxious for nothing*" in Philippians 4:6, then, in verse 8, God tells us to focus our minds on only those things which are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, things that are virtuous and worthy of praise. Most of the turmoil of this life is avoided when we set the boundaries of our hearts to the parameters that God supplies. If we are determined to shine the light of peace, we will be a great blessing to others around us.

Before we end this point, and this lesson, please know that "others" does not only mean alien sinners trapped out there in the doom of darkness. Our light of peace needs to be seen by our children, our family, and our brethren too. Every day, we need to rise and shine the light of peace.

Conclusion

We have considered the influence of God's way on our own lives and what it can do for others. This influence will only be seen if we live it out in the open. Knowing the love of God, knowing the joy of a bright eternal future beyond, and knowing the peace of God every day along the way are blessings we can have in abundance, allowing us to shine the light of love, joy, and peace everywhere we go, so that others can see, seek, and find.

Sharing the Gospel of King Jesus

SEAN CAVENDER | WICHITA, KANSAS

Introduction

After His resurrection, Jesus told His apostles that “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Jesus soon ascended into heaven and was exalted to sit on David’s throne, reigning as king over His kingdom (Acts 2:33; Philippians 2:9-11). Following this claim to kingly authority, Jesus then told His apostles to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I command you...” (Matthew 28:19-20). Throughout the book of Acts, we see the apostles work in fulfilling Jesus’ words. As the church grew and more and more people were converted to Christ, all disciples began to share the word of God with those who were not disciples of King Jesus (Acts 8:4).

When we think about evangelism, we often look for ways to motivate Christians to overcome fears or consider methods of evangelism. These are necessary and important lessons regarding evangelistic efforts. However, there may be something that is missing in some discussions about evangelism. Perhaps we need a better and more robust understanding of the gospel if we will be effective communicators with those who are lost and separated from Christ. Therefore, this article will seek a fuller understanding of the gospel to be better equipped to share the gospel with others. One aspect that I am convinced will help us be more confident in our presentation of the gospel to those lost in sin is our own recognition and appreciation of the authority and kingship of Jesus of Nazareth. If we recognize Jesus’ kingship, we should be more apt to share the gospel with others.

What is the Gospel?

The gospel is God’s power to save man from



4 via Timothy Eberly | Unsplash.com

his sins (Romans 1:16). With such power, we should better understand the gospel. So, what precisely is the gospel? Some people seek to reduce the gospel’s core components about Jesus’ life. One popular — and biblical — definition of the gospel is from 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 where Paul states that Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection are the gospel. Some people limit the gospel to be only the death, burial, and resurrection. While there are certain essential aspects that we must accept and believe as true that are indeed part of the gospel, the lists that some people have narrowed down the gospel to only three, five, or seven core parts to the life of Jesus fall short. I believe the gospel is more robust than a simple list of only a few items.

The English word “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, defined as “good news.” Since the gospel is God’s power to save us from our sins, we likely think of the word “gospel” as only a religious word. However, that isn’t very accurate. Notice one particular definition:

“The word euangelion was not invented by the gospel writers but was already in use in the Roman world, euangelion. It referred to an announcement of “glad tidings” regarding a birthday, rise to power,

or decree of the emperor that was to herald the fulfillment of hopes for peace and well-being in all the world. Mark redefines this concept of “glad tidings” by introducing his gospel with the phrase, “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,” implying that it is really the birth and subsequent actions of Jesus that will change the face of the world in a cosmic way that no earthly king could ever do. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, brings true and lasting well-being and peace to the world, in fulfillment of OT hope” (Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words)

The word “gospel” was a secular word that could reference politics and political rulers. For example, certain events might occur within a country and empire, and a herald would be sent out to make announcements to the kingdom’s citizens. The New Testament uses the word “gospel” and shapes it around Jesus Christ and His kingdom. This should immediately cause us to recognize a broader use of the term gospel.

The Gospel Paul Preached

First, the gospel is God’s gospel (Romans 1:1). The apostle Paul made it clear that he was called as an apostle, appointed and called by God to preach it. The gospel is God’s gospel because it contains His power for salvation (Romans 1:16). Also, God gives us hope and peace through the gospel (Romans 15:13, 33; 16:20). The gospel contains the message of God’s activity and work in the world through Jesus Christ, His defeat of Satan, and His rescuing the world from sin (Romans 15:25-27). The gospel is about the “only wise God” who saves us from sin, and the gospel is rightly about Him and from Him.

Secondly, the gospel is about fulfilling God’s promises (Romans 1:2). The Old Testament prophets and the Old Testament Scriptures contain those promises. Paul appealed to two Old Testament examples, Abraham and David,

in Romans 4 to express the blessing and promise of forgiveness and justification by grace (Romans 4:1-8). Later, Paul would show that God’s promise to bless all nations through Abraham’s son, Isaac, indicated that God planned to offer justification, salvation, and blessing to both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 9:6-8). God fulfilled this promise ultimately through Christ coming into the world (Romans 9:5). To fully appreciate the gospel of God, we must know and understand the Old Testament so we can see the gospel’s unified story.

Thirdly, the gospel is a proclamation about God’s king and kingdom. Paul states that the gospel of our God is “concerning His Son” (Romans 1:3). The gospel is the good news that involves the person and story of Jesus Christ! Jesus was born a descendant of King David. The gospel of God identifies Jesus as the promised heir to the throne of David, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises (2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6-7). When Mary’s pregnancy with Jesus was announced, Gabriel declared that her son would fulfill these Old Testament expectations of placing a king on the throne of David (Luke 1:31-33). Gabriel’s message was a gospel message — a declaration about the future birth of God’s Son and the king who would rule over God’s kingdom!

The Gospel of the Kingdom

When discussing the gospel, it is fitting to talk about Jesus Christ, especially His kingship. If people only reduce the gospel to His death, burial, and resurrection, they miss out on Jesus’ kingship and authority. The gospel of Mark opens by stating the beginning of the gospel starts with the preaching of John the baptizer, who preached about the kingdom of God (Mark 1:1; Matthew 3:2). Then, somewhat surprisingly, Jesus Himself continued John’s mission and preached the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15)!

Since Jesus preached the gospel, the gospel is not only about Jesus. We must begin to grasp a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the gospel. The gospel is a declaration about God’s kingdom and its

establishment. It is a proclamation of the kingdom and its laws. The gospel is about becoming a part of the kingdom of God. When the blood of Christ saves us, the Father transfers us into the kingdom of His Beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). Jesus is head of the church and rules over the kingdom of God, sitting at the right hand of God (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:20-23). We are now citizens of God's kingdom (Philippians 3:20). Therefore, the gospel includes preaching and teaching about Christ's authority and church.

The Gospel Promotes Faithful Obedience to God

The gospel of God is good news about salvation in Jesus Christ, but it is not merely news that someone hears and ignores. The gospel of God requires a response — the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). God saves those who believe and obey the gospel (Romans 1:16; 6:16-17). On the other hand, if people do not obey the gospel, God will condemn them for their disobedience (1 Peter 4:17). The good news about Jesus Christ should motivate people to believe in Jesus as their Savior and the Son of God, who is Lord and King. Therefore, they should believe in Him when they hear the message of Christ

(Romans 10:17), and they should confess their faith (Romans 10:9-11). Are you ready to give your life in allegiance and obedience to King Jesus?

The gospel promotes obedience to God and invites people to participate and join Jesus Christ. Paul writes about being united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection when believers are baptized (Romans 6:3-6). Therefore, believers are invited to join Christ, and upon being baptized, they will be saved, justified, and given the newness of life.

Conclusion

When we recognize the fullness of the gospel, we should be more willing and more motivated to share the gospel. Since the gospel is about God's work of saving us from our sins, His authority, and obedience to King Jesus, we should be eager and ready to invite others to become a part of the kingdom of God. We should help show them how to join their lives with Christ in baptism. When we have a deep and abiding loyalty to our King Jesus, we will eagerly teach others the message of grace and hope! Therefore, let us begin to love the complete picture of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Not Peace But A Sword

JEFFREY SMITH | GAINSVILLE, VIRGINIA

Peace on Earth?

The angel who announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds led a chorus of angels in saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)

So, the promise of peace on earth is intimately connected with our Lord and Savior. That is why we are taken aback when Jesus later said he did not come to bring peace.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household."
(Matthew 10:34-36, ESV)

Which is it? Peace, or no peace? War, or peace? Or both?

To better understand Jesus' attitude and actions toward peace it helps to develop a robust definition of peace and the areas to which it applies.

Shalom

The Hebrew word for "peace" is "shalom", and it connotes much more than simply the absence of military conflict. That "shalom" loses something in translation is evinced by English versions typically using twenty different words to translate it. The root meaning is "to be whole, uninjured, undivided." Shalom can also refer to tranquility of mind. With respect to areas of application, "shalom" could refer to peace of mind felt by an individual, peace



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between individuals, peace between nations, or peace between humans and God. When we see a reference to peace we must determine from context what type of peace it is and where it applies.

Peace Through Violence?

Peace and violent conflict are opposites. But throughout the Bible peace came as the direct result of violent conflicts. Powerful, evil men rarely listen to rational arguments and agree to peace. Force is necessary to overcome their evil intentions.

Classic case-in-point is the Pharaoh of Moses' day. He was the most powerful man on earth in his time. How could his evil domination of God's children be brought to an end? He had to be overcome by force. God overcame him with severe plagues and violent destruction of his army (Exodus 7-14). Israel enjoyed peace, to a limited degree, on the eastern shore of the Red Sea as a direct result of God's violence against Pharaoh and his army.

Not Violence for Violence's Sake

In Deuteronomy 20 God prescribed His will for Israel's violent conflicts: rules of engagement for necessary future battles. Part of the

preparation for battle was a formal offer of peace (Deuteronomy 20:10). Israel was not to be a band of marauders advancing violence for violence's sake. If a foe agreed to Israel's (God's) terms, battle was avoided (vs. 11). If not, battle ensued (vs. 12). Israel was ready to forego battle if peace was agreed to, but God's terms were not negotiable. It would be peace God's way. The enemy chose, by submitting to or resisting God, whether or not there would be a battle.

However, scriptures tell us that sometimes God hardened the hearts of the disobedient to keep them from choosing peace (Joshua 11:20). God did this to ensure destruction of those who had been devoted to destruction. The peace ultimately enjoyed by Israel in the promised land was the result of violent military conquest of resolute foes.

Peace through Violent Conflict

Centuries later when Jezebel saw approaching Jehu, using a disparaging nickname she asked if he came in the name of peace (2 Kings 9:31). Was it peace? Yes and no. Jehu enlisted the aid of Jezebel's servants to immediately put her to violent death (vs. 32-33). Spontaneous execution is pretty much the opposite of peace. However, immediately following her execution, Jehu and company sat down to a peaceful meal (vs. 34). So, in this instance, peace was the result of violence. On a broader scale Jehu was God's instrument to bring a type of peace to the nation of Israel through a series of violent conflicts (2 Kings 10). Jehu was excessively violent, for which a price had to be paid later (Hosea 1:4).

The God of War and Peace

Is God a God of war or of peace? Consider this passage from the close of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." (Romans 16:20, ESV). Seems like a contradiction, doesn't it? The God of peace is about to crush Satan. Doesn't sound very peaceful to me. Unless we understand

that peace is often the direct result of violent action against an evil foe.

Paul's reference to Satan being crushed by God refers to the final conflict at the end of this age, as foretold in Revelation 19. Jesus, the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah, appears with the armies of heaven (vs. 14). Against him are arrayed "the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who is sitting on the horse and his army (vs. 19). After the tumultuous drama of Revelation we expect this Armageddon to be a prolonged, brutal, knock-down, drag-out fight. But, instead, it is over in an instant (vs. 20). All that remains is the carnage of battle for the birds of the air to devour (vs. 21). So, here also, peace – ultimate, eternal peace – results from extreme violence of God's armies led by Jesus defeating all those who oppose Him.

Not Condoning Christian Violence

But it is important to note that even though an end-time battle is prophesied in The Book of Revelation, physical violence is not the proper method for advancing Christ's kingdom now, nor has it ever been. Our weapons are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4-6). Christians are often subjected to violence in this life, but we do not advocate violence to further the Kingdom.

Peace and a Sword?

So how can Jesus bring both peace (Luke 2:14) and a sword (Matthew 10:34-36)? Well, see if this fits. The peace that Jesus would bring in Luke 2:14 is the ultimate, everlasting, overarching peace described in Revelation 19. End-game peace. But in Jesus' times on earth, and in the present age which continues until the end comes, there was and would continue to be conflict between Jesus and his disciples and Satan and his disciples. So, peace in Matthew 10:34-36 refers to this age. Peace in Luke 2:14 refers to eternity.

Already; Not Yet

A corollary to this tension between peace and violent conflict is the "already, not yet" character of Jesus' victory. Notice the following passage from Hebrews.

⁶ *It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?"* ⁷ *You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor,* ⁸ *putting everything in subjection under his feet."* Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.
Hebrews 2:6–8 (ESV)

Everything is in subjection under Jesus' feet, but, at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection. Already, not yet.

Perfect Peace, But Not Yet

So it is with the peace Jesus brings. He will ultimately bring perfect peace, fulfilling Luke 2:14. But until that final victory, we do not have peace, but a sword, in fulfillment of Matthew 10:34-36.

JANUARY 2023 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE	<u>Jeff Asher</u> will bring us the final article in our series of portrayals of Jesus Christ, this one from the gospel of John.
CHURCH ARTICLE	<u>Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba</u> continues our series of congregational profiles for churches we find in the New Testament, looking at the Thessalonian church.
WORSHIP ARTICLE	<u>Jeremy Woodman</u> continues our psalms of worship series with an analysis of Psalm 145.
APPLICATION ARTICLE	<u>Sean Sullivan</u> gives us part 2 in his three-part series on the Fruit of the Spirit. This article focuses on patience, kindness, and goodness.
EVANGELISM ARTICLES	<u>Sean Cavender</u> and <u>William Stewart</u> compile a “community brainstorm” on ways to get busy with the work of evangelism.
BEYOND BASICS ARTICLE	<u>Sonia Rainwater</u> (deceased, March 2018) presented a lesson to a group of girls at the 2013 NE Florida College Camp on being strong for the Lord. <u>Tom Rainwater</u> has edited Sonia’s material into an article for our benefit.



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