

October 13, 2013 - Jesus 101

Our goal with this series is that we are trying to look at some of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity, some of the core truths that we, as Christians, hold to. Specifically, we are trying to look at all of those things from the angle of, what does the Bible say about these specific things. That has been our target all along so we will continue with that here this morning.

It's our fourth topic and our fifth lesson because we tried to do God in one week and there was just too much to say so we had to split that up into two weeks.

I just want to give you a really quick review, just to get us up to speed, if some things have gotten foggy in the memory or if you weren't here previously. Very quickly, this is what we have said in the last couple of weeks.

We started out talking about God and we said that the God of the Bible is 'supernatural'. He is out of this world, He is unlike anything we have ever seen or imagined. More than we can even begin to start to wrap our minds around. That is who God is.

More than being just supernatural, God is also 'relational'. As we look at God in the Bible, what we see is that God is always trying to establish and restore our relationship. There is something at the very core of God's being that desires relationships and God's actions are always motivated by that desire to create and to nurture and to restore relationships with others and between others.

A couple weeks ago, we moved on from that and we talked about sin. We said that basically sin is not following God's rules and instructions for how to live life. God's instructions exist to defend and protect those healthy relationships that God desires. Relationships between us and God; relationships between other people and us. And simply, sometimes God's instructions exist simply to protect us from inflicting damage upon ourselves. So that's where we came from but all of that leads up and leaves us with a bit of a problem. The problem is this: When we fail to follow God's instructions, we destroy our relationships. That's kind of what we said last week. In Romans, Chapter 3:23, Paul writes: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all get that, we all kind of sense that intuitively. We all mess up, we all fall short, we all fail to live up to the standard. We have not always followed God's instructions on how to live. I think most of us would quite readily admit some of that. In the process of doing that, what has happened is that we have caused some damage. Some damage has been done, perhaps to ourselves, perhaps to those around us, perhaps to our relationship with God. Most of us would recognize and acknowledge that part of the story, as well, at least in hindsight, we can see how that has played out in our life. But the million dollar question in all of that, at least for me is, if that is all true, if that damage has been done, if those problems have been created, then, what I really, really, want to know is, how do you fix it? That's really the burning question. I

think it's the burning question in most of our hearts. Okay, we'll acknowledge that we haven't followed the instructions; we'll acknowledge that damages have been done; and we'll acknowledge that relationships are not all that we wanted them to be, but the question that we really have, is: How do we fix it? In many ways, that's the big question of life, right? How do we fix it? It's great to say, follow all of these instructions, all of the time, and you will be able to navigate this world as best as possible. But what happens when I don't do that? What happens when things go bad? What happens when I fall short? What happens when my relationships break? What happens when troubled times come? What happens when other people don't follow God's instructions and I'm collateral damage of their decisions? How do we fix it? How do we restore those relationships? How do we heal from hurt? How do we cope with the consequences? Now, lots of people have tried lots of different things, lots of different ways to accomplish this. I'm highlighting just a couple for us this morning. I don't know if they are the most popular, they are the ones I go to most often.

First of all: Denial. We think we'll act like nothing has happened. Act like there is no problem. Pretend that the problem does not exist, or that the damage was not done. Just ignore it, and hopefully it will all go away. Sometimes that's how we try to fix it.

Other times, we try: Determination. Tough it out; barge on undaunted; full steam ahead; survive it by sheer force of will. That's how we try to address the problem and fix it.

Other times, and this might be the most popular, at least in my life: Distraction. We go to distraction; take your mind off it; forget your troubles; find something that will distract you. Sometimes people go to things like, drugs; or alcohol; sex; or gambling. Sometimes what we do is, we try to start a new relationship to take the place of the one that we have damaged or destroyed. Sometimes we just go ahead and lose ourselves in a sport or hobby or some activity. Sometimes our approach is, maybe even subconsciously a little bit, we fill every waking moment with T.V. and games books and social networks, and anything else that will help us not to think about the consequences that our actions have brought into our lives.

Now, perhaps you have tried some of these yourself. If you have, you likely know how well these strategies work. All of these solutions tend to produce the same results. At least in my experience, what these things produce is further destruction, more problems. Denying that the problem exists doesn't make it go away. Determination alone isn't enough to solve my problems. Distractions may help me momentarily forget my problems but they do nothing to fix them. These things simply give my problems more time to get worse and cause further destruction.

Well, the Christian answer to the question: How do we fix it? Is very simply put: Jesus. Looking at that verse out of Romans, 3:23-24: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus." That is it in a nutshell, what Jesus is all about. We haven't followed God's instruction, damage has been done, relationships have been destroyed and Jesus' mission is to

fix it. To restore our relationship with God. To repair the damage we've done to ourselves and to others. To heal the wounds and help us to live with the scars. To renew the life that God intended us to have from the beginning. Jesus is the answer; he is the solution; the remedy; the cure. And to understand exactly how all that works what we need to do is first understand who he is. Now there's a lot of opinions as to who Jesus is, there's a lot of different perspectives of that and there are many, many things throughout our world, the history throughout the last 2000 years many things that have been done in the name of Jesus that are nothing at all like him. Oftentimes the discussion of who Jesus is gets side-tracked on many different tangents but what we are going to try to do this morning is very simply, hit the very middle of that target; hit the centre; hit the core of what the Bible says this is what Jesus is all about.

Now, we started out the series several weeks ago, to do this we've got to go back to the Bible and see what our foundation for this discussion is going to be. We started out several weeks ago looking at the Bible and said there are several things we can do to have confidence that the Bible is a trustworthy thing. There are several tests we can run it through. The first test is to look at the number of manuscripts that we have of the New Testament specifically and we gave you some examples of Plato's tetralogies, the number two highest number is the Iliad by Homer, which has 643 manuscripts in the present day. Now, compared to all that the Bible has 24,633 copies. So, just by the number of manuscripts, the first test that we're going to use, the Bible seems to be a hands down winner.

Now, the second questions we asked is: What's the age of the manuscript? What's the gap of time between when the first copy was written to the copy that we have today? How long is the time space between because the longer the space the more time there is for things to go awry. So we looked at several different examples of famous ancient works and the time spread between when they were originally written and the oldest copy we have, was. Where does the Bible fit into all that? Well, it's about 50 years between when the last book of the Bible was written and our oldest copy of a manuscript that we have. We gave several examples of that. We gave the John Ryland Papyrus, which is a fragment of the Gospel of John which is dated at 130; the Chester Beatty Papyrus, which contains large portions of most of the New Testament including big sections of all four of the Gospels which is what we are going to concern ourselves with this morning and then by 325 A.D. we have the Codex Vaticanus which is the entire New Testament essentially as we have it today. We have a copy of that dated back to 325 A.D. So again, the Bible as far as authenticity as far as we can have confidence that what you hold in your hand this morning, your Bible is the same as what was actually written, we have a fair degree of confidence in that process. Now, as we're talking about Jesus, this morning, not just the Bible or New Testament, but Jesus specifically, the question we really want to ask is: When we're looking at the biography of Jesus, which is really what the Gospels are, those books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. When we look at the biography of Jesus the question we want to ask on top of those two questions is: How long was the gap between when Jesus actually lived and when he had his ministry and when he died on the cross, how long was the gap from that until someone

actually wrote down the stories? And so, as most of you may know, Jesus' ministry is usually dated from somewhere around 30 A.D. to 33 A.D. That's when he was crucified on the cross, about 33 A.D. How long after 33 A.D. was it? How many years from then until someone actually started to write down the stories, write down the teachings of Jesus? We have four different biographies of Jesus, the four Gospel books. The earliest one is the Gospel of Mark. It was written around 48-55 A.D. so you're talking 15 years. The second one was the Gospel of Luke, was written around 57-62 A.D. which is about 24 years between Jesus' death and Luke's writing. Next is Matthew, written around 75-78 A.D., about 32 years. And then the last one to be written, quite awhile after the others, was the Gospel of John. John wrote some time in the '90's, we're not sure exactly when, so you're looking at about 60 years. Now, as you look at those dates that may seem like and feel like a long time from something actually happened to when it got written down into a hard copy. But, the thing to note and the thing that's of significance there, is that, even John's Gospel is close enough to the actual events that there would still be eye-witnesses around. There would still be people who had actually seen what had happened. Who had actually listened to Jesus teach; who had actually tasted the five loaves and two fishes. There would still be people around who could verify what these guys were writing, or could contradict what these guys were writing and could say "No! I was there and that's not at all what happened." So, it seems like a long time to us but it's still close enough that you would have those eye witnesses around.

Just to give us some contrast and to give us something to compare it to, Alexander the Great. How many of you know of Alex. Everyone knows of Alexander the Great and kind of have a sense of what he did and all of that. The first biography of Alexander the Great was written 400 years after he died. So in comparison to Jesus, this is a much greater gap. Just to give you a little perspective on that, that would be like someone writing on what we are doing here today in the year 2413. I don't know if you can wrap your mind around that? Maybe it would be better to go backward. It would be like someone today sitting down and for the first time writing about Shakespeare's Globe theatre burning down in London. Or perhaps Galileo spotting Neptune in his telescope for the first time. Or perhaps writing about the first English baby born in Canada, born in a town called Cupid's Newfoundland. All three of those events happened in the year 1613. Can you imagine sitting down today and for the first time ever, writing those events down? This one is a little bit later, but it seemed appropriate this weekend. The Mayflower bringing the pilgrims over to Plymouth Rock, just under 400 years ago. Can you imagine sitting down today and for the first time saying "I'm going to write that story down." Can you imagine the gap there. Compare that to perhaps writing about the Y2K phenomenon that came around the turn of the millennium. Everyone thought the world was coming to an end. Everyone was freaked out, computers were going to crash. Now that would be a lot easier because most of you were around then. Most of you can remember that. Most of you have friends or people you knew who you could interview and say "What were you doing on December 31, 1999?" So that's kind of the description that we're talking about.

That's kind of the context and the validity of the Gospels that we're going to look at. We can look at them and we can say "Well sure. But that's the Bible and of course the Bible is going to talk about Jesus and say that Jesus existed and that he was a real guy? But what about something that's not the Bible? Is there anything that's not the Bible that can verify that Jesus actually existed, that Jesus was around? Is there anything that Jesus did? Well, in fact there are. There are 42 ancient manuscripts that reference Jesus within 150 years of his life, that talk about Jesus, talk about what he taught, talk about what he did. Now, you're going to say "All of those were Christian so of course, they're going to say what the Bible says because they're Christians and that's just how it goes." Most of them are Christians, about 33 of them are written by Christian people, but 9 of them are written by non-Christian historians. So there are nine manuscripts out there written by non-Christians who talk about Jesus; this is who he was; this is what he did; this is what he taught. Now, in terms of comparison, Tiberius Caesar who was Caesar at the time of Jesus, we have 10 manuscripts that talk about him. So again you see the weight of evidence falls in favour of Jesus.

Now, here's something that totally blew my mind away when I first heard it several years ago. Without the Bible, without even opening a page of the Bible, even if the Bible never existed, here is what we could know about Jesus. We could know that Jesus lived; that people believed that he was the Messiah; that people worshipped him as God; that people believed he did miracles; that he died by crucifixion by Pontius Pilot; that it was believed that he appeared to his disciples afterwards. We could know all of that about Jesus without even opening the cover of our Bible. So if we are asking the question if Jesus was really a real guy, was he really who we thought he was, well there is significant evidence toward that fact. Even Islam which wasn't founded till the 7th Century, Islam will concede that Jesus was a real person; that he lived on earth; that he taught according to God's will; that he performed miracles; and that he ascended to Heaven.

One ancient manuscript scholar states this about Jesus, he says: "We have more and earlier manuscript evidence about the person of Jesus Christ than we do anyone else in the ancient world, including Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great."

So if the question is: Was Jesus a real person? Did Jesus actually exist? Then the answer has got to be 'Yes'. Then the next question we have to ask and the more important question, probably is, if we can really conclude that there was a Jesus, what we really want to know is: Who Jesus really was? And who better to answer that question than Jesus himself. There are lots of verses in your New Testament and in the Gospels specifically, but the Apostle John lays it out for us, I think, especially well. So let's begin with what is the most well-known verse in the entire Bible. John 3:16. This is what it says: "For God loved the world so much that he gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." John says, this is who Jesus is. Actually it's Jesus himself talking, he says: "Jesus, who I am, Jesus is God's one and only Son." He is God in the flesh. He is perfect. He is sinless. He is God. But he is also sent by the Father, he is sent because God loves humanity so desperately. He is sent because God wants people to have eternal life.

Jesus explains this concept of eternal life a little bit better later in John 17:3, he says: “And this is the way to have eternal life. To know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent to earth.” Eternal life comes from God and knowing Jesus and here again, knowing is not just mental data retention or memorizing facts, knowing here is an intimate relationship. Earlier, John 14, Philip asks for Jesus to show the disciples the Father and Jesus replies: “If you have seen me, you have seen Him. If you know me, you know Him.” Jesus came to restore people’s relationships with God because that is where eternal life is found. And eternal life means more than just a quantity of life. Older versions of your Bible, instead of ‘eternal life’ may have used the phrase ‘everlasting life’. Eternal life is a little bit better but it still kind of leaves us with a sense of life that goes on and on and on, but there’s more to it than that. Eternal life has a quality to it that matches it’s quantity.

In John, Chapter 10, verse 9, Jesus says: “The thief’s purpose is to steal and to kill and to destroy; my purpose is to give them rich and satisfying life.” Jesus says, there’s a thief who tried to steal and kill and destroy life. Two weeks ago we looked at a verse and talked about something very similar to that out of Romans 6:23 we read: “For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord.”

Sin is not God’s way of taking all the fun out of life. Sin is a thief trying to take all the life out of you. In contrast Jesus said that he came to bring full and abundant, rich and satisfying, the complete and best possible life there is for you to have. All of that simply because he is God’s son. Jesus came to bring life by restoring relationships with God. Jesus came to instruct us on how to live in a way that protects our relationships with God and with others. Jesus came to pay the price for our sin; to replace what was stolen; to restore what was damaged; to renew what was destroyed. Jesus came to do what only God’s son could accomplish. In John, Chapter 14, the disciples are asking Jesus about the way to find God; the way to know what the truth is; the way to have life, and Jesus tells them this, he says: “I am the way the truth and the life, no one can come to the Father except through me.” And that is Jesus 101. That is the heart of who he is. That is the core of who he is and what God sent him to do. That is what everything else stems from and grows from.