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Preface

The warm response to *Wisdom of the Bible*, published on the Internet in January 1996, has encouraged me to attempt a much more difficult topic, the teachings of Jesus. I have tried to categorize and present the major themes that Jesus emphasized over and over to His disciples and to others who listened to His teachings. Nearly all this material is derived from the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The teachings of Jesus are central to all branches of Christianity, but they do not fully represent the beliefs held by Christians. Countless theologians through the centuries have shaped those beliefs. Chief among these are St. Paul, whose letters appear in the New Testament, and St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430). The Orthodox Eastern Churches broke with the Roman Church in 1054 and have developed their own traditions, with emphasis on the writings of the Fathers of the Church. Since the Reformation in the 1500's, Protestant beliefs have been strongly influenced by Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), John Calvin (1509 – 1564) and the founders and theologians of the individual denominations. Meanwhile, Catholic beliefs have been influenced by the popes, the Catholic church's own internal reforms, and in recent times by the Second Vatican Council of 1962 – 1965.

I have not tried to present a complete set of Christian beliefs. Instead, I have attempted to categorize and present those things that Jesus, Himself, taught during His three years of earthly ministry. This is not a criticism or rejection of any church's doctrine, but it is an acknowledgment that, while Jesus and His teachings are absolutely central to all branches of Christianity, there are many different shades of interpretation and belief within the Christian community. If there is any intentional bias on my part, it is to concentrate on Jesus' advice for living our daily temporal and spiritual lives. I have not emphasized controversial topics such as the nature of Jesus' divinity, nature of salvation, etc., which are of more interest to theologians.

It is my hope that this work will be useful as an aid to understanding the ministry of Jesus, what He taught about our relationship with God and each other, and how He is guiding us toward eternal life in God's kingdom.

Throughout this work I have highlighted Jesus' words in red, in the tradition of many Bible editions.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of my wife, Helen, who edited this work and made many needed improvements.

Cliff Leitch
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Introduction - the Gospels

(Marshall, Lockyer)

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (NAS, Luke 1:1-4)

Nearly everything we know about the life and ministry of Jesus comes from the Bible's four Gospel books – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Gospels existed in oral tradition in the young Christian communities for some time before they were finally set in written form. As the eyewitnesses to the events of Jesus' life began to pass away in the latter part of the first century, it probably became more urgent that these events be preserved in writing.

The Bible's New Testament, which includes these four Gospels, was originally written entirely in Greek, the common language of the Mediterranean lands in Roman times. The first of the Gospels was probably Mark, written around 70 A.D., about 40 years after Jesus was crucified. Matthew and Luke were written between 80 and 90 A.D. Finally, The Gospel of John appeared in its final form around 95 A.D.

All four Gospels are anonymous in the sense that none includes the author's name. The traditional names – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – did not become associated with these writings until the second century. In the early centuries of Christianity, our four Gospels coexisted with a number of other Christian writings, many of which have not been preserved. Finally, the Synod of Carthage adopted the present twenty-seven New Testament books, including the four Gospels, as the canon of the New Testament in the year 397.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the *Synoptic* Gospels because they are strikingly similar. Bible scholars believe the authors of Matthew and Luke were aware of the Gospel of Mark and incorporated much of it in their own writings, along with material from another common source that has not been preserved, plus unique material of their own.

The Gospel of John is very much different from the Synoptic Gospels in the way it presents and interprets the events of Jesus' earthly life. The Synoptics portray Jesus traveling about and preaching in parables about the coming kingdom of God, while John presents a more spiritual and meditative picture of Jesus. Both John and the Synoptics present many of the same events of Jesus' life, including His trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Because of the differences among the Gospels, we are tempted to ask which, if any, is the correct portrayal of the events of Jesus' life. However, each of the four is a unique view of Jesus, drawn from different eyewitnesses and different traditions, and we are fortunate to have these four "windows" to see four views of these central events of Christianity.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus the Man

Although we number our years from the beginning of the Christian era, scholars believe Jesus was actually born between 6 and 4 B.C. Both Matthew and Luke recount Jesus' birth in the city of Bethlehem, in what is now southern Israel. Jesus was born into a Jewish family and remained faithful to Judaism all His life.

Jesus spent his youth and early adulthood in the city of Nazareth, in the land of Galilee. Almost nothing is known of this period of His life, except for the incident at the Temple told in Luke 2:41-51.

At about age 30, Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist and began His public ministry. He selected 12 disciples who would carry on his ministry after Him. He traveled through the regions of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, teaching in the synagogues and speaking to the crowds of people who followed wherever He went. He preached about the kingdom of God, repentance, and love for all people. The gospels tell how He healed the sick wherever He went and performed many other miracles.

Jesus' public ministry lasted about three years, and He found many followers among the Jews of Palestine. However, He had enemies, too. Jesus was very critical of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His time. He said they observed the *letter* of the Jewish law, but defiled its *spirit* by living lives of greed and sin. These religious leaders plotted to kill Jesus, and eventually forced the Roman governor, Pilate, to order His crucifixion on Friday, the eve of Passover, in about the year 30 A.D.

The Gospels tell that Jesus arose from the dead on the following Sunday, and He remained on Earth another 40 days before ascending into heaven. Jesus, Himself, said He was the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah awaited by the Jews. He said His death and resurrection were all part of God's mysterious plan of salvation.

Jesus the Good Teacher

It is impossible to read the Gospels without getting a sense of the intensity and passion of Jesus' teachings. He spoke with great authority on spiritual matters, often leaving his detractors tongue-tied and looking foolish. Many of His teachings are disturbing and shake us out of our comfort and complacency. 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.

Jesus often spoke in parables, using common images of nature and agriculture, to deliver His spiritual messages. Many people, often including His disciples, were left baffled by the parables. Jesus explained His parables to his disciples in private, but many of the explanations have not been recorded in the Gospels.

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them (the crowds that followed Him), as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. (NIV, Mark 4:33-34)

Why did Jesus speak in parables? Why not just explain everything in plain language? Jesus, Himself, had this explanation:

When (Jesus) was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" (NIV, Mark 4:10-12)

It seems that Jesus constructed His parables so only those who were pure of heart and receptive to His teachings could understand them. Jesus' enemies and the merely curious were left baffled. This seemingly harsh attitude may be Jesus' way of making His message available and inviting those who wish to understand and believe while never forcing anyone to know and accept His truths. If Jesus had spoken in plain language, the sheer power of His personality and message might have forced many to believe, even against their own will. By speaking in parables, Jesus made it possible to decline the invitation to understanding and commitment found in the parables. (Marshall, p. 869)

The parables serve a second purpose as well. How can you explain to someone an experience they have never had? How would you explain the beauty of a sunset to someone who had never seen one? The parables are skillfully painted mental "pictures" to help us understand the kingdom of God and other spiritual things we have never experienced ourselves. The **New Bible Dictionary** expresses it this way:

The parables are the appropriate form of communication for bringing to men the message of the kingdom, since their function is to jolt them into seeing things in a new way. They are a means of enlightenment and persuasion, intended to bring the hearers to the point of decision. Jesus, as it were, stands where his hearers stand, and uses imagery familiar to them to bring new and unfamiliar insights to them. (Marshall, p. 867)

Jesus the Savior

For those who have accepted the gift of faith, Jesus is much more than a historical figure and a good teacher. He is the Christ, the Savior, the Son of God, who came to Earth to redeem us from sin, establish His spiritual kingdom of God on Earth, and to offer the promise of eternal life. Although He is not now on Earth in bodily form, He is present with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is our guide and savior, the source of all our strength, who will lead us through this earthly life and into eternal life beyond. We can talk to Him in prayer. He speaks to us through the Bible and our consciences. He strengthens us with His love.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (NIV, John 14:26-27)

Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this— that I am with you always, even to the end of the world. (TLB, Matthew 28:19-20)

God's Love for Mankind

"Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. (NAS, Luke 12:6-7)

Jesus often referred to God as "the Father" or "the heavenly Father." Our relationship to God is like the loving relationship between parent and child. Like a loving parent, God knows and cares deeply for each of us.

God is pure Spirit. We cannot see or touch Him. We can only dimly understand Him, but we can know Him through prayer, through the teachings of the Bible, and through our faith. In His teachings, Jesus presents a picture of a very loving God who wants everyone to be in harmony with Him. He is seeking to awaken a loving response in each of us. God knows and loves each of us personally, as parents know and love their children. God will give good things to those who ask:

"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (NAS, Matthew 7:8-11)

Like children, some of us return God's love, and some do not. Nevertheless, He loves all of us. God's gifts of love and salvation are freely offered to all, even to those who choose the path of wickedness.

.... He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (NIV, Matthew 5:45)

God is also merciful. He is always willing to forgive a truly repentant sinner and give him or her another chance. Even when we sin, we can be assured that God still loves us and seeks to bring us back into harmony with Him. However, it is up to us; we can accept or reject God's love. No matter how far our lives have drifted away from God, we must never be discouraged and think we are beyond hope!

"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (NAS, Luke 15:4-7)

One day Jesus was speaking with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, who was intrigued by Jesus' teaching but was more than a bit skeptical. Jesus told Nicodemus that God loved the people He had created so much that He sent Jesus to save them from the forces of evil and their own sinful ways. Those who put their trust in Jesus and His teachings could be born again spiritually and be part of God's spiritual kingdom. They could even defeat the power of death and attain eternal spiritual life! It was in this conversation with Nicodemus that Jesus spoke one of the most loved and quoted verses of the Bible:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. (NAS, John 3:16-17)

Related verses: Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 6:25-30, Matthew 10:29-31, Luke 6:35-38, John 10:11-12.

The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is the very centerpiece of Jesus' teachings. Matthew speaks instead of the "kingdom of heaven." However, a number of passages in Matthew are virtually identical to those in Mark and Luke, except for the substitution of "kingdom of heaven" for "kingdom of God." Thus, the same reality is intended. The Gospel of John mentions the kingdom only twice but refers many times to the closely related concept of eternal life.

For hundreds of years, the Jews had been expecting the decisive intervention of God to restore the glory of Israel and defeat its enemies. When John the Baptist and then Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom was at hand, it was certainly understood in terms of this expectation. (Marshall, p. 647)

However, the kingdom initiated by Jesus is not the earthly kingdom that was widely inferred from the Old Testament prophesies. It is a spiritual kingdom that is now growing in the hearts of men and women, and it will find its fulfillment in the eventual sovereign rule of God and defeat of all evil. Those people who choose to belong to God's kingdom and serve Him, are those who are destined to inherit eternal life in God's presence.

Jesus often compared the kingdom of God to a seed planted in the hearts of men and women. Each of us has the seed of the kingdom within us, but it will grow only if we give it the proper "care and feeding." Jesus tells of this aspect of the kingdom in His famous Parable of the Sower:

... Jesus left the house and went down to the shore, where an immense crowd soon gathered. He got into a boat and taught from it while the people listened on the beach. He used many illustrations such as this one in his sermon: "A farmer was sowing grain in his fields. As he scattered the seed across the ground, some fell beside a path, and the birds came and ate it. And some fell on rocky soil where there was little depth of earth; the plants sprang up quickly enough in the shallow soil, but the hot sun soon scorched them and they withered and died, for they had so little root. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns choked out the tender blades. But some fell on good soil and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as he had planted. (TLB, Matthew 13:1-8)

Jesus' disciples were often just as baffled by His parables as the huge crowds of people who came to hear Him preach. Later, when he was alone with His disciples, Jesus explained the Parable of the Sower to them in plain language:

"Now here is the explanation of the story I told about the farmer planting grain: The hard path where some of the seeds fell represents the heart of a person who hears the Good News about the Kingdom and doesn't understand it; then Satan comes and snatches away the seeds from his heart. The shallow, rocky soil represents the heart of a man who hears the message and receives it with real joy, but he doesn't have much depth in his life, and the seeds don't root very deeply, and after a while when trouble comes, or persecution begins because of his beliefs,

his enthusiasm fades, and he drops out. The ground covered with thistles represents a man who hears the message, but the cares of this life and his longing for money choke out God's Word, and he does less and less for God. The good ground represents the heart of a man who listens to the message and understands it and goes out and brings thirty, sixty, or even a hundred others into the Kingdom." (TLB, Matthew 13:18-23)

According to Jesus' explanation, three things are needed to belong to God's kingdom: understanding, commitment, and total devotion to God's Word above all else. Like the seed that falls on the hard path, a person who does not understand the Word and the Commandments will fall into the temptation of evil and lose sight of God's kingdom. Like the seed that falls on the shallow, rocky soil, a person lacking a strong commitment will drift away from faith because of peer pressure, inconvenience, embarrassment or persecution. Like the seed that falls among thistles, the faith of a person who is not totally devoted will succumb to the pettiness of worldly life and the desires for wealth, power and status.

The kingdom of heaven is not some far away place in a far away time that we can only dream about. It is here and now, among and within us. Jesus put it this way:

One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God begin?" Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God isn't ushered in with visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'It has begun here in this place or there in that part of the country.' For the Kingdom of God is within you." (TLB, Luke 17:20-21)

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32), Jesus again compared the kingdom of heaven to a seed, this time a mustard seed. He said the mustard seed is the tiniest of all seeds, but it can grow into the largest of plants. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is like a tiny seed within each of us. We cannot see it or touch it and we are free to ignore it. However, if we choose to nurture it, it can grow into a powerful and wonderful force within us.

We are all God's children, and if we wish to be a part of His kingdom, we must humble ourselves before God like small children. We can enter *only* by the grace of God. God is not "required" to admit anyone because of faith proclaimed, church services attended, good deeds done, wise words spoken, or hardships suffered. We must come on God's terms, leaving our pride, arrogance, rebellion and self-centered desires behind:

... The disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (NAS, Matthew 18:1-4)

The Gospel of John tells of the kingdom of God in terms of a spiritual birth. Just as we were born and grow in the flesh, we must be "born" and grow in the Spirit. Speaking to the Pharisee Nicodemus, Jesus said we must be born again spiritually to enter the kingdom:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (NAS, John 3:3-7)

Saul was a well-educated young man, a Jew and a Roman citizen. His Jewish heritage meant everything to Saul, and he saw the rise of Christianity as a threat to all that he held dear. He was present at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and he became a fierce persecutor of the early Christians. He was determined to destroy the young church, and went from house to house arresting Christians and sending them to prison. (Lockyer, pp. 805-6)

Sometime around the year 34 A.D., while on the road to Damascus, Saul was blinded by a bright light:

He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. (NIV, Acts 9:4-7)

Saul was born again that day and became known as the Apostle Paul. He became the first and most influential interpreter of Jesus' message and teachings, a passionate missionary, founder of many Christian communities, and author of several New Testament letters.

Like Saul, a few people have a sudden, intense spiritual rebirth that instantly changes their whole lives. However, for most of us, spiritual rebirth is not so much an event as it is a process of becoming more and more focused on spiritual things and less on selfish material things. Not that we drop out of the world, but we think more and more of how we can do God's work on earth instead of just living for ourselves.

God's kingdom will not come to total fulfillment in the present age. The kingdom will continue to exist and grow among the powers of evil. This is told in Jesus' Parable of the Weeds:

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said,

'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" (NIV, Matthew 13:24-30)

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (NIV, Matthew 13:36-43)

The Parable of the Weeds tells us that, like the farmer who sowed good seed, Jesus has brought God's kingdom into the world. However, it will not be totally fulfilled in this age. Like wheat growing among weeds, God's kingdom will exist and grow amidst the forces of evil that are so prevalent in our world.

We should not look for ease or perfection in this life. Those who belong to the kingdom and serve God will continue to live among those who (knowingly or unknowingly) serve the powers of evil. In the end, though, if we are able to cling to our faith despite all the surrounding evil, we will be freed from the evil of the world and live in perfect harmony with God. The ultimate fate of those who serve the forces of evil, whether by design or neglect, will be grim to say the least.

Being born again and entering the kingdom of God is a process of gradually coming to obey God's commandments instead of a "sin now, pray later" attitude. It is learning to truly obey Jesus' great commandment to "Love God with all your heart and soul and love your neighbor as yourself." It is listening to our consciences and spending time in prayer to ask for guidance and wisdom. It is feeling secure that God will give us the strength to face whatever challenges come our way and will take care of us in the end.

Related verses: Matthew 3:11, Matthew 5:8, Matthew 7:13-14, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 11:12, Matthew 11:25-26, Matthew 13:23-29, Matthew 5:20, Matthew 13:11-23, Matthew 13:33, Matthew 13:44-50, Matthew 16:8-12, Matthew 18:23-35, Matthew 19:13-14, Matthew 19:16-26, Matthew 20:20-28, Matthew 21:28-32, Matthew 23:11-12, Mark 4:1-20, Mark 4:30-32, Mark 9:35-37, Mark 10:17-27, Mark 10:42-44, Luke 8:1-18, Luke 9:48, Luke 11:9-13, Luke 12:22-31, Luke 12:49-53, Luke 13:22-28, Luke 15:24, Luke

18:15-16, Luke 18:18-30, Luke 19:1-10, Luke 21:10-11, John 6:57-58, John 6:63, John 8:12, John 14:16-17, John 18:36.

Love the Lord Your God

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" **"The most important one,"** answered Jesus, **"is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'**" (NIV, Mark 12:28-30)

Jesus said loving God is the most important of all the commandments. But what does loving God really mean? Here are six ways that Jesus taught us to express and demonstrate our love for God:

- **Know and Obey God's Commandments**
- **Trust in God and Jesus**
- **Put God Above All Else**
- **Be Committed**
- **Be Humble before God and Men**
- **Make Time for Prayer**

Know and Obey God's Commandments

"..., blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it." (NAS, Luke 11:28)

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. (NIV, John 14:21)

In both testaments, the words for obey also carry the idea of hearing. The two concepts are inseparable. The Hebrew *shama* means both "to listen to" and "obey," as does the Greek word *hupakouo*. The biblical concept is, then, of a hearing that takes place and the need to comply with what is heard... Obedience is the supreme test of faith in God (1 Samuel 15:22-24), or, as the NT puts it, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:14-26). Thus obedience and faith are always very closely linked in the Bible (Young, p. 396).

Jesus repeatedly called for obedience to God's commandments and to His own teachings; we are called to put our faith into action. The commandments we are called to obey are best summarized by the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), Jesus' Great Commandments to Love God with all your heart and soul and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-31), and the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 – 7:29).

It is abundantly clear throughout the Bible that this is *not* an area where we are free to live by our own feelings of right and wrong. The principles that must guide our lives every minute of every day are set out in no uncertain terms. Perfect obedience must be our constant goal.

In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says that simply calling on Him is not sufficient to enter the kingdom of heaven; we must also do God's will. In the Parable of The Wise and Foolish Builders (Luke 6:46-49), Jesus compares a man who hears His words and puts them into practice to a house built on a solid foundation or rock; it will weather any storm. On the other hand, a man who hears His words and does not put them into practice is like a house built without a foundation; the first storm will cause it to collapse and be destroyed.

Despite our best efforts, however, we are only human and will fail again and again to live up to the ideals set forth by Jesus. Fortunately, God is always willing to forgive and forget our sins and failures as long as we are sincerely sorry and are willing to also forgive those who sin against us.

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (NIV, Matthew 6:14-15)

"... heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who haven't strayed away!" (TLB, Luke 15:7)

Related verses: Matthew 5:14-16, Matthew 5:18-19, Matthew 5:48, Matthew 6:24, Matthew 7:15-20, Matthew 7:21-27, Matthew 12:46-50, Matthew 13:2-23, Matthew 23:27-28, Mark 3:31-35, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 6:46-49, Luke 8:4-18, Luke 10:38-42, Luke 11:27-28, Luke 11:33-36, John 8:51, John 14:15, John 14:21-24, John 15:9-10, John 15:14, John 15:17

Trust in God and Jesus

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. (NIV, John 14:1)

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (NIV, John 6:28-29)

We live in an age of rational thought, scientific knowledge, secular government and cultural diversity. Can there be any room in our lives for simple faith? Yet, simple child-like faith is exactly what Jesus calls us to. Just as a small child trusts completely in his or her parents, Jesus calls us to trust completely in Him and His Father in heaven:

And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of

God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all. " And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands upon them. (NAS, Mark 10:13-16)

Rationality, logic, and science are useful tools for understanding and controlling the material world. Faith is different. It operates in the spiritual realm, not the material realm. Things of the material world cannot invalidate the truths of our faith, nor does our faith invalidate the truths of the material world. There is no conflict between the two realms as long as we understand that true faith is a freely given gift from God; it is not derived from science, logic, or rational thought.

Everywhere around us there is war, prejudice, crime, exploitation and all kinds of suffering. How can we maintain our faith in the face of such overwhelming evil? Jesus simply calls us to trust God and maintain our faith *in spite of* all the incomprehensible evils of the world. We can (and should) try to make our world a better place for all of us to live. However, bringing it to perfection is a job only God can do, and it will happen only on His timetable. Speaking of the trials and evils to come, Jesus said:

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (NIV, Matthew 24:10-13)

We are called to simple, sincere, freely chosen faith. God will not give any miraculous sign that would force us to believe against our own will:

The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." (NIV, Mark 8:11-12)

Maintaining our faith in the face of all of life's disappointments, suffering, and cynicism is a daily challenge. But, if we can meet that challenge, we can rise above all those evils. Then we can be at peace with God, with our fellow men, women and children of the world, and with ourselves.

Related verses: Matthew 4:18-20, Matthew 5:14-16, Matthew 6:25-34, Matthew 7:7-8, Matthew 9:18-19, Matthew 9:20-22, Matthew 9:23-26, Matthew 9:27-30, Matthew 12:38-40, Matthew 16:1-4, Matthew 18:1-4, Matthew 21:16-22, Mark 1:16-18, Mark 9:17-27, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 5:4-6, Luke 5:18-26, Luke 7:36-47, Luke 10:38-42, Luke 12:22-31, Luke 17:5-6, Luke 17:11-14, Luke 18:15-17, John 1:40-41, John 1:47-49, John 6:28-29, John 6:66-69, John 8:28-32, John 10:11-12, John 10:30, John 10:38, John 11:25-26, John 11:32-45, John 12:44, John 14:8-11.

Put God Above All Else

"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (NIV, Luke 16:13)

There is nothing evil about owning the things we need. However, when we strive to collect wealth or possessions beyond our need, we may neglect our duty to God, to our families, and to mankind.

Jesus said that serving God and serving wealth are incompatible goals. It is all too easy to become obsessed with wealth and possessions. Because technology has provided such an abundance of consumer goods, the quest for possessions may be an even stronger temptation now than in Jesus' time. We may work long hours at stressful jobs so we can afford a luxury car, a larger house, designer clothing, and countless other items.

When a rich young man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:16-24, Mark 10:17-25), Jesus probably knew the man was obsessed with wealth. He told the man to sell his many possessions and give the money to the poor. Sadly, the man could not bring himself to give up his great wealth, even for the promise of eternal life from Jesus, Himself!

An obsession with wealth is not the only thing that can come between God and us. Any desire that becomes too important in our lives can cause us to lose sight of God's love. While speaking to a group of religious leaders, Jesus mentioned a number of things that can separate us from God:

And then he added, "It is the thought-life that pollutes. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts of lust, theft, murder, adultery, wanting what belongs to others, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, and all other folly. All these vile things come from within; they are what pollute you and make you unfit for God." (TLB, Mark 7:20-23)

To keep Jesus' commandment to **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,"** we must always keep the things of God foremost in our minds.

Related verses: Matthew 4:8-10, Matthew 5:3-11, Matthew 6:19-21, Matthew 6:24, Matthew 16:26, Matthew 21:33-43, Matthew 23:37-39, Mark 8:36-37, Mark 12:1-10, Mark 13:31-37, Luke 6:24-26, Luke 9:25, Luke 10:41-42, Luke 11:23, Luke 12:13-34, Luke 13:34-35, Luke 20:9-18.

Be Committed

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (NAS, Matthew 16:24-26)

Jesus had little patience for half-hearted or hypocritical followers. He was totally and passionately committed to fulfilling His earthly mission, and He expected the same of His followers. We can never fully live up to Jesus' example, but we *can* do our best to live our faith every hour of every day.

Not only must we be committed, we must be committed to the right cause. We must be sure, through study and prayer, that we are following God's agenda and not our own. We must be sure to follow the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), Jesus' Great Commandments to Love God with all your heart and soul and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-31), and the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 – 7:29).

We may find commitment to be inconvenient and difficult. We could suffer loss of wealth, power and prestige. It could even be dangerous. Jesus promised the burden will never be too great to bear, though:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." (NAS, Matthew 11:28-30)

Commitment to carrying out God's plan may be may be inconvenient and may conflict with our own desires. However, the peace of mind, purposefulness of life, and eternal rewards will be immeasurably great.

Related verses: Matthew 7:13-14, Matthew 10:37-38, Matthew 8:18-22, Matthew 13:1-23, Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 4:1-20, Mark 10:29-31, Mark 12:41-44, Luke 8:1-18, Luke 9:23-24, Luke 9:61-62, Luke 12:35-48, Luke 14:26-27

Be Humble before God and Men

... the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (NIV, Matthew 18:1-4)

Humility before God means realizing that all we have and all we are is a gift from God. We are God's children and should show Him our complete faith and trust. It also means

realizing that God has a plan for each of us, and it is our job to follow that plan, not to follow our own agendas. Each of us has been given unique talents that we can (and should) use to improve our lives and the lives of others.

Humility before men is a quality of being courteously respectful of others. It is the opposite of aggressiveness, arrogance, boastfulness, and vanity. It is the quality that lets us go more than halfway to meet the needs and demands of others. Jesus said that wealth, power, status and pride will count for nothing in the kingdom of God. Faith, humility and service to others are the qualities of true value:

The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (NIV, Matthew 23:11-12)

In our age of instant communication, jet travel, and massive migrations of people, we are becoming more and more a worldwide society rather than a number of isolated groups as in the past. Our different beliefs and cultures often clash with one another. How should we deal with people of different faiths? Jesus calls us to spread the good news to all peoples. However, we are *not* called to impose our faith, beliefs and values on others. (Forced faith is no faith at all!) Rather, like a light shining on a hill, we should let the goodness of our lives demonstrate the validity of our faith:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. " (NAS, Matthew 5:14,16)

Being humble means focusing more on God and others than on ourselves. Acting with humility does not in any way deny our own self-worth. Rather, it affirms the inherent worth of all persons and our trust in God. Some would consider humility to be a psychological malady that interferes with "success." However, wealth, power or status gained at the expense of others brings only anxiety – never peace and love.

Related verses: Matthew 5:3-11, Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 18:1-5, Matthew 20:25-28, Matthew 23:11-12, Mark 9:35-37, Luke 14:10-11, Luke 17:7-10, Luke 18:9-14, Luke 20:46-47

Make Time for Prayer

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (NAS, Matthew 7:7-11)

Prayer is loving communication with God. Prayer may be long or short, alone or in a group, silent or aloud, but should be a true communication with God and not done for public recognition. Important aspects of prayer include: (Lockyer, pp. 866-7)

- Expression of *faith* and trust in God
- *Worship* and *adoration* of God
- *Confession* of sins
- *Praise* of God's mighty deeds
- *Thanksgiving* for all the good things we have received
- *Dedication* to service to others
- *Requests* for our needs and the needs of others

God answers prayer requests in His own way in His own time, and will not grant requests that are against His holy and wise purposes, are selfish in nature, are not in our best long-term interest, or those made with impure motives. Often, we must be persistent in prayer. The answer, when it comes, may be in a form radically different than we expected.

Jesus spent a lot of time praying. He often went to a solitary place and prayed for hours at a time, especially at difficult times in His ministry. The famous *Lord's Prayer* is Jesus' model of the perfect prayer:

"This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, (NIV, Matthew 6:9)

First, we call God by the affectionate term "Father," and praise His holy name.

your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (NIV, Matthew 6:10)

We ask that God's will be done on earth and in our lives.

Give us today our daily bread. (NIV, Matthew 6:11)

We ask to be given the things we need, but we don't ask for things we merely desire.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (NIV, Matthew 6:12)

We ask forgiveness of our sins and acknowledge that we must also forgive those who sin against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' (NIV, Matthew 6:13)

Finally, we ask for the strength to resist the temptation to follow the path of evil.

Prayer is the expression of our inner spiritual needs. Through prayer we can find strength of spirit, guidance and wisdom, joy and inner peace.

Related verses: Matthew 5:44, Matthew 6:5-15, Matthew 14:23, Matthew 26:36-41, Mark 1:35, Mark 11:24-25, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Luke 6:28, Luke 9:18-20, Luke 9:28-29, Luke 11:5-13, Luke 18:1-14, Luke 22:40.

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, **"The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 'The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."** (NAS, Mark 12:28-31)

In Jesus' teachings, our relationship with our fellow men, women and children is inseparable from our relationship with God. Love of God and love of our neighbors are two aspects of the same calling:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (NIV, John 13:34-35)

Who is my Neighbor?

We commonly think of neighbors as the people who live near us, but Jesus meant it to include all mankind – even our enemies! Jesus told His famous parable of the Good Samaritan to make it clear that "love your neighbor" means to love all persons, everywhere – not just our friends, allies, countrymen, etc.:

One day an expert on Moses' laws came to test Jesus' orthodoxy by asking him this question: "Teacher, what does a man need to do to live forever in heaven?" Jesus replied, **"What does Moses' law say about it?"** "It says," he replied, **"that you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And you must love your neighbor just as much as you love yourself."** **"Right!"** Jesus told him. **"Do this and you shall live!"** The man wanted to justify (his lack of love for some kinds of people), so he asked, **"Which neighbors?"** Jesus replied with an illustration: **"A Jew going on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes and money, and beat him up and left him lying half dead beside the road. "By chance a Jewish priest came along; and when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Jewish Temple-assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but then went on. "But a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw him, he felt deep pity. Kneeling beside him the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his donkey and walked along beside him till they came to an inn, where he nursed him through the night. The next day he handed the innkeeper two twenty-dollar bills and told him to take care of the man. 'If his bill runs higher than that,' he said, 'I'll pay the difference the next time I am here.' "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the bandits' victim?"** The man

replied, "The one who showed him some pity." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same." (TLB, Luke 10:25-37)

The Jews and Samaritans had been enemies for hundreds of years. The Jews of Jesus' society considered the Samaritans to be ceremonially unclean, socially outcast, religious heretics (Mays, p. 1029). Yet, the Samaritan took pity on the poor man who had been robbed and beaten. He gave freely of both his time and his money to help this Jewish man who was not only a stranger, but also an enemy from a foreign country. In His parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus challenges us to **"Go and do the same."**

To reinforce that "love your neighbor" applies to everyone, Jesus extended the rule of love to even our enemies!

"There is a saying, 'Love your friends and hate your enemies.' But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even scoundrels do that much. If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (TLB, Matthew 5:43-48)

Like the unselfish Samaritan man of Jesus' parable, we are called to extend our love and concern to all persons everywhere, as our neighbors. We should not exclude anyone or any group because of social status, a supposed character fault, religious difference, racial difference, ethnic difference, citizenship difference, etc.

Related verses: Matthew 22:34-39, Luke 6:27-38

Forgive Others

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (NAS, Matthew 6:14-15)

Anger can consume us with hatred and block out the love of God. Whether between parent and child, spouses, friends, or nations, expressions of anger divide us and drive us toward open hostility. More often than not, our angry feelings are based on a misinterpretation of what someone said or did. A grudge clouds our judgment and may lead us to an act of revenge that can never be undone.

Jesus said to forgive and forget. We should always be willing to forgive others, even when they don't ask for forgiveness. Holding a grudge and seeking revenge have no place in the lives of those who truly love their neighbors. Jesus calls us to remember that we are all God's children. Just as He loves all His people and is willing to forgive their sins, we should be willing to forgive also.

The Old Testament law specified equal revenge for equal wrong: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:23-25, Leviticus 24:19-20.) But this rule was too harsh for the new age of the kingdom of God. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the right thing to do is to take no revenge at all.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 'But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. (NAS, Matthew 5:38-39)

The need to forgive is not some ideal that we cannot hope to attain. Forgiveness is necessary to free us from the dark cloud of anger and resentment that can literally destroy our own lives. Unless we are willing to let go of our anger and the desire to punish or get even, the love of God cannot enter our lives.

Related verses: Matthew 6:12, Matthew 5:21-24, Matthew 18:21-35

Help the Needy

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. "And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 'And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' "Then they themselves also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'" (NAS, Matthew 25:31-46)

Jesus could hardly have made things plainer than in His Parable of the Sheep and Goats, above. We are not meant to live hard-hearted or self-centered lives. We are called to put our faith into practice and truly love our neighbors, especially those less fortunate.

God has given each of us unique talents and gifts to use in His service. His work for us on earth is to use our gifts and talents in the service of others! Each of us has something to offer to someone in need. We can give our money and our time to charity, be a friend to someone who is sick or lonely, do volunteer work, or be a peacemaker. We may give unselfishly of our time to our spouse, children or parents. We may choose a service-oriented occupation, or we may just do our everyday jobs with integrity and respect for others.

It would seem that the more we give to others, the poorer we become, but just the opposite is true! Service to others brings meaning and fulfillment to our lives in a way that wealth, power, possessions and self-centered pursuits can never match. As Jesus said,

For if you give, you will get! Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use to give— large or small— will be used to measure what is given back to you." (TLB, Luke 6:38)

Does this mean we can't satisfy Jesus' command unless we have abundant wealth to give, or extraordinary talents to serve other? No! It is *not how much* we give, *but the spirit* in which we give that counts with God. Each of us is called to give generously of what wealth and talents we have been given – whether it is a little or a lot. Jesus compared a poor widow, who gave only a little, to the wealthy men who gave much more. The wealthy men had only given a token amount from their great wealth. In God's eyes, the widow gave much more because she gave from the heart:

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything— all she had to live on." (NIV, Mark 12:41-44)

Each of us has something to give. Some have wealth, some have talents, and some have time. Whatever gifts we have been given – large or small – we should share generously. When we do, we make the world better for someone else and find true meaning and satisfaction in our own lives.

Related verses: Matthew 6:1-4, Mark 9:35, Mark 10:17-27, Mark 12:41-44, Luke 6:30, Luke 14:12-14, Luke 12:33-34, Luke 14:12-14, Luke 19:1-9, Luke 21:1-4.

Follow the Golden Rule

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (NIV, Matthew 7:12)

The Golden Rule, spoken by Jesus, is possibly the best-known quote from the Bible, and sums up Jesus' ethical teachings in one short sentence. If we wish to be loved, we must give love. If we wish to be respected, we must respect all persons – even those we dislike. If we wish to be forgiven, we must also forgive. If we wish others to speak kindly of us, we must speak kindly of them and avoid gossip. If we want strong marriages, we must be loyal and faithful to our spouses. If we wish to be fulfilled in our lives, we must share generously with others. If we wish to reap the rewards of our Heavenly Father's love, we must truly love all His people.

If we do not wish to be judged harshly, then we must not judge others harshly. Often we are tempted to call someone else a "sinner" or to think of ourselves as holier. However, we are called to correct the faults within ourselves, not to criticize or condemn others:

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (NIV, Matthew 7:1-5)

Jesus' comical story tells of a man trying to remove a speck of sawdust (a minor fault) from his friend's eye while he is blinded by a huge plank (a major fault) in his own eye. Jesus says that as long as we have our own faults and sinfulness (which we always will), we do not have the right to criticize others.

The golden rule – treat others as you would want to be treated – is the standard Jesus set for dealing with other people.

Related verses: Matthew 5:22-28, Matthew 12:34-37, Matthew 20:25-28, Mark 9:35-37, Luke 6:27-36, Luke 6:37-38, Luke 12:57-59, John 8:3-11

In His sermons and parables, Jesus seeks to shock us out of our selfishness and worldliness and create in us a true passion for the welfare of our fellow men, women and children around the world. Universal love is at the very heart of Jesus' teachings; it is God's earthly work for us.

What matters to God is our love for Him and our love for each other. Wealth, power and status count for nothing in the kingdom of God. When we truly love our neighbors, we do our part to make the world a better place, and we find our own fulfillment in life.

Epilogue

Jesus radically changed the world. He was a new kind of leader, a new kind of king. Instead of power and wealth, universal love was His standard of worthiness. Instead of the sword, the word of God was His "weapon."

Instead of the proud, worldly king, He was the humble bearer of the kingdom of God. Yet, no one in history has had the impact on world affairs that Jesus has. His teachings and principles have made their way into human thought throughout the world, far beyond the bounds of formal Christianity.

The essence of Jesus' message to us is this: God loves you. Love and respect Him in return. Love and care for all your fellow men, women and children around the world as much as you care for yourself.

The kingdom of God is still growing within and among us. The news headlines constantly remind us of all the very real evil surrounding us. However, millions and millions of men, women and children around the world are quietly, in their own ways, worshiping God, loving their neighbors, making the world a better place, and finding their personal peace and fulfillment as part of God's kingdom.

Appendix: Events of Jesus' Life and Ministry



Palestine at the time of Jesus (left) and today (right)

Event	Approx. date	Location	Reference
Jesus is born (commemorated on Christmas Day)	6-4 B.C.	Bethlehem	Matthew 1:18- 2:18, Luke 2:1-20
Jesus grows up		Nazareth	Matthew 2:19-23, Luke 2:39-52
At about age 30, Jesus is 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
First miracle – turns water into wine at the wedding in Cana	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 - 7:29, 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 to Jerusalem (commemorated on 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 (commemorated on Good Friday)	Friday, Passover Eve	Jerusalem	Matthew 26:47 - 27:66, Mark 14:43 - 15:47, Luke 22:47 - 23:56, John 18:2 - 19:42

Resurrection from the dead (commemorated on Easter Day)	Sunday	Jerusalem	Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-10
Appears to disciples	during following week	Jerusalem	Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25
Ascends to Heaven	40 days after resurrection	Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem	Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:44-53

Much of the above table abstracted from [Zondervan, pp. 719-720]

References

Bibles

(NAS) **The New American Standard Bible**, published in 1971, is a scholarly update of the 1901 American Standard Version. Sponsored by the Lockman Foundation, the translators used the best available Greek and Hebrew texts as a guide.

(NIV) **The New International Version Of The Bible**, a completely new translation of ancient Greek and Hebrew texts sponsored by the New York International Bible Society, was published in 1978. Its clear, direct modern English makes it easy to read and understand.

(TLB) **The Living Bible**, published in 1971, is a popular paraphrased version written by Kenneth N. Taylor, who began this version to help his own children understand the New Testament Letters of Paul. As a result, the language is exceptionally clear and direct, making this Bible suitable for all ages.

Other Works

(Lockyer) Herbert Lockyer, Sr., ed., **Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary**, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986. Commentary on people, places, things and doctrines of the Bible, arranged by topic. Includes references to relevant Bible passages.

(Marshall) I. Howard Marshall, *etal*, eds., **New Bible Dictionary, third edition**, Intervarsity Press, 1996. Commentary on people, places, things and doctrines of the Bible, arranged by topic. Includes references to relevant Bible passages.

(Mays) James L. Mays, ed., **Harper's Bible Commentary**, Harper, 1988. Commentary, interpretation and historical perspective on each book and each verse of the Bible.

(Young) G. Douglas Young, ed., **Young's Compact Bible Dictionary**, Tyndale House, 1989. Commentary on people, places, things and doctrines of the Bible, arranged by topic. Includes references to relevant Bible passages.

(Zondervan) **Bible Study Helps**, 1984. (Included in NIV Bible editions published by Zondervan Publishing House.)

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