

# **Country Folks Bible Study!**

## **The Church History Books of the New Testament. Matthew –Acts**

**By Charles Higgs and Greg Long**



## **PREFACE:**

The Harvest Field of the Western Heritage is white unto harvest and we praise the Lord in what he is doing in the Cowboy and Country Churches across America.

One of the urgent needs of the Cowboy and Country Churches is Bible Study/Discipleship helps. I have teamed up with Dr. Greg Long, Pastor of Lost Pines Cowboy Church of Elgin, Texas to write this Volume on the Church History Books of the New Testament. The Books of Mathew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts. Greg and I also wrote "Get That Bible Out of Your Saddlebag Volume One ." This Volume deals with the History Books of The Old Testament. It is a study for the Old Testament Books from Genesis to Esther. You can order that book at Amazon.com. See you on the trail! **Charles Higgs, Director of Western Heritage Ministry of Texas Baptist.**

**Charles Higgs** has been Director of the Western Heritage Ministry of the Baptist General Convention of Texas since 2006. Charles has pastored several churches in Texas and Oklahoma. He was also Founding Pastor of the Cowboy Church of Erath County in Stephenville, Texas. Charles received his Masters of Arts Degree from Dallas Baptist University and a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Trinity Theological Seminary. Charles received his Masters of Arts Degree from Dallas Baptist University and a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Trinity Theological Seminary. Charles is married to Nancy, they have one married daughter, Andrea who is married to Scott Sage and they have three children Hope, Wes and Walker.

**Greg Long** is a native of Georgia. He is a graduate of Georgia State University and New Orleans Baptist Theological where he taught as an Adjunct Professor for four years. He has been a Pastor of churches in Georgia and Mississippi and is the founding Pastor of Lost Pines Cowboy Church in Elgin, Texas where he currently serves. Greg and his wife, Bonnie, have two children, Jason and Krisite, and one granddaughter, Aubree Renee Long.

# Matthew's Trail of the Gospel

## Lesson One:

Who is Matthew? His name was Levi (Mathew 9:9; Mark 2:14) and Jesus named him Matthew. He was a Roman Tax Collector that caused the Jews to despise him. His knowledge of tax collector helped Matthew give the history of the bloodline of the Messiah. Someone called the Genealogy of the Messiah, Matthew Chapter 1: "*Levi Genes.*"

It has been pretty quiet for some time. In fact it had been 400 years since Malachi had given his words of prophecy.

Matthew gives us the story from the birth of Christ to his death resurrection and return to heaven.

**Chapters 1 to 4:** The Birth and preparation of Messiah, Jesus Christ. We learn about His descendants, earthly father and mother. We see his birthplace in Bethlehem, the guest that came to meet baby Jesus. We see the flight to Egypt and his boyhood upbringing in Nazareth. In chapter four we see the beginning of His earthly ministry, His baptism and the challenge of being tempted by Satan.

**Chapters 5 -6:** The great Sermon on the Mount. This great sermon deals with Kingdom principles and challenges us to "think right" and "live right."

**Chapters 7-20:** Here we listen to the parable and teachings of Christ. We see the Miracles that He performs. We see His selection of the 12 Disciples who would become the 12 Apostles. We see the opposition of the religious folks like the Pharisees and Sadducees. In these chapters we hear Christ sharing of His upcoming death, resurrection and eventually His second coming.

**Chapters 21-25:** Here we see the growing resentment of the religious groups against Jesus. Christ prophesies the fall of Jerusalem and a time of tribulation. He also prophesied concerning His second coming.

**Chapters 26-28:** Jesus Christ dies and is resurrected. The gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in these three chapters.

The Trail of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!

In Chapter one, we see the Genealogy of the King and in the last part of Chapter 28 we hear the King say, "All power is given unto me...." John McArthur says, "Matthew presents The Messiah King who is *revealed*, the King who is *rejected*, and the King who will *return*."

### **Discuss:**

1. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is that an option for a believer or a mandate? How is your church involved in fulfilling the Great Commission? How are you personally fulfilling the Great Commission?
2. Jesus said in Matthew 22 that there were two Great Commandments.

The Greatest Commandment is: "Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" Matthew 22:37 NIV

The Second greatest commandment is: "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Mathew 22:39 NIV

Think about it this way. We have 10 commandments in the OT. The first four deal with our relationship to God. The next six deals with our relationship with others.

Jesus said that all the law would hang on these two commandments. Cowboys & Country Folks keep life simple and so does Jesus. He was actually telling us take the first four commandments and relate them to the His first and greatest commandment. Take the next six and relate them to the second greatest commandments.

3. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, that He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Look at His family genealogy. There was Tamar who disguised herself as a prostitute and had sex with her father-in-law so she could have a child. We



have Rahab the harlot who hid the Israelite spies in Jericho. We have Ruth the Moabites and Bathsheba who committed adultery with David. His own genealogy we see a family line of God's Amazing Grace.

### **Uniqueness of Matthew:**

- Matthew connects the gospel with the Old Testament. He shows that teaching of the prophets was all fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Matthew's whole gospel is the Trail of the King from the genealogy all the way to His final appearance on the earth before His ascension.

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Singer, Lyle Lovett**

- He was raised on a family ranch in Klein, Texas "Land that has been in his family since 1849."
- Has a passion for riding horses
- Attended Texas A& M
- Works with Reining Horses and his Palomino Horse "*Smart & Shiny*" has won over 100,000.00

## **Lesson Two:**

### **Matthew's Happy Trails! Part One**

**Matthew 5:1-5; Humble People Live in a Place Called Happy!**

**Christ says, "Happy Trails to you!"**

#### **Found In Happy, Texas!**

Years ago while serving as Youth Pastor at First Baptist Church in Dimmitt, Texas, we took what I thought was a short cut from Amarillo to Dimmitt. It was not a short cut the way I follow directions. We finally realized that we were lost because we had gone through Happy, Texas twice. Through the years I have thought of my adventure in getting lost in Happy, Texas. Think about it! There is actually a city called Happy. A place called Happy. That is a good name for a place to live.

#### **How to Live Happy in Texas!**

I have found that Happy is not a certain state or city or region. Happy is found in our thinking and then in our living. The address for Happy is Matthew 5:1-12. We call them the Beatitudes. It is here that Jesus gives us the demographics of a place called Happy.

#### **Happy Trails to you by Dale Evans!**

This song has been sung for decades. It is now being sung at the end of most church services at Cowboy & Country Churches. This song was written by Dale Evans wife of Roy Rogers. She was an actress, singer and most of all a dedicated believer. She wrote:

*Happy trails to you, until we meet again.  
Happy trails to you, keep smilin' until then.  
Who cares about the clouds when we're together?  
Just sing a song and bring the sunny weather.  
Happy trails to you, 'till we meet again.*

*Some trails are happy ones,  
Others are blue.  
It's the way you ride the trail that counts,  
Here's a happy one for you.*

We come now to the Beatitudes in chapter five. Instead of being lost in Happy, Texas, the beatitudes tells us that we can be found Happy.

People want to find a place called Happy. They want to be lost and found in a place called Happy. Let's look at a place called Happy and how to be a resident there. By the way only four types of people live there: 1. The Humble; 2. The Holy; 3. The Helpful; 4. The Hopeful

The Attitudes are the Points on the Compass that will lead us to a place called Happy! In this lesson you will be reminded of the eight points from the compass of Christ. In teaching and preaching through these three chapters at least four different occasions, it has penetrated my heart, mind and soul over and over again. D.A. Carson commented, *"The more I read these three chapters the more I am both drawn to them & shamed by them. Their brilliant light draws me like a moth to a spotlight; but the light is so bright that it sears and burns."*

Attitude leads to action and reaction. *"As a man thinks so is he..."* In chapter five Jesus deals with attitudes and in chapter six and seven He deals with actions. Attitude and Actions will determine if we will take our life's journey on the road less traveled. Remember when you travel that road it will make all the difference.

Happy, Texas is located 35 miles south of Amarillo on Highway 87 & Interstate 27. The city has a population of 588 and their motto is, "The Town without a Frown." They have over 250 students in their school system and their mascot is the "Cowboy!" They have five churches, one bank, a candle factory, convenience store, day care facility, grain

elevators, restaurant, craft shop, service station, beauty shop, automotive garage and cattle and hog feed yards. Their average rainfall is 19 inches. They have a mayor and two city/county commissioners. There you have it, Happy, Texas...population 588....Salute! Happy, Texas the place where I found directions.

Do all of us live in a place called "Happy?" I am not talking about Happy, Texas. Only 588 people live there. I am talking about a place called "Happy" that lives in our hearts and attitudes. Do people around you say? *"Eric lives in a place called Happy!" "Meagan lives in a place called Happy!"* How do they know that? They know it because they see it in their attitudes and actions.

Christ wanted us to live in a place called Happy. Few believers live there. I am sure there are more than 588 that live in a place called Happy. Christ wanted His Disciples to live there. You can live in Texas, Oklahoma, California or New York and still live in a place called Happy. You can even live in the poorest section of Calcutta, India and still live in Happy. (Mother Teresa proved that.) You can lose all your health and wealth and still live in a place called Happy. Happy is found in every state, nation and country. You can have a Happy Trail!

**Humble People travel on a Happy Trail! Humble People Live in a Place Called Happy.**

**"God can use humble folks, and the Devil can ruin their usefulness by making them proud." -Angel Martinez**

**A Place Called Happy... Can Be Found By A Beggar!**

We see the man at the stoplight standing holding a sign that says, "I need food." Our first reaction is, "get a job." The homeless we see as beggars. Christ says, ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."*** Matthew 5:3;

When we see a homeless person who begs for food or money, we think where is his/her pride. God sees us as homeless from His kingdom. We carry signs that says, *"I am a pretty good person."* *"I am a member of such or such denomination or church."* *"I have been baptized and confirmed."* Signs of pride. Many are Lost from a Place Called Happy because they carry their signs of pride.

**What is the middle letter of the word *PRIDE*?**

The answer is, "I." Jesus is telling us that you will find yourself in a place called Happy, when you carry a sign post in your heart that says I am poor, homeless and I am begging for the mercy of God. Augustine said that the greatest barrier between man and God is pride. *"To this one, I will look to him who is humble and contrite of Spirit, and who trembles at my word."* Isaiah 66:2;

The Pharisee stood praying in the temple, reciting his virtues. The Publican admitted his spiritual destitution, *"Lord be merciful to me a sinner."* Jesus said that when they went home only the Publican was justified. Only the publican found the place called Happy.

Cowboys are prideful. They might say something like, "I am my own man." We like this thing called pride and we seem to embrace it also. Coach Shug Jordan at Auburn University asked his former Linebacker Mike Kollin, who was then playing for the Miami Dolphins, if he would help his alma mater do some recruiting. Mike said, "Sure, coach. What kind of player are you looking for?" The coach said, "Well Mike, you know there's that fellow, you knock him down, he just stays down?" Mike said, "We don't want him, do we, coach?" "No, that's right. Then there's that fellow, you knock him down and he gets up, you knock him down again and he stays down." Mike said, "We don't want him either do we coach?" Coach said, "No, but Mike, there's a fellow, you knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up." Mike said, "That's the guy we want isn't it, coach?" The coach answered, "No, Mike, we don't want him either. I want you to find the guy who's knocking everybody down. That's the guy we want." Pride will knock us down and will keep us from living in place called Happy. *"Pride goes before destruction a haughty spirit before a fall."* Proverbs 16:18 NIV

***Pride is not just a mistake but it is a sin!***

A young woman asked for an appointment with her pastor to talk with him about a besetting sin about which she was worried. When she saw him, she said, "Pastor, I have become aware of a sin in my life which I cannot control. Every time I am at church I begin to look around at the other women, and I realize that I am the prettiest one in the whole congregation. None of the others can compare with my beauty. What can I do about this sin?" The pastor replied, "Mary, that's not a sin, why that's just a mistake!"

We must recognize sin of our pride--the sin that says, *"I'm good enough on my own."* There will be no room for Jesus in our life until this is done. We must be like Peter and drop the false humility routine, to say, "then Lord, please clean me, make me acceptable to

you"

***There must be a renunciation of self!***

In order to take your place in Happy, you have to renounce self. Christ says, "Blessed are the poor..." The Greek meaning for the word "poor" means to "cower or shrink." John the Baptist knew about this. He says, *"I must decrease so Jesus will increase."* We sing *"Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now and found, was blind but now I see."*

This first compass points says that if you want to live in a place called Happy, then you better admit your spiritual destitution and have the attitude of a hymn that says, "Just as I am, poor wretched, blind; Sight riches healing of the mind, Yea, all I need in Thee to find, O Lamb of God I come, I come! I come! "

Before a person can get born again he/she has to admit that they are spiritually bankrupt of the glory of God. *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* Romans 3:23 KJV Paul tells us in Romans 7:18 *"Nothing good dwells in me..."* Look at the Message version of Matthew 5:3 *"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God."*

In his book *Brother to a Dragon Fly*, Will Campbell was once asked to explain in 10 words what the Christian faith was all about it. Will did not need to do it in ten words, instead he did it in eight words, *"We're all bastards but God loves us anyway."*

**Sad People travel Happy Trails! Glad are the Sad in A Place Called Happy!**  
**"Blessed are they that mourn for they will be coveted." Matthew 5:4**

Life has its tragedies, hurts and pain. In my 31 years of pastoring and over 800 funerals I have tried to answer the age-old question, "Why?" There was the suicide death of a 14-year-old teenager. The 38 years old mother who was killed by a drunk driver while she was driving a brand new car that she would be giving her 16-year-old son for his birthday. There was the death of a 13 year old girl that was thrown from the back of a pickup and killed. A 26 year old captain dying in Iraq; The 14 year old who was accidentally shot and killed on a hunting trip. A 3 year old died who suddenly of an aneurysm that burst while he was sleeping. And I could go on and on. I have watched people mourn and mourn and mourn. Rabbi Kushner would ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Maybe the right question is not "Why?" But: "What?" "What happens to good people when bad things happen to them?" The answer lies here in verse four. They shall be comforted. They shall receive gladness. The first attitude places us in a place called Happy, the second through the eight tells us how to be glad in a place called Happy.



What does it mean to mourn? The word here describes a desperate ache of the soul. There are different types of mourning. **There was the mourning of love.** Christ says, "the love of many shall wax cold." We should mourn those who love on the basis of color, social status, and what you can do for me. Christ tells us that we will know that we are His disciples if we have love for one another.

**There is mourning over the lost.** "Those who sow in tears will reap in joy." (Psalm 126:5,6) The great sign post of Church History was highlighted by men and women that wept.

**There is the mourning of sorrow.** The Psalmist says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

**Meek Minded in a Place called Happy! Meek minded people ride the Happy Trail! "Happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5**

Former Minnesota Governor, Jesse Ventura, was quoted as telling a reporter for Playboy magazine, "Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who needs strength in numbers."

It is not macho to be meek. Murphy's Law says, "The Meek will inherit the earth but the Rich will inherit the mineral rights." Aristotle describes the meek man, "Who is angry on the right occasion and with the right people and at the right moment and for the right length of time." Barclay translates this, "Blessed is the man who is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time." Christ is the great example of this when He cleansed the temple.

Meekness is a paradox. A paradox that says, Dying is Living! Loosing is Finding! Least is the Greatest. Poor is Rich. Weakness is strength. Serving is ruling. Joseph of the Old Testament was all of the before mentioned. Meek when sold into slavery. Meek when he was thrown into prison. Meek when he made it to the palace. From a pit to a palace he was the picture of meekness. At a time to be revengeful to his brothers, he instead said, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good." Here is a believer that lived in a place called Happy. He was a resident of Happy when it was a Pit, when it was a Prison and when it was a Palace. He lived in Happy during the adversity of his life and during the prosperity of his life. With the attitude of meekness wherever you are, and wherever you live it will be in a place called Happy.

Cowboys are known for being proud but we know that they can be humbled and we know that they can be transformed. All over the southwest we see the wrought iron figure of a horse, a cowboy kneeling and a cross. What a picture of a humbled Cowboy.

Meekness is the shell of protection. God gave the turtle a shell for protection. The God given shell of protection for people who live in place called Happy is Meekness. Protection as the travel that Happy Trail!

## **Humble People Live in a Place Called Happy!**

**They are Poor in Spirit!**

**They Mourn!**

**They are Meek!**

## **Discussion: Thinking About Humility:**

1. The word "Meekness" is a picture of a horse that is broken. In fact that is what the Greek Word for Meekness portrays. Discuss horses that you have seen broken or maybe that you have helped in breaking. Now discuss how God has to break us in order to use us..
2. Discuss James 4:6;
3. Romans 3:23 tells us that we because of our sins we are bankrupt of the glory of God. Discuss Matthew 16:26. Donald Trump, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett cannot buy their way into Heaven.

## **Good Old Hankology! HOUSE OF GOLD Lyrics/Hank Williams Sr.**

People steal, they cheat and lie  
For wealth and what it will buy  
Don't they know on the judgement day  
That their gold and silver will melt away

I'd rather be in a deep, dark grave  
And know that my poor soul was saved  
Than to live in this world in a house of gold  
And deny my God and doom my soul

Jesus said ,come on to me  
I'll break sin's chains and set you free  
I' ll carry you to a home on high  
Where you' ll never, never die

What good is gold and silver, too  
When your heart's not good and true  
Sinner hear me when I say  
Fall down on your knees and pray

Jesus died there on the cross

So this world would not be lost  
Sinner hear now what I say  
For someday you 'll have to pay

What good is gold and silver too  
If your heart's not good and true  
Sinner, hear me when I say  
Fall down on your knees and pray

# Lesson Three: Matthew's Happy Trails! Part Two

Holy People live in a Place called Happy!

## Matthew 5:6-8

**Hungry People Live in a Place Called Happy!**

**"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6 KJV**

Humble people live in a place called Happy, but Humble People are also Holy People. Holy people are Happy People. How can one live a Holy Life and Live in holiness? Well a holy Person is hungry for the things of God.

There is a "Diet Craze" going on in our world. Billions of dollars are spent in weight loss programs and products. There is also many who are on a diet craze form God and spiritual things. Wilbur Rees wrote: *"I'd like to buy three dollars' worth of God. Please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a rebirth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I'd like to buy about three dollars' worth of God, please."*

Too many believers only want \$3 worth of God in a paper bag...No more or No less. They want God is a paper bag.

### **What do you hunger for?**

In Christ day....Most people in Palestine were on the edge of starvation. The people he was talking to could relate to hunger. Yet, He was not talking about physical hunger but spiritual hunger. Are you hungry spiritually? What are your goals? What drives you? Is what you're after in life going to allow you to live in a place called Happy?

Will it allow you to live in a place called Happy?

Lucifer was passionate for power. (Isaiah 14:14,15) Nebuchadnezzar lusted after praise.(Daniel 4:20-30) The Barn Building Fool in Luke 12 hungered after pleasure. None of them were ever filled with true Happiness. You see when we hunger for so-called things then we will never be satisfied when we get them. We will hunger for something else.

### **What should you hunger after?**

There are all sorts of hungers and thirst, there is food, sex, riches, power, love and acceptance. Yet when we receive them we still want more. We are never satisfied.

Mother Teresa: "The difference between Africa & America is that Africa is starving physically and America is starving emotionally." May I add spiritually.

Christ says, "Righteousness." What does that mean? It means upright doing/right thing.

One has to hunger and thirst to practice the right things. How? Two Things...

1. **Trust; Proverbs 3:5, 6;**

2. **Obey;** Obedience is better than sacrifice. Obey God rather than man. *"Be doers of the word and not hearers only."* James 2:22

What do you get when you trust and obey? You get FILLED!

### **Livestock & Being Filled!**

The word "filled" carries the picture of feeding livestock. The word "filled" means "to gorge." The Rancher feeds and feeds his livestock before sending them off to be sold and then slaughtered.

**Do you want to be filled?** The word filled also means to be fulfilled.

People who want to gorge themselves with power, praise and pleasure will never be fulfilled. The prodigal son found that out and ended up in the pig's pen. He found out that what he had could not compare with what was at the Father's House.

John 10: 10...John 6:35...Born in Bethlehem the House of Bread...He went to Calvary and arose on the third day so you have the bread of life. He will quench your hunger and thirst.

### **Holy People Have a 20/20 Vision!**

**"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."**6:8

People that live in a place called Happy can see God in life.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Looking at the Menu:What are you hungry for?**

1. Sometimes when we are starving we use this expression: *"I am as hungry as a horse."* Do we get that hungry for God? Are we starving for the things of God? If not, then why not.
2. Many believe that the main thought of Matthew 6-8 is found in Matthew 6:33. Read and discuss.

#### **What are you Seeing?**

## **Lesson Four:**

### **Matthew's Happy Trails! Part Three**

**Helpful People live in a Place called Happy!**

**"Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God."  
(Matthew 5:7, 9)**

Too many people are like the Dead Sea. They take in but don't give out. Jesus condemned that type of attitude and action in His Parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10)

#### **What is mercy?**

Mercy is offering relief ...Grace is offering pardon. The bottom line...mercy is offering forgiveness.

#### **What is forgiveness?**

*Forgiveness is not forgetting. God can forget. Isa.43:25...You can put a nail through your soul. You can remove the nail, but the hole is still there. Forgiveness is not excusing the behavior which hurt you. Forgiveness is not pretending that you are not hurt. Forgiveness is not tolerating. Forgiveness is to pardon. It is refusing to punish. Too many times we want to choose the recipients of mercy.*

#### **Why should we forgive? Why should we show mercy?**

We should show mercy and forgive so we can stop the cycle of pain.

When you forgive and show mercy then Jesus says that you will receive happiness over pain.

Forgiveness and showing mercy is your ticket to get off the roller coaster of hurt.

If you refuse to forgive that person then you continue to damage yourself.

Jesus is saying to receive mercy then you must show mercy to others. God gives you mercy, and then gives you a free gift for you to give away.

We want people to earn our forgiveness. Well you say, "That person hurt me so bad." Yet, Jesus on the cross would forgive those who placed Him there.



Forgiveness and mercy are the messages from the Cross.

## **Peace Makers live in a Place Called Happy! Matthew 5:9**

### **No OK Corral in a place called Happy!**

*"Your happy when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete and fight..."*

### **How Can I become a Peacemaker?**

**Make Peace with Yourself:** You want to know peace then know God.

Scriptures tells us why we do not have peace. The Bible says that we are born in sin, estranged from God.(Isaiah 48:22; 53:6; 57:2; 59:8) We don't pay attention to God: (Isaiah 48:18) Scriptures tells us Jesus is the only way to make peace with God.

In talking about Heaven and her spiritual life, Actress Sophia Loren told USA the following: *"I should go to heaven, otherwise it is not nice. I haven't done anything wrong. I am as pure as those orchids over there, and I should go straight, straight to Heaven."* The Bible gives a total opposite of what Sophia Loren portrays. Read God's description about all of humanity in these verses, Isaiah 53:6; John 14:27; 16:33; Romans 5:1; Eph. 2:14

How can we know God and Know Peace?

Look at John 14:1-6, 27; Romans 10:9

### **How can a Believer maintain peace within ourselves**

- Obey His Word Psalm 119:165;
- Trust God Always Isaiah 26:3; Phil. 4:6,7

### **Making Peace with Others:**

God doesn't want us to be involved with a shooting at the OK Corral. God's word shares with us how we need to make peace.( Romans 12:18,19,21; I Corinthians 7:15)

Rick Warren gives 5 different responses that people use when they have a disagreement:

1. *My Way:* It is the only way
2. *No Way:* I withdraw. I avoid all conflicts
3. *Your Way:* I give in
4. *Half-Way:* We compromise
5. *Our Way:* I care so let's work out mutual goals

God's way is to find a point of agreement ...

The Reward: We shall be called the Children of God...Unhappy are the trouble makers for they shall be called the Children of the Devil

*Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace...*

*Let the Peace of Christ rule in your hearts...Col. 3:15... "He, Himself is our peace.." Eph. 2:14*

I saw this on a church sign: No **Christ!** No **Peace!**...**Know Christ! Know Peace!**

Christ went to the Cross-...So that that we can have peace!

### **Discuss:**

- Look at the word F-O-R-G-I-V-E...two words...Give...Gift
- To forgive, you must be forgiven. I John 1:9; Christ forgave it all.

"Lord require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God..." Micah 6:8

- Look at what Christ says, Mt. 18:23-35...
- Who do you need to have a Peace Conference with?

## Lesson Five Happy Trails Part Five

### Hopeful People Live in a Place Called Happy!

#### *It Is A Happy Thing to be Persecuted!*

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of God." "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:10-12;*

#### **The Longest Beatitude!**

If you were to ask the world what is happiness, they sure would not have given the answer that Jesus gave. His answer was "persecution for right thinking and right living." Noticed that Jesus reemphasizes this beatitude. He emphasizes it in verse ten and then again in verse eleven. Matthew Henry says that he reemphasized it because it was such an incredible statement. Who indeed would ever relate happiness with persecution?

He saved the longest for the last. He knew what was coming ahead for His disciples. What happened to them? We know that Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and went out and hung himself. What about some of the others?

Tradition tells us that Peter died as a result of being transfixated to the cross upside down. Andrew, Peter's brother was tied to a cross and left to die. The book of Acts tells us that James was martyred by. John was burned in hot oil and left to die at Patmos. Thomas was slain with a dart. Hiram, King of Egypt had one of his soldiers to run a spear through Matthew.

#### **Is it Possible to Rejoice under Persecution?**

Jesus not only promoted this idea, He would demonstrate it. *"Let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and is sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* Hebrews 12:2-3

### **Consider Him!**

The writer of Hebrews tells that in our persecution, consider Him. How do you consider Him? You consider Him by fixing your eyes upon Him.

### **He Will Stand With You!**

The Three Asbestos Jew are testimonies of this. King Nebuchadnezzar sent the three Hebrew men (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) into the furnace. Why did they go into the fiery furnace? Because they did not bow down and worship the idol that immortalized King Nebuchadnezzar. Look at the text: Daniel 3: 9-30. What a story! God stood with them during their persecution.

### **He Will Stand Up for You!**

The three Hebrew children were rescued out of their persecution and promoted. Stephen was persecuted and martyred and was not rescued but was promoted. In Acts 7:1-53, Stephen preaches a scolding message to the self-righteous religionist of his day. He called them "stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears." Their reaction was to stone him. As they were about ready to stone him, he looked up to heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. In Hebrews 12:2 we found out that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, yet for the persecuted Stephen Jesus is standing up.

### **He Will Be Revealed through Us!**

Paul was no stranger to persecution. He was left for dead on one occasion, imprisoned, persecuted outside and inside the church. Look at what he is sharing with us. (II Corinthians 4:7-12)

### **You Might be Called on to Suffer for Christ!**

Peter, who was no stranger to persecution, and who would eventually be martyred for the sake of the gospel admonishes us, "*If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*" I Peter 4:15, 16

### **Are we being persecuted?**

Probably not. I asked myself this question, "Has Charles Higgs ever been persecuted? Maybe agitated or misinterpreted but not really persecuted. I was called "*preacher boy*" while I worked as a teller in a bank during my college days. I have taken some mean remarks from some of the Grace Killers that I have met in some of my pastorates. I had some mean spirited words aimed at me when I stood up for allowing blacks to attend our church. Yet the average American believer knows very little about affliction. If you are persecuted for being a Christian then remember this truth that Paul gives to us, "*But our light affliction, which is for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*"

### **Who is being persecuted in today's world?**

### **And you shall wear crown!**

Christ writes the second Asia Minor letter to the persecuted church at Smyrna. He tells them, *"Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."* Revelation 2: 10

### **What did I do to you? Why are you so Mean to me?**

Even though our experience in persecution is very mild we do have situations where people treat us unfairly. How do we cope with that? How do we deal with our enemies?

### **It is a Tough Love!**

Jesus tells us, "Do good to them that hate you..." Luke 6:27. Jesus tells us, "Bless those that hate you..." Luke 6:28

### **The Inspite of Kind of Love!**

There are three basic types of love: There is I love you because of what you can do for me. There is, I love you if you agree with me and meet all my expectations kind of love. The first two are conditional. The third kind of love is unconditional. I call it "in spite of kind of love." I love that person in spite of our differences and hurts.

### **Can't I Just Tolerate Them?**

God's word does not read, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you tolerate one another." It reads, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."

### **Five Ways to Love the Unlovable!**

The five loving principles are:

#### **1. Pray!**

This should be the main focus of our strategy of loving the unlovable. Prayer, fervent prayer can and will melt down walls of bitterness, anger and hurt.

#### **2. Listen**

You cannot really love someone unless you listen to them. We do not listen intently. The old couple was sitting out on the front porch in their rocking chairs. The husband was always curt, never really listening to his wife. She said, *"I'm proud of you!"* He said in return, *"I'm tired of you, too."* We need to listen not to just the facts but also the feelings behind the facts.

#### **3. Overlook!**

Most things that irritate need to be overlooked. Our tendency is to retaliate.

I heard a preacher use this illustration: One lady came home from church and found out that her son had forgotten to put the clothes in the dryer. She pitched a fit and began preaching a sermon about irresponsibility. The son, about half way through her sermon, interrupted and asked, *"Mom, when you are at church and a parent says, 'My son is on drugs,' and another says my teenage daughter is pregnant and another says that her thirteen year old son is a reform school,' do you say, 'That's nothing, my son forgets to put the clothes in the dryer?'"*

Some things should be overlooked.

#### **4. Value people and give them their true worth!**

Look for good things in a person. (Even if you have to use a magnifying glass) Don't major on their bad points.

#### **5. Encouragement!**

We all need appreciation. A woman complimented the pastor on his Sunday morning sermon. She said, *"Pastor, your sermon was so filling."* The pastor trying to be modest looked down at her grade school son and said, *"Son what did you think of my sermon?"* The little boy replied, *"I got a belly full of it also."*

A good word from you to someone who has hurt you just might do wonders. Say that prayer! Make that phone call! Write that note! Even if that person does not react in a positive way, you will know that you did the God thing! That is what counts.

The song tells us that *"Jesus looked beyond our faults and saw our need."*



## **Mark the" Motion Picture Gospel" Lesson One/ Introduction of the Gospel of Mark Lesson One**

The Gospel of Mark is vivid, simple and filled with action packed events of the Life and Ministry of Christ.

Cowboys and Indian Movies have been a great part of our recollection of the Old West. The Movie and Television Screens show us the stress and harshness of the Old West. We see outlaws; private justice and the outgrowth of the Code of the Cowboy. We see gunslingers, bounty hunters, sheriff and marshals; Stetson Hats, bandannas, spurs, buckskins, revolvers, rifles, wild horses and riders, dusty towns, cattle drives and survival. All of this from thirty minutes to two hours.

What is your favorite Western Movie? Mine is Open Range with Kevin Costner and Robert Duval. What is your favorite Television Western Series? Mine was series called Gunsmoke with Actor James Arness, as Marshall Matt Dillon. I still can remember watching it with my Dad. It was a great time for our family to sit down and watch Matt, Kitty, Doc and Festus. Those were the good old days. I love the Western Movie Station that we subscribe to. Of course my favorite Western Mini-Series on Television was Lonesome Dove.

Mark's Gospel is like a fast movie episode presentation of the earthly ministry of Christ. Through the years scholars have called Mark's Gospel the Motion Picture gospel.

**Who is Mark?** Actually his full name was John Mark? Mark was his Roman name; John was his Jewish name. Mark was not an eyewitness of the life of Christ, but he was a companion of Peter, who passed on the details to Mark. (I Peter 5:13) Mark was the son of Mary, (Acts 12:12, 25) and cousin of Barnabas. (Colossians 4:10) He accompanies Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. He also deserted them and later joined up with Barnabas and was commended by Paul in 2 Timothy 4.

### **Mark's Highlights:**

Mark shows Jesus as a "Suffering Servant" and that real greatness comes from serving. The Key Verse and theme is found in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The Service of the Servant 1:1-10:52

The Sacrifice of the Servant 11:1-15:47

The Success of the Servant 16:1-20

### **Why the Gospel of Mark is called the, "Motion Picture Gospel?"**

- His use of the word "immediately". Key word "immediately" or "straightway"...indicating immediate action repeated throughout the entire book. He uses this word over 30 times.
- The way Mark details the events.
- Personal touches: "Jesus was much displeased" 10:14; "They were all amazed" "They were all afraid" 10:32 "The common people heard him gladly" 12:37
- Mark is more condensed. Mark has little to say concerning prophecy and gives only a brief report of discourses but lays great stress upon the mighty works of Jesus. 63 quotes from OT compared to 128 in Matthew's Gospel and 90 to 100 in Luke's Gospel. Mark is the shortest gospel.
- He alludes to the human feelings of Christ: His disappointment 3:5; His weariness 4:38; His wonder 6:6; His sighs 7:34; 8:12; His affection 10:21

### **The Gospel of Mark in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Mark gospel is not only fast moving and full of action filled events surrounding the Life of Christ but it relates to us today with our fast paced lives.

#### **Think on this:**

- Mark's Gospel is the nearest thing we will ever get to a report of Jesus' life. (William Barclay) Westcott calls the Gospel of Mark: "a transcript from life."
- Mark starts and ends with the Divine Side of Christ.

### **Discussion:**

Since Mark 10:45 is the key verse then what does it teach us?

What brought on Christ making this statement? Look at verses 35-vs. 37. People love position and they love to be first. Christ says, "...the first shall be a slave to all. "

"Preach the gospel and if necessary use words."-Saint Francis of Assisi  
Discuss this quote and relate it to your life and the need to serve others.

**An Example of Cowboys Serving:**

Cowboys Helping Kids "CHK" is a nonprofit Organization. Cowboys Helping Kids is an Organization that will bring awareness for American Children, on Horseback, while Promoting Cowboy/Western Heritage. Ride Cowboys Ride. COWBOYS HELPING KIDS Cowboys Helping Kids is an Organization that brings awareness to the needs of American Kids, while Promoting Cowboy/Western Heritage. The Organization's purpose is to create Positive Role Models for ALL KIDS to emulate. Cowboys Helping Kids will benefit Kids across the United States of America. Numerous charity groups, all working towards the same cause, Helping Kids, will benefit from our Organization's efforts. What will we be doing? We will be riding across the Country on horseback to raise awareness of American Kids needs. Collecting canned and non-perishable dry goods and distributing them to local food banks, located along our route, putting the contributions to immediate use. Stopping in Hospitals and visiting with terminal (and non terminal) Kids who are sick from numerous ailments. One of the most requested things from Kids is to meet a Real Cowboy. If you know of any Kid along our route, or even outside of our route, that is terminally ill drop us a line and we will do our best to show up and spend time with them. What is an extra 50 miles when you can experience the smile on a Kids face? We realize that you have been asked for years to contribute to starving and desperate Kids all across the world. But, when was the last time you thought about the Kids right down the street? When was the last time you thought about a Kid with cancer whose only request is to meet a Real Cowboy and be able to pet his horse? How are you serving others?

## **The Gospel of Mark: Lesson Two**

### **Baptism & Branding! Why was Jesus Baptized? Why Should You Be Baptized? Passage: Mark 1:4-11**

A New York family bought a ranch out West where they intended to raise cattle. Friends came to visit and asked if the ranch had a name. "Well," said the would-be-cattlemen. "I wanted to call it the Bar-J. My wife favored the Suzy-Q. One son liked the Flying-W, and the other son wanted the Lazy-Y. So, we're calling it the Bar-J-Suzy-Q-Flying-W-Lazy-Y Ranch."

"But where are all your cattle?" "So far, none has survived the branding."

Livestock branding is a technique for marking the livestock so as to identify the owner. Many years the steer was captured and secured by roping it, laying it over on the ground, tying its legs together and applying the branding iron that had been heated in a fire. Today they have the use of the chutes by using the cattle crush or squeeze chute where after secure they apply the branding iron. Branding has been around a long time. Branding has its origin from Ancient Egypt. Symbols were used as brands and applied. The original word for "brand," meant anything hot or burning.. Europe in the Middle-Ages started this branding for identification purpose of livestock This European Custom was imported to the Americas and were further refined by the Vaquero tradition. In the American West, a branding iron consisted of an iron rod with a simple symbol or mark, which Cowboys heated in the fire. When we think of famous brands, I am sure many of you would shout our XIT. Brands have become so numerous that registering the brand has become required. Paul, in Galatians writes about having the Brand of Christ. When Paul writes in Galatians 6:17...He was saying this mark stigmata or brand represents Christ's ownership.

Baptism is a public witness to tell Believers and Unbelievers that I have the Brand of Christ on my heart and life. In the passage that we are looking at we see that John the Baptist baptizes new believers and that He also Baptized Jesus. (See Matthew 3:13-17)

When we read this passage, two questions come to my mind.

#### **Question One: Why was Jesus Baptized?**

Jesus was baptized...means identification...

While Jesus baptism resembled all other baptisms, it was far greater and more significant.

Why was Jesus baptized? He was sinless. Baptism shows that we have repented of our sins and that we have asked for God's forgiveness of our sins. Jesus was sinless. So why was Jesus baptized? That is a good question. Even John the Baptist asked that question. Here are several insights:

- Jesus was baptized to show the approval of John's baptism and what John was doing.
- Jesus was baptized to be an example. Here are some other explanations:
- Jesus was baptized to identify with the sinners that He came to save.
- "To purify the water." -W.T. Conner
- To identify that He was the mighty one that John the Baptizer was talking about.
- To fulfill righteousness.

I believe that Jesus was baptized to be an example and identify with the sinners that He came to redeem.

### **Question Two: Why is a believer baptized?**

#### **It is Biblical:**

- Acts 2:41 "those who accepted his message were baptized."
- Acts 8:12: "but when they believed Phillip as he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, they were baptized,"
- Acts 8:35-37: "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the Eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"
- Acts 16:30-34: The desperate Philippian jailor asked, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer in Acts 16:30-34 was "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house and then immediately he and all his family were baptized. His baptism came after his confession of faith.

#### **It is Identification: Identifying with Christ Publically**

Dr. M.R. DeHaan put it this way:

"In the early days of the church. . . , baptism was a declaration that the believer was definitely identifying himself with that group of people who were called Christians and were despised and hated. To be a Christian meant something. To identify yourself with those who were called Christians meant persecution, maybe death; it meant being ostracized from your family, shunned by friends. And the one act which was the final declaration of this identification was BAPTISM. As long as a man gathered with Christians, he was tolerated, but when once he submitted to baptism, he declared to all the world, I BELONG TO THIS DESPISED GROUP, and immediately he was persecuted, hated, and despised. In baptism the believer entered into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. A person might be a believer and keep it strictly a secret and thus avoid unpleasantness

and suffering, but once he submitted to public baptism he had burned his bridges behind him. . (SOURCE: Pamphlet, Water Baptism, p. 27.)

### **3. It is the Right Thing to do:**

#### **The Late Paul Harvey, America's favorite Newscaster Baptism:**

Paul Harvey wrote in Guidepost Magazine about his own baptism. He said that even though he had received almost every reward for his broadcasting ability that he still felt empty inside. One summer, however, he & his wife were vacationing in a place called Cave Creek, AZ. Sunday morning came & they decided to go to church. So they went to this little church, & there were only 12 other people present.

He believed in Jesus, but he had never gone forward in a church service. One night he had prayed in his hotel room & asked Jesus to come into his heart, but he felt that there was still something that was missing."

He said that the preacher got up & announced that his sermon was going to be about baptism. Paul Harvey said, "I yawned. But as he started talking about it I found myself interested. He talked about the symbolism behind it, & how it symbolized the complete surrender of one's life to Jesus Christ, & how there was nothing really magic in the water. But there was this cleansing inside that took place when you yielded yourself to Jesus." He went on to say, "Finally, when he came to the end of his sermon he said, 'If any of you have not been baptized in this way, I invite you to come forward & join me here at the pulpit.'"

Paul Harvey said, "To my surprise, I found myself going forward. The preacher had said there was nothing magic in the water. Yet as I descended into the depths & rose again I knew something life changing had happened - a cleansing inside out. No longer did there seem to be two uncertain contradictory Paul Harvey's, just one immensely happy one. I felt the fulfilling surge of the Holy Spirit in my life."

Paul Harvey went on, "The change this simple act made in my life is so immense as to be indescribable. Since totally yielding to Him in baptism, my heart can't stop singing. Also, perhaps because baptism is such a public act & because one's dignity gets as drenched as one's body, I discovered a new self-consciousness in talking about my beliefs."

As Paul Harvey would always say, "Now you know the rest of the story." The Rest of the Story is that if you are a believer then you need to be obedient to the Master's Example and Command and follow Christ in Public Baptism.

#### **Discussion Question:**



- Talk about your own baptism or why you have not been baptized?
- Who is a proper candidate for baptism?

**Discuss the following:**

One might say, "I was baptized when I was born." Well that may have been a thoughtful act by the parents, but the infant certainly didn't exercise repentance and faith. Perhaps it could be seen as a prayer from the parents that when the child came to understand their fallen condition he or she would turn to Christ in personal faith. But salvation is a personal decision and cannot be accomplished for another even though we might want that power.

## **The Gospel of Mark/Motion Picture Gospel- Lesson Three**

### **Passage: Mark 6:45-51**

**TRUE GRIT, Do you have it? You sure will need it! Sand Storms Sea Storms!**

In the August 1988, Issue of Texas Monthly, Anny Diggs wrote the following:

"When all of Texas seems about to blow away, the best defense is a sense of humor. She said we call it True Grit. If the Pioneers didn't have it before their first sandstorm they certainly had it did after. That's why cowboys said a spunky fellow had sand. Though rarely lethal, sandstorms are universally despised. Nothing can keep out flying sand—not closed windows, not bandannas, not prayer. (Wet rags under the door help, but not much.) Sandstorms spell trouble. An 1895 storm blew down section houses along the Texas and Pacific Railway tracks. A sixties spate of "Oklahoma rain" chased by a blizzard dumped brown snow across the High Plains. A pair of 1977 dust storms ruined \$6 million worth of winter wheat in the Panhandle and injured twenty people in El Paso. With Texas one of thirty states now stricken by drought, new tales may be on the way."

You may have never experienced a sand storm or a storm on the sea, but I imagine that you have experienced a storm a personal storm. Are you walking in a storm right now? We all encounter storms of health, wealth, sorrow, and family conflict. There are emotional storms, physical, mental and spiritual storms. As Christians we must learn to walk through those storms with confidence. Before looking at this passage, it is good to ask, "What happened before this incident?" Well it was a miracle that came from a little boy's lunch. The lesson that Christ was teaching His disciples was that of "faithing" God through tough times, and stormy times. This is a tremendous passage...Mathew, John and Mark all write about this storm.

Christ is teaching us through this event that whatever storm we are going through, that we are not alone. If you are facing a storm right now, you may think that you have done something wrong. We have been taught that when we are faithful everything goes well. That is a lie. Look at Job, Joseph, and Paul. The truth is that you may be going through a storm because you have done something right. The problem with the disciples is that they

overlooked some important elements in their storm. We do this also. I want to share 5 biblical truths about walking through the sand storms of life.

**1. There is a True Grit Lesson in Every Sand Storm vv.45, 51;**

Why did the wind cease? Because God had accomplished His purpose.

There was an agenda, a lesson. Your storm is not an accident...God is in control...that is a lesson to learn. The reason that the disciples were in the boat was because Christ had placed them there, vs. 45. Your storm has a beginning and an ending. This too will pass!

**2. There is the True Grit Presence of the Lord in Every Sand Storm V 48;**

As we walk through the storm we must not look at the storm, but look to Jesus.

The reality is not the storm that you are going through. The reality is that there is a God. The disciples had forgotten this, we must not forget.

**3. There is a True Grit Rainbow in Every Sand Storm V.51**

When there is no solution, Jesus is the solution. When there is no answer, there is Jesus. Sometimes we confuse the solution with the problem. The disciples did this when they mistook Jesus. Vv. 49. The fact is, sometimes solutions come wrapped in problems. Jesus is there in the storm, don't give up just keep going. When you accept your storm, then you will find the solution and see the Rainbow of Jesus.

**4. There is True Grit Story in Every Sand Storm Matthew 14 31**

Peter looks at the whole story...what was I doing before the storm? Why did I walk on water? Why did I sink? How did I get up? Peter found out that it is better to be a Jesus Watcher instead of a Wave Watcher. The great lesson is to keep your eyes on Jesus during the storm.

**5. There is a True Grit Song in Every Storm. V.52**

Why were you created? You were created to Worship and Glorify God. That is our main business. That is why we have storms...so as we go through them and come out of them and see the wonders of God...and praise and worship Him.

We are called to sing in the storm. We are not called to be anxious in the storm, or complain in the storm, but sing in the storm.

Someone has said that a bird sings for no reason at all, but simply because the bird has a song. You have a song also...God uses the storms of life to tune up that song.

***Jesus Watches Us! Jesus Comes to Us! Jesus Helps Us!***

***Jesus Brings Us to Our Destination!***

***I have a compass because I have Jesus. He is in the boat with me***

***As long as He is in the boat with me then I won't get lost.***

## **Discussion:**

**Let's discuss the following statements:**

- **Nothing will make you like a storm. A storm will either put you on your back or put you on your face. A storm will either put a prayer on your lips or curse words out of your mouth.**
- **Sometimes we miss the opportunity to minister for Jesus in our storms.**
- **Too many times we pray to escape the storm instead of praying to enlist the storm.**
- **"Jesus is greater and bigger than what is bigger than we are facing.**
- **Discuss the following verse: Isaiah 43:2**

## **The Gospel of Mark: Lesson Four Headed for the Last Round-Up!**

### **Passage: Mark 13**

The definition of a Roundup is the driving together of cattle, horses for inspecting, branding and shipping to market.

In Mark 13, Christ shares with his disciples about the Last Roundup. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke we see the teachings of Christ on this subject. (Matthew 24; Luke 21) Christ shared a parable about this in Mathew 25:31-46 about separating the sheep from the goats.

Gene Autry's hit record in the 1930's, "Headed for the Last Round-Up!" *"I'm heading for the last roundup; Gonna saddle old Paint for the last time and ride; So long, old pal, it's time your tears were dried; I'm heading for the last roundup."*

Jesus is talking about the 'Heading for the Last Round Up!' The "Second Coming of Jesus Christ" is mentioned in the New Testament one out of twenty verses in the New Testament. Jesus shares fence markers that point to His Return.

### **Background vv. 1-4;**

The Second Coming of Jesus was an interesting subject for the Disciples of Christ. It also is one of great interest to us. When will Christ return? Jesus talks about destruction and "end times: Verses 1-2. He tells them of destruction of the temple and the great structures that they were in awe about. Peter, Andrew, James and John ask him about the signs of the end times. Verses 3-4.

### **Signs of Deception! Vv.5&6, 21-22;**

### ***Deception outside the church:***

Today we have people who preach that Jesus is not the only way, that there is no Hell and no moral absolutes. (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) We have people who proclaim Messiah-ship. (2Thess. 2:1-4, 9-11)

### **Deception inside the church**

There will be a time that the church will proclaim unsound doctrine. 2 Timothy 4:3

We have churches today that deny the Virgin Birth of Christ; Blood Atonement; Inspiration of the Bible; the resurrection of Jesus Christ; The existence of Heaven or Hell.

### **There will be Signs of Destruction! Vv.7, 8b; 12;**

#### **Wars**

Since Jesus made this statement there has been only three hundred years of peace. He is saying it is not just wars between countries but kingdoms against kingdoms. This indicates the political map of the world will be redrawn. We have watched that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We have seen two world wars constant wars and strife in the Middle East. Israel and the former USSR have seen their maps redrawn. We have observed the maps of Eastern Europe and Central Asia completely redrawn.

Today we see fighting against brother, tribe against tribe, in Albania, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Sudan and of course in the Middle East.

#### **Signs of Catastrophe! V.8-10;**

##### *Earthquakes in various places ...*

Historians of the 15<sup>th</sup> century recorded 115 earthquakes in various places; 253 earthquakes were recorded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; 378 in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; 640 in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; 2,119 in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the number has risen from 2,588 in 1983 to 4,084 in 1992. The Bible records at least 33 instances of God using earthquakes to communicate with the spiritually hard of hearing. Ex. 19:18 ...When Moses received the 10 commandments. God used an earthquake at the crucifixion to split the veil in the temple from the top to the bottom. Matthew 27:51; He issued an earthquake at the resurrection to roll the stone from the borrowed tomb-not to let Jesus out but to let others in. (Matthew 27:51)He used an earthquake to let Paul and Silas free from the jail at Philippi (Acts 16:26) He will use another earthquake to announce the Messiah's coming. Amos 1:2; At the coming of the Messiah the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (if it is still standing) will collapse and the Mount of Olives will split in half. (Zech.14)

#### **Famines**

America has the ability to feed the world, yet we pay farmers not to grow certain crops lest they glut the market and drive the prices down. Yet night after night we see footage on television of starving children.

The Bible predicts that we would know famine. We have always had places in the world that have experienced famine. Late last year, the Van Impe Intelligence Briefing reported that the world's leading agriculture scientists say we are headed for an unprecedented global shortage beyond the scope of anything modern man can imagine. They said that because the developing world's population was expected to grow by 2 billion in the next few years, those countries least able to produce food would need at least 75 percent more. Food production around the world is at its poorest in the last four decades in 90 different countries. Grain stocks are at the lowest in 35 years.

#### **Persecution vv.9-10;**

Look at the persecution that is taking place throughout the world. Recently in Kenya, some people were asked if they were, Christians. When they said yes they were shot and killed. This happening all over the world.

#### **There will be Signs of Evangelism v.11.**

With the age of communications the gospel is traveling worldwide. Many people in isolated places are being reached with the gospel. It is happening in our day.

It is easier today to blanket the gospel with the gospel message.

Did you know that there are over 6,000 languages spoken in the world today? Never before has the Bible been translated into so many tongues-even some spoken by the obscure tribal peoples with no access to radio, television or even the written word.

#### **There is a Fifth Great Awakening!**

According to David Barrett, author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 82,000 people become Christians every day. More are coming to Christ than at any time in Christian history. Today, 32,000 will become followers of Jesus in Africa, 25,000 in Asia, and 17,000 in Latin America. More Muslims are becoming Christians than at any time in the history of Islam. Thousands of Muslims are seeing visions and dreams of Jesus and coming to faith in him as their Lord. Al-Jazeera television says that every day, "16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity." They claimed that Islam is losing six million a year to Christian faith. However, of the 82,000 coming to Christ every day around the world, only 6,000 are in Europe and North America, combined. While much of the world is experiencing an explosion in Christian growth, we are living in a time of unprecedented skepticism in the Western world with regard to historic Christianity. Redeem the time for the Days are evil.

#### **There will be Signs of Israel. V.28.**

*The Rebirth of Israel May 15, 1948; Isaiah prophesied this, Isaiah 66:8-10; Matthew 24:3; 32-34; Look at v.34. The generation that sees the rebirth of Israel has been a special generation. In fact this generation has been called the *terminal generation*.*

**There are Commands!**

**WATCH!** Verses 5 & 37; **BE ON GUARD!** Verses 6 & 33; **BE READY!** Verses 32-33

There is going to be a Great Roundup and we are supposed to be serious about taking every opportunity to round up the strays for the Great Roundup in the Sky. Jesus tells us to live our life with Expectation and Urgency in light of the Great Roundup.

***Discussion: Just Asking?***

- **How are you preparing for the Great Roundup?**
- **What does this passage teach you about readiness?**
- **How would you explain the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to an unbeliever?**



# Luke's Trail of the Gospel

## Lesson One: Introduction to Luke

The author of the Gospel of Luke is not identified by name in the text; however, early Christian tradition ascribes both the Gospel and Acts to Luke. The information we know about Luke comes from other references in the New Testament. Three facts can be identified about Luke: (1) He was a Gentile (Colossians 4:10-11); (2) He was a physician (Colossians 4:14); (3) He was a missionary companion of Paul (2 Timothy 4:11).

The theme of Luke's Gospel is the great roundup. Luke portrays Jesus as the Savior not only for the Jews but also for all people. The theme verse for the Gospel is Luke 19:10:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (NIV)

Luke's Gospel and Acts are like the beauty of a horse and rider working together. The Gospel is the story of the rider - the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Acts is the story of the horse and rider together in perfect union - the growth and expansion of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel can be organized in the following structure:

**Chapters 1:1-4: Introduction** The introduction to Luke is unique among the four Gospels. Luke identifies the purpose for writing his Gospel. Many other writers and eye witnesses have compiled a record of Jesus' life and ministry, but Luke desires to write an account for "Theophilus" to confirm with certainty the things taught and believed about Jesus. Theophilus might have been a person who commissioned Luke to write his Gospel or possibly could be a phrase to indicate all believers. The word "Theophilus," in Greek means "beloved of God" or "friend of God."

**Chapters 1:15-4:13: The Promise, Birth and Preparation for the Messiah.**

Luke tells the prophetic promise of the birth stories of John the Baptist and Jesus, the infancy and childhood of Jesus, the preaching of John, and the response of Jesus. Luke's purpose for telling about the birth and early life of Jesus is to demonstrate His Jewish origins and the fulfillment of Jesus as the Messiah. Luke

also wants to prepare to tell the story of the expansion of the Christian movement from the Jews to the Gentiles (Luke 2:29-32).

**Chapters 4:14-9:50 Jesus Ministry in Galilee:** Luke identifies Galilee as the beginning place of Jesus' ministry. Jesus began His ministry in the Jewish synagogue, which he probably attended as a child. Luke identifies very early the rejection of Jesus among the Jewish religious leaders, and the resulting expansion of Jesus ministry to outcasts and sinners. The true people of God are not those born to a particular race, culture or ethnic group, but those who hear and do God's will (Luke 8:21).

**Chapters 9:51-19:27 Jesus Ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem:** Jesus gathers His disciples and turns toward Jerusalem. Jesus preaches forgiveness for those who will accept it - sinners, the rejected in the highways, prodigals who have lost their way, and even foreigners. Jesus proclaims a joyful and a threatening future as He travels to Jerusalem.

**Chapters 19:28-22:53 Jesus Ministry in Jerusalem:** In Jerusalem, Jesus offers Himself as the Savior to the world forcing the Jewish leaders and people to accept or reject Him. Luke tells the story of the refusal of Jesus' own people to join the rest of the world in receiving Him as Lord and Savior.

**Chapters 22:54-24:53 The Trial, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus:** In Jerusalem, two worlds collide. God offers at Calvary a beautiful act of redeeming love; mankind responds with a brutal act of rejection. There are two strong contrasts in the death of Jesus: God's self-giving and man's self-assertion. Life proves to be stronger than death, and love overcomes the pride and self-reliance of man.

### **Think and Apply:**

4. When Luke wrote his Gospel, the barrier that was the hardest to cross was the discrimination and separation between the Jews and the Gentiles.

What are some barriers that make it difficult to round up all of God's people today?

5. Jesus said in Matthew 19:10 that He "came to seek and to save what was lost."

Identify three or four ways today that you can seek out those in your circle of influence that need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

6. Jesus tells three parables recorded in Luke 15 - the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost son.

What is the main point of the three parables? How would you describe your response to the parable of the lost son? Is it more like the lost son or the older brother? Why?

7. In your own words, what is the meaning of the death of Jesus?

8. When does Jesus death become a saving act for a person?

### **Uniqueness of Luke:**

- Luke places special emphasis on the Holy Spirit. There are 17 references to the Holy Spirit in the Gospel.
- Luke emphasizes Jesus' reliance on prayer in the crucial times and events of His life.
- Luke emphasizes compassion for the socially exploited and despised. Jesus is the friend of the poor, the despised Samaritans, tax collectors, and the crippled.
- Luke emphasizes that wealth is not for personal gratification but for sharing with and caring for those in need.

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Singer, George Strait**

- He was raised on a family ranch in Poteet, Texas "Land that has been in the Strait family for more than 100 years.
- Has a passion for riding horses and team roping.
- He attended Southwest Texas State University (Texas State University).
- He has held the George Strait Team Roping Classic in San Antonio, Texas for more than 30 years.

## Luke's Trail of the Gospel

### Lesson Two: The Trail of Jesus' Galilean Ministry

According to Luke, Jesus began His public ministry in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30). However, Jesus was rejected by His own people (Luke 4:28-30). They were determined to destroy Him not because of His claim to be the Messiah (Luke 4:21), but because He interpreted His role as Messiah to include the Jews and all other nations. For Jesus, there was no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles (Luke 4: 18-19, 25-27).

The theme of Luke's Galilean ministry is the great inclusion. Jesus came as the Messiah to all people, but His own people tragically rejected him. This is the triumph and tragedy of the Gospel. Luke reminds us that there are always people who want to accept God only on their own terms. Because Jesus was rejected in Nazareth, it was necessary for Him to authenticate His Messianic claim in Galilee.

**Chapters 4:31-6:16: Jesus is the Messiah.** Jesus' first encounter in Galilee is in the city of Capernaum. A man possessed by a demon spirit confronts Jesus. A demon-possessed man confirms what the Jewish leaders refused to acknowledge - Jesus is the "Holy one of God" (Luke 4:34). Jesus heals the demon-possessed man, and the people are amazed at Jesus power over unclean spirits.

The Pharisees continue to challenge Jesus' authority and demand proof of His claim to be the Messiah (5:1-6:16). Jesus demonstrates His authority over sin when he heals a paralytic (Luke 5:17-26). The Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy because only God can forgive sins. The Pharisees believed that all sickness and handicaps were the result of sin. Rather than just healing the paralytic, Jesus forgave him of his sins and then cured his paralysis. Jesus demonstrated to the Pharisees that He Jesus was the Son of God and had power over sin.

Not only did Jesus forgive sin, he also accepted sinners, had fellowship with them, and called them to be His disciples (Luke 5:27-32). Those who are righteous are

the ones who seek God and trust Him for their salvation. Religious rituals, fasting and Sabbath observance will not substitute for loving God and caring for others (Luke 5:33-6:16).

**Chapters 6:17-49: Jesus' Sermon on the Plains.** After calling His disciples, Jesus set forth in His sermon the nature, privileges and responsibilities of being a disciple. The sermon can be organized in three parts: 1) the blessings and warnings (6:20-26), 2) the ethical principles of Kingdom living (6:27-45), and a concluding parable that emphasizes the consequences of one's choice to follow Jesus (6:45-49).

**Chapters 7:1-8:21: Jesus cares for all people.** Jesus' concern for all people is most evident in His relationships with the outcasts, the sick, the heartbroken, and the helpless who were rejected and denied access to God by the religious leaders. Jesus declared that religious heritage and family lineage is not what makes a person righteous. Those who hear the Word and do it are the children of God (Luke 8:21). Jesus heals the son of a Roman Centurion (a Gentile) because of the Centurion's great faith, not his pedigree (Luke 7:1-10); Jesus showed great compassion for a widow when he raised her son from the dead in Nain (Luke 8:11-17); and He taught a Pharisee a great lesson in faith when a sinful woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and poured expensive perfume on them (Luke 7:36-50). "Those who are forgiven much, love much," Jesus, said (Luke 7:47).

Jesus reinforced the requirements of the Kingdom when He taught the parable of the sower and the lamp (Luke 8:1-18). Those who hear the Word, receive it and live it are the true citizens of the Kingdom. Those who listen are like a light set upon a lamp stand. Their influence dispels darkness and reveals the truth of a life lived in relationship to God (Luke 8:16-21).

**Chapters 8:22-9:50: Who do you say that I am?** Luke concluded the trail of Jesus' Galilean ministry with a progressive revelation and demonstration of Jesus' true identity. Jesus calms the storms demonstrating that even the wind and waters are within His Power. He commands the demons, raises the dead, cures those who reach out and touch Him, and miraculously feeds more than five thousand. Even His

disciples are granted the power and authority over demons and diseases (Luke 8:26-9:17). Because of these demonstrations of power and miracles, Peter confessed Jesus to be the promised Messiah. The disciples in their heightened expectations of the coming Kingdom saw Jesus transfigured with Moses and Elijah, but failed to understand the coming sacrifice of Jesus (Luke 9:44-45). Instead the disciples argued over who would be greatest in the coming Kingdom of God revealing their obvious misunderstanding of what constituted true greatness (Luke 9:46-48).

### Think and Apply:

Dr. Frank Stagg in his commentary on Luke made the following observation:

Much is made today of "communication," as though human relationship would improve if we understood one another better. This is not necessarily true... Jesus was most popular when he was least understood. As he emerged more clearly, he was most feared and hated by some and abandoned by the masses. It continues to be true that Jesus is most "popular" when least understood - when made over into our own image.<sup>1</sup>

1. Do you agree with Dr. Stagg's statement above? If so, why or why not?
2. Do we make Jesus in our image today? Do we accept Jesus for who he is revealed to be in the Bible?
3. Do you accept Jesus as the Son of God? How does that impact your life on a daily basis?

### Uniqueness of Country Western Singer, Gene Autry

- He was born in Tioga, Texas on September 29, 1907
- From 1940 to 1956 the public listened to him on Gene Autry's **Melody Ranch** radio show that was heard weekly over the CBS Radio Network, featuring Autry's trademark theme song *Back In The Saddle Again*.
- Autry is the only entertainer to have all five stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, one each for Radio, Recording, Motion Pictures, Television, and Live Theatre/Performance.

- He was the most successful singing cowboy, completing 93 movies and starring in 91 television productions.
- He was inducted into The National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

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<sup>1</sup>Stagg, Frank. *Studies in Luke's Gospel*. Nashville: Convention Press, 1967, p. 69.

# Luke's Trail of the Gospel

## Lesson Three: The Trail to Jerusalem

In Luke 9:51, the Gospel trail takes a dramatic turn when Jesus leaves Galilee and goes to Jerusalem. Luke emphasized the resolve and purpose in Jesus' journey: "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Luke began this section with Jesus' determination to fulfill his journey to the cross, and ends the section with His triumphant purpose in Jerusalem, "For the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

This is the longest section of the Gospel (Luke 9:51-19:27), and it does not give us a specific geographical itinerary for Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The journey is organized around the central theme of the pending cross. As Dr. Frank Stagg noted, "It is as though Luke let the shadow of the cross fall across this whole section." Jesus must go to the cross to fulfill His mission while along the journey He instructed His disciples in the meaning of His death and prepared them for their mission after His resurrection.

Luke's account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is focused more around the theological themes that inspired Luke to write his Gospel than an actual chronological or geographical journey. From this central section, we can identify several key themes:

1. **The Demand for Discipleship.** Jesus' call to follow Him was never an invitation to easy discipleship (Luke 9:57-62). For one who is eager to follow, He required a commitment to finish well. For others who had reservations about immediate commitment, Jesus challenged them to weigh the relative values of what they were giving up and what they would receive. The demand of following Jesus always requires us to face the inevitable confrontation between God's purpose and will and our personal choices and decisions.

True disciples must choose whom they will serve (Luke 10:22-23; 11:23; 11:28; 13:22-30; 14:25-34; 16:13). The rules of ritual and piety are not the indicators of true followers (Luke 11:52). The perils of riches prove to be a



potential barrier to hearing and doing the Word of God (Luke 12:13-34; 16:1-13, 19-31; 18:18-30).

2. **Lost and Found.** Luke 15 is the pinnacle of Luke's Gospel. It is the joyous expression of God's desire for all people and nations to be saved. Yet, it comes in a section of Luke's account of Jesus' ministry where the shadow of the cross, and the crucifixion stand in the background against the reason for joy. It reminds us of the paradox of the gift of salvation that comes through the suffering of Christ upon the cross. A paradox the writer of Hebrews clearly explained:

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)

The Pharisees and the scribes resented Jesus' acceptance of sinners and outcasts, and criticized and questioned Jesus for eating with them (Luke 15:1-2). Jesus responded with three parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons, that were directly pointed at the religious leaders who failed to see the value in finding what had been lost.

The first parable conveys the diligence and concern for even one sheep that has wandered from the fold. The Shepherd's reach is not shortened and his love is not diminished even for one lost sheep. God exercises a different kind of math. And even one is cause for great rejoicing when it is found (Luke 15:6-7). The sheep is brought back to the fold because of the desire of the shepherd to seek even one that is lost.

The parable of the lost coin conveys the same message as the lost sheep. It is the diligence of the woman that results in the silver coin being found. She calls her neighbors to rejoice and share her joy. The woman does not grow weary in her search - lighting a lamp, sweeping the house, and searching carefully until the coin is found. God is never impatient in His offer of repentance and forgiveness.

The parable of the lost sons is the climax of the three parables. It has been called the parable of the "prodigal" son. The word "prodigal" means "to squander or waste something in an extravagant way." If we read the story carefully and understand its full meaning, we will realize there are really two prodigal sons, a younger and an older. One son, the younger, left home, squandered the riches of his Father in sinful living, realized his wayward and destructive lifestyle, returned home and found joy in His Father's house. The other son, the older, stayed home, enjoyed the presence of his Father and the blessings of his Father's gifts, but he squandered and wasted the riches of his Father's gifts and his continual presence, not realizing the greatness of what he possessed. The older son never found joy in His Father's house, and could not rejoice in the return of his brother.

- 3. Forgiveness and Repentance.** In the final chapters of the trail to Jerusalem, Luke continually emphasizes the recurring themes of forgiveness and repentance. The rich man's attitude toward possessions, prosperity and power prevented him from realizing his need to repent too late, and poor Lazarus could not help (Luke 16:19-31). Even a rich tax collector finds salvation, because he recognizes his sin and in his joy returns to the poor four-fold that which he had taken from them (Luke 19:1-10)..

On the trail to Jerusalem, Jesus continually offers forgiveness and salvation to anyone who will receive it. He invites sinners, tax collectors, prodigals and foreigners into the Kingdom. He confronts Pharisees who rely on old rules of piety and the rich and self-sufficient who see no need for God. Those who reject Jesus' offer to sit at the Kingdom banquet are left to face judgment on their own (Luke 17: 22-36).

### **Think and Apply:**

4. Define a disciple based on Jesus' requirements in Luke 9:51-19:27.
5. Is it possible for a rich person to be a disciple?

6. Which of the two sons do you most identify with in the story of the Prodigal son? Which son do you believe was the real prodigal son?
7. Define repentance. Define forgiveness.

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Performer, Red Steagall**

- Russell (Red) Steagall was born in Gainesville, Texas on December 22, 1938.
- He was a bull rider until age 15 when he was stricken with polio. He started playing the guitar and mandolin to improve the strength and dexterity of his arms and hands.
- He is best known for his Texas swing dance music. He has written more than 200 songs and recorded 26 consecutive songs on national charts and more than 23 albums.
- Since 1991 Steagall has hosted "The Red Steagall Cowboy Gathering" in Fort Worth, Texas.
- He was inducted into Hall of Great Westerners at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, OK; the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame; and in 2005 was named the "2006 Poet Laureate of the State of Texas," the first "cowboy " poet to be named the poet laureate of his state.

## John's Trail of the Gospel

### Lesson One: Introduction to John

The Fourth Gospel has traditionally been identified as written by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James, who lived well into old age and wrote the Gospel from Ephesus around the close of the first century. Ireneaus, one of the late second century church fathers, was the first to indisputably attribute the Gospel to the apostle John. The Gospel, itself, does not identify an author by name but there is a reference to the author as "... the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20, 24). For purposes of this study, we will refer to the author as John in accordance with historical tradition.

The purpose of the Gospel of John is clearly stated in John 20:30-31:

"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you may have eternal life."

John declared that Jesus is our "trail boss," from whom we take direction and leadership along the trail of life. John did not simply record the chronological events of Jesus life and ministry. After John had many years to reflect on the teaching, activities and events of Jesus life, he wrote his Gospel so his readers would know the *meaning* of the historical activities of Jesus life and ministry. John wanted his readers to know Jesus is the Son of God.

The Gospel of John is organized in three dramatic movements:

**Chapter 1:1-51: The eternal Word and the witness of men.** Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John did not begin with the historical events of Jesus - the birth narratives, the baptism and temptations of Jesus. John began with the pre-

existence of the eternal Son of God that became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Jesus is both the divine Word and the supreme human witness. The eternal Word of God awaits the testimony of human witness to proclaim that which has been seen and heard.

**Chapter 2-12: The Book of the Signs.** John identified seven signs that revealed Jesus as the Son of God: (1) turning water into wine, (2) the healing of an official's son, (3) the healing of a lame man at the pool of Bethesda, (4) the feeding of the five thousand, (5) Jesus walking on water, (6) the healing of a man born blind, (7) the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

**Chapter 13-20: The Preparation and Passion of Jesus.** John not only gave one of the earliest sources of the events of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, but he also emphasized the meaning of these events for the disciples, the Jews, the Gentiles, and all mankind. Jesus humiliation and rejection was transformed into his exaltation and glory before his Father and those who recognized Jesus as the Son of God.

### **Uniqueness of the Gospel:**

- John emphasized the importance of belief and eternal life more than any other Gospel. The word, believe, occurs 98 times in John and only 34 times in the other three Gospels together. The word, life, occurs 36 times in John and 16 times in the other three Gospels together. The dominant focus of the Gospel is a personal relationship with Jesus that transforms one's present life and future existence.
- The Gospel is the preeminent book in the Bible on the eternal existence of Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Word, which was from the beginning with the Father and through whom all creation finds its ultimate fulfillment (John 1:1-4). The eternal Word became flesh and revealed the glory of the Father (John 1:14). The Gospel begins with a new Genesis that depicts the redemptive work of Christ in bringing creation to its intended consummation.
- The Gospel addresses three of the most profound issues of human existence: the relationship of eternity to time, the relationship of spirit to matter, and the relationship of good to evil.

- The Gospel provides an enriched, expanded, and developed understanding of God as revealed in the Old Testament. John referred to God as "Father" over 115 times despite the fact that the Jews did not frequently use this image of God. John referred to the relationship of the Father and the Holy Spirit claimed by Jesus, and gives one of the clearest expressions of the doctrine of the Trinity affirming the divine oneness of God expressed in three distinct persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- John emphasized that Jesus is the great "I AM" of Exodus 3:14, confirming that Jesus is the incarnate manifestation of God who revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush (John 8:58).
- John proclaimed that Jesus is a light that came to shine in the darkness. Jesus is the Savior of the world (John 4:42). In union with Jesus the believer is given eternal life, and that life is a present as well as a future possession for all who receive him.
- John, more than any other Gospel, spoke to the community of believers, the church. Because of the later date of John's writing, John addressed the conception of the group of believers as the collective church that draws its life from Christ (John 15:1- 16:33). The mission of the community of believers is to gather all of the scattered people of God, Jew and Gentile. The believers are to preach the message of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. John understood the church to be an extension of Jesus' ministry. In the celebration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper the church would re-present Jesus as the power of God for all who believe.<sup>1</sup>

## Think and Apply:

9. John said the Word was made flesh. What does this mean to you?
10. What do the signs that Jesus performed say about who Jesus is? If you had been one of the people who witnessed these signs, what would you think of Jesus?
11. In your own words, what does the word "believe" mean?

12. What does this thought mean to you: "the one whose boss decides whose boss."

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Singer, Neal McCoy**

- He was born, Hubert Neal McGaughey, Jr in Jacksonville Texas on July 30, 1958.
- As a schoolboy, Neal performed in school programs and musicals, in church choirs, and Gospel quartets.
- He recorded three platinum albums, one gold album, and won the Entertainer of the Year Award in 1998 and 1999.
- He toured with Charley Pride for seven years and participated in 13 USO Tours, both domestic and international.
- He founded East the Texas Angel Network for children of East Texas with terminal or life-threatening diseases.
- He is a winner of the Academy of Country Music's Home Depot Humanitarian Award, the Country Radio Broadcaster's Artist Humanitarian of the Year Award, and the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas' W. B and Brandon Carroll Humanitarian Award, the highest honor given to a non-Mason.

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<sup>1</sup> William E. Hull, "John," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 9 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 206.

## **John's Trail of the Gospel**

### **Lesson Two: The Trail to Hope**

It has been described as the North Star of the Bible, the Mount Everest of the Scriptures, the Crown Jewel of the Heavenly Kingdom, and even the Hope Diamond of the Bible. Perhaps a more contemporary example of magnitude might help reveal the stature of the words.

On January 8, 2012, in the BCS College Football National Championship, Tim Tebow donned eye-black under his eyes with the inscription, "John 3:16." Over the next 24 hours, more than 90 million people conducted a web search for the term, "John 3:16," a record for Google in a twenty-four-hour period.

John 3:16 is a twenty-six-word symphony of hope that begins with God and ends with life. Words so famous and well known that most can recognize the words simply by the numbers. These words, this bedrock of good news, were spoken in a conversation between a religious expert, Nicodemus, and Jesus of Nazareth, a new upstart Teacher performing miracles and wrecking havoc in the Temple courts.

#### **A late night conversation (John 3:1-15)**

After the chaos of Jesus clearing the Temple of those who bargained the blessings of God for money, John made sure the background and status of Jesus' late night visitor was known. Nicodemus was one of the leaders of Judaism, a Pharisee. Perhaps afraid of association with Jesus or fear of his colleagues finding out, Nicodemus came in the darkness to the light of the world (John 1:4-5). Nicodemus came in his pedigree, clout, credentials, and status as a religious expert



to discuss God. But he also came with his questions. He tried to break the ice, to make conversation (John 3:2). But Jesus responded neither to Nicodemus' position or stature. Jesus declared, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3).

Jesus drew the great dividing line between religion and relationship. Nicodemus came with all the credentials of religion's best efforts - work hard, pray, attend services, fast, give your best, be the best and stay away from the rest. Jesus stood on the other side of the dividing line and said your best efforts will not work. Your works are what doesn't work. Unless you are born again, you can never see God or his Kingdom. Like Nicodemus, we might protest and say, "but I need to see to believe." Jesus responds, "You must believe to see."

Nicodemus has many relatives. We protest along with him, "How can someone be born when they are old?" We can't be born again? Rewind life and go back into the Mother's womb? Start all over?

Wouldn't we love the opportunity for a redo? Who wouldn't want another chance, a mulligan? But how is that possible? Nicodemus thought Jesus was speaking of a physical rebirth. Jesus was speaking of a spiritual rebirth (John 3:5-8).

The key to the new birth of which Jesus spoke is in the word "again." The word means to be born from above, from heaven - a birth that comes from God the original source of life. He who created from the beginning must recreate us. Only God can accomplish the new creation. More effort will not accomplish this rebirth. Trying again and harder is not the answer. The answer is a miracle of God, a gift, our Savior Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Nicodemus, the religious answer man, had no answer for Jesus. The Teacher who had the credentials, position, power, and spoke to the people on behalf of God was stunned, "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked (John 3:9).

### **Jesus' answer to Nicodemus (John 3:16)**

Jesus answered Nicodemus with what has been called the greatest verse in the Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever

believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). In these twenty-six words, the symphony of God's love song is revealed along with his divine plan for the salvation of all mankind.

God so loved the world. God loved? Is that what we would expect, Nicodemus? We might expect God to judge the world, to punish the world, to forsake the world. But would we really expect God to love the world? We confuse life and God sometimes. When we experience heartache, suffering or sickness; when we lose our jobs or make poor choices in relationships, we mistake life with God. Since our lives are not going well, we believe our lives are a reflection of how God feels about us. We expect anything but love.

God loves the world? Not this world? Not this messed up confused world of me-first takers, manipulators, cheaters, liars, heartbreakers, hope-crushers, life takers, and dream destroyers. Politicians promise but never deliver; religious people like Nicodemus talk the talk but don't walk the walk. But God *loves*.

God loves so much that he *gave* his:

Demands?

Rules?

Requirements?

Conditions?

No. God loved so much that he gave his one and only son. When nothing else could cure the sinful condition of the world, God gave himself. Not a list of rules; not a religious ritual, but God incarnate in the flesh and blood Savior, Jesus Christ.

Why did God give his one and only son? He gave so that "... whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "Whoever" is a universal word. This gift, God's Son, is for all people.

How could anyone refuse the gift of eternal life? Perhaps, it is because somewhere in their journey the good news has ceased to be good news. The simple message of salvation has gotten complicated. If someone has complicated the message of Jesus Christ and made the good news bad news by adding things like, straighten up, attend church, obey the ten commandments, give your money, join the church, then

we have complicated the message of the good news. And if today, you are not ready to believe this good news and message about Jesus and you are still not sure it is good news, this is something you need to remember - the good news is good news today and it will be good news always. The promise of Jesus in John 3:16 is that whoever, whenever, and wherever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Perish is a halting word. It makes us stop and realize that everyone dies. But no one has to perish. If we believe into him, lean into him, we will have eternal life. In the end some will live and some will perish. But the determining factor for who will live and who will perish is not our works, whether we have been good or bad, our pedigree, positions, power, or our clout. Nicodemus had all the credentials. The determining factor of living or perishing is our belief. Do we believe into and trust Jesus or do we depend on ourselves?

And what became of Nicodemus? After John 4:9, we don't hear from him again until after Jesus had been crucified and the disciples were preparing to bury him. In John 19:38, John tells us that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body so that he might bury him. John tells us that Joseph was a disciple of Jesus. Joseph, accompanied by Nicodemus, brought spices and ointments to anoint the body of Jesus. The two men anointed Jesus body, wrapped him in grave cloths and laid him in the tomb of Joseph (John 19:38-42). Nicodemus must have become one of the "whoever's." What about you?

#### **Think and Apply:**

1. In what do people believe to try and find salvation today?
2. Nicodemus was a religious expert. Does knowledge about religion help or hurt our understanding of what it means to be saved?
3. What are your impressions of Nicodemus? In what ways are you like Nicodemus?
4. In your own words, how would you tell someone what John 3:16 means?

#### **Uniqueness of Country Western Singer, Ernest Tubb**

- Ernest Dale Tubb was born on a farm in Ellis County, Texas in 1914.
- He learned to play guitar and was influenced by the "yodeling" style of Jimmy Rodgers. After his tonsils were removed, ET could no longer yodel and he developed a nasal, twangy singing style that became uniquely Ernest Tubb.

- In 1941, he recorded his first big hit, *Walking the Floor Over You*, which sold more than a million records
- ET and his band, the Texas Troubadours recorded 54 singles from 1944 until 1959. Of the 54 singles, 50 were top ten hits.
- He was elected to the CMA Hall of Fame in 1965, and later he was inducted into the CMA and the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

# John's Trail of the Gospel

## Lesson Three: The Trail to Victory

John chapter 11 is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This chapter is both the great pinnacle and the great dividing line of the Gospel. The raising of Lazarus is the seventh miracle in John: 2-12, and while the raising of Lazarus was not the last miracle Jesus performed, it was the greatest and most decisive. In Jewish numerology, the number seven is symbolic of completion or perfection. The seventh miracle, victory over death, the last and greatest enemy to life, could not be denied or avoided. If Jesus could not defeat death then all other signs and miracles were just temporal. The raising of Lazarus was a miracle, a sign pointing to the source of victory over death. Jesus was the reality of resurrection and life eternal (John 11:25-26). He is the true source of life and was the first man to be resurrected and conquer death (1 Corinthians 15:20, 51-57; Romans 8:31-39).

The Lazarus story is the great dividing line. It is neither more theological nor less historical than other miracle stories in the Gospels.<sup>1</sup> John intended for us to understand that Lazarus literally came out of the tomb four days after he died. Some witnesses then, as today, have problems with this account because they doubt Lazarus could have come out of the tomb (John 11: 45-46). Yet, the raising of Lazarus occupies only two verses of the fifty-seven verses in John 11. John was concerned about the meaning of the event of Lazarus as much as he was concerned with the event. He took more than fifty verses to explain the meaning of life and death, and to explain Lazarus was only a sign that pointed to the true resurrection, Jesus. John said that seeing Lazarus would not give assurance of resurrection after death. It took *faith* to see in Lazarus more than a medical miracle, to believe that he signified the possibility of eternal life in the midst of temporal time. Only Jesus, not Lazarus, could awaken such belief, and in the end, it is faith or lack thereof that is the great divider.

### The death of Lazarus and the delay of Jesus (John 11:1-16)

Jesus had retreated from Jerusalem after the Jews tried to stone him for claiming to be God (John 10: 31-40). He was staying some twenty miles from Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. A messenger arrived from Bethany to inform Jesus his friend, Lazarus, was sick, and Mary and Martha wanted him to come. Bethany was a day's journey from the place Jesus was staying. By the time Jesus received the messenger Lazarus was already dead.

When Jesus received word about Lazarus, he delayed for two days saying that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death but was for the glory of God (the disciples did not know Lazarus was dead). Jesus could not go back to Bethany, only a few miles from Jerusalem because the Jews had tried to stone him just days before. The circumstances appeared hopeless, and Jesus' disciples certainly did not want to return to Bethany. They must have thought going back would surely result in their death along with Lazarus. Perhaps the disciples wondered:

1. Why did Lazarus get sick to begin with if Jesus loved him so much?
2. Why did he wait for two days if he intended to go to Bethany
3. Why didn't he heal Lazarus from a distance like he did the Roman Centurion's son?

There are no guarantees that just because Jesus loves us that we will be immune to the problems of life. We frequently interpret the circumstances of life as an indicator of the presence or absence of God's love. We believe that love and suffering are incompatible. In Jesus suffering and death upon the cross, God's love and suffering unite. Jesus saw in Lazarus' sickness and death the opportunity to reveal the glory of God not an opportunity to display God's judgment. Jesus did not promise that Lazarus would not die; only that death would not be the end. The ultimate result of Lazarus' death was God would be glorified.

When confronted by disease, disappointment, delay, and even death, the ultimate end is that we glorify God (Philippians 1:20-21; 4:11-13). Jesus was not glad Lazarus had died (v.15), but he was glad that he was not there so that the disciples might see the glory of God. In raising Lazarus from the dead, the disciples would remember the glory of God when Jesus was resurrected.

### **The anguish of Lazarus' sisters and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:17-44)**

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming to Bethany, she did not wait for his arrival. She went out to meet Jesus protesting his delay and hoping in her anguish that even then Jesus might perform a miracle (John 11:21-22). "If" is such a big word (v. 21). What if? It is such a futile word. It is such a hollow word - hopeless and filled with regret. "Lord, **if** only you had been here my brother would be alive."

Jesus took Martha's opportunity of despair over Lazarus' death to teach the bedrock foundation of hope upon which the good news of Jesus Christ is built (1 Corinthians 15:14-19). Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."

After arriving at the house and seeing the despair and grief of Mary, Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb and ordered the stone to be rolled away. Mary and Martha not wanting to face further anguish protested, "Lord ... by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there for four days." But Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you **believe**, you will **see** the glory of God." Jesus prayed to the Father and in a loud voice he called Lazarus to come out. Lazarus came forth from death to life, wrapped in strips of linen and grave cloths.

### **The plot to kill Jesus (John 11:45-57)**

Some who witnessed the raising of Lazarus went immediately to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. The Pharisees called a meeting of the High Priest, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin. The religious leaders were afraid that Jesus would cause a riot when people realized he could raise the dead. But Caiaphas addressing the rulers declared that "it is better that Jesus die for the people rather than the whole nation perish." John declared that Caiaphas was used as an instrument of God to prophesy the death and crucifixion of Jesus (vs. 51-52). From that day forward the religious leaders plotted together to take Jesus life.

### **What we learn from the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44)**

1. Lazarus came forth after men rolled away the stone. Jesus needed no such human help.

2. Lazarus came forth still bound in grave cloths. Jesus passed through those grave cloths and left them behind.
3. Lazarus returned to his earthly relatives. Jesus ascended to his Father in heaven.

### **What we know about the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15: 35-50)**

1. The body buried is perishable. The body raised is imperishable.
2. The body is buried in dishonor and is raised in glory.
3. The body that dies is weak. The body raised is raised in power.
4. The body that dies is physical (natural). The body raised is spiritual (animated by the Spirit of God).

### **Think and Apply:**

8. When Martha confronted Jesus about the death of her brother, she said if only Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. What are some of the "what if's" in you life?
9. What circumstances are you facing that may be causing you discouragement? How might you glory God in your circumstances?
10. Can you identify two ways that Jesus words I am the resurrection and the life make a difference in your life today?

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Performer, Jimmy Dean**

- Born near Plainview, Texas on August 10, 1928, Jimmy Dean worked on neighboring farms while growing up.
- He learned to play the piano, accordion, guitar, and harmonica as a young boy.
- He served in the Merchant Marines and the US Air Force.
- His 1961 hit, *Big Bad John*, sold more than 8 million copies.
- He had his own television show from 1963-1966, and starred in the hit series *Daniel Boone* from 1967-1970.
- In 1968 he founded the Jimmy Dean Meat Company.
- He was inducted into the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame in 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> William E. Hull, "John," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 9 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 311.



## **John's Trail of the Gospel**

### **Lesson Four: The Trail Home**

Have you ever been lost? The best way to prevent being lost when traveling is to begin with the end in mind. Before you begin, have a clear understanding of your destination. It also helps to have a really good guide - someone who has been where you are going, a good map or one of the new GPS systems.

My wife has a horse, Buddy, who always has a clear picture of the end before he begins. Whether we are on a trail ride around our property or at one of the trails at a nearby state park, Buddy always has a picture in mind of the barn or the horse trailer. When it is time to return, Buddy always gets back to the barn or trailer, and usually pretty quickly. He never gets lost!

Jesus began his earthly ministry with the end in mind (Matthew 2:41-49). As he approached the cross, Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for his death, burial, resurrection, and his return home to his heavenly Father. Only days before his crucifixion, John tells us that Jesus prepared his disciples for his trail home, and he assured them they would not be left alone. They, too, would have a guide, and know the destination home when it was their time to travel that trail (John 13:31-14:31).

#### **Troubled hearts (John 13:31-14:31)**

As Jesus' last days approached, he knew the hour had come for him to leave this world and return to the Father. He gathered his disciples in a private room to celebrate Passover. What began, as a celebration during the meal, became a very dark and troubling night. The days ahead would grow even darker.

While the meal was in progress, Jesus removed his outer garment, wrapped a towel around his waste, filled a basin with water, and began to wash the disciples feet. The disciples, especially Peter, were troubled by this display of humility (John 13:2-17). Jesus then announced that one of the disciples was a traitor and would betray him. And if that were not enough, Jesus told them he was going away and the disciples could not follow him.

Self-confident and brash, Peter was certain that not only could he follow his Lord, but he could also lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus warned Peter that he was going to deny Jesus three times by morning. Peter did not know his own heart and his capacity for retreat. We don't know our hearts either, except, like the disciples, our hearts are easily troubled.

In the darkness and silence of that night, Jesus gave the disciples one of the greatest promises of assurance and confidence. Even though Jesus would not physically be with them, they would not be alone, and they had a home!

### **A prepared place (John 14:1-14)**

An antidote for troubled hearts is belief in God and his son, Jesus. Peter and the disciples could not follow Jesus on the cross (though church tradition says Peter was crucified upside down), but they could be assured there was a prepared house for them with many dwelling places. There are two possible meanings intended here. First, the Temple in Jerusalem had a sanctuary area (house) and an area outside the sanctuary where weary pilgrims who traveled far distances could rest (many rooms). Jesus said he would go and prepare a place. The Greek word "place" is sometimes translated Temple (Matt. 24:15; John 4:20; 11:48; Acts 6:13; 21:28). Perhaps Jesus was saying that by his death and resurrection he would become the true spiritual temple filling the world and his followers with the presence of God. The body of Christ, the church, was to become like a "home" where all who come can find the presence of God and rest.<sup>1</sup>

Second, when we do make our final journey home, like the disciples, we will be with Jesus in heaven (John 17:24). Jesus promised that he would come back and take us to be with him so that we also may be where he is. Heaven is a real place. It is not a psychological or emotional aberration created in the minds of those trying to escape the reality of death. It is not a moral or ethical hope that one day the scales of justice will be balanced for the have's and the have not's. Heaven is a place where God dwells and Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father (Rev. 21:1-27). The Bible describes heaven as a kingdom (2 Peter 1:11), a city (Heb. 11:16), a home (John 14:12), and a place where all that have believed in Jesus have an

eternal citizenship (Phil. 3:20-21). John 14:1-14 promises us not just that one day we will go to heaven but that Jesus has already brought heaven to us. As Christians, we can live at home in this world because the risen Christ and his Father will abide in us in spiritual fellowship. Jesus explained to the disciples how they will have a heavenly home, and not be alone in their earthly home. That is comfort for troubled hearts.

### **A promised presence (John 14:15-27)**

The greatest concern the disciples experienced in the context of the Passover night was not where they would go after death but rather why they could not go where Jesus was going. Thomas, the doubting one, was the first to speak up. He said, "... we don't know where you are going so how can we know the way." Jesus reminded the disciples that to know him is to know the way, the truth and the life. And because they knew Jesus they knew the Father. Philip, still not understanding, asked Jesus to show the disciples the Father. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The end had been known from the beginning. God revealed himself in the earthly life of the Son.

Jesus left the disciples with a powerful promise. But this promise was not without condition. The cure for being alone is love. "If you love me," Jesus said. Not if you give to the poor, pray three times a day, read the Scriptures, attend the Temple ... if you love me and keep my words, "I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of Truth" (John 14:16). The word advocate means one who represents you in a court of law, who stands by your side pleading your case. This word also has the connotation of an encourager, a comforter, a defender and an instructor. The promised encourager is the Holy Spirit prayed for by the Son and sent by the Father. Jesus said he would not leave the disciples as orphans - alone, helpless and hopeless. Jesus said, "I will come to you..." This meant that the Holy Spirit that was to come would not be a different presence from Jesus but would be the same nature and character expressed in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had been *with* the disciples but the Holy Spirit would be *in* the disciples. Jesus closed the meal with the same message with which he began, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be

afraid." A promised guide for the trail and a prepared place for a destination; enjoy the journey.

### **Think and Apply:**

11. What are some things that trouble you?
12. In John 13:36- 14:31, what troubled the disciples? Why?
13. What does Jesus promise that will calm our troubled hearts?
14. How do you find your way when you are lost?
15. Do you know your final destination?
16. What does this passage teach us about the Holy Spirit?
17. How can the Holy Spirit lead us when we are troubled?

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Performer, Ray Price**

- Ray Noble Price was born in East Texas at little Perryville on January 12, 1926
- He enlisted in the Marines during World War II and after the war intended to become a veterinarian but his musical ability led to a long and successful music career.
- He was known as the "Cherokee Cowboy" and through close friendship with Hank Williams he was invited to join the Grand Ole Opry in 1952.
- He was one of the first to introduce drums and strings into Country music in hits like "Make the World Go Away," "Burning Memories," and "Danny Boy."
- After three decades and in his 80's, Ray still leaves his ranch in East Texas and records and performs 100 dates per year.

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<sup>1</sup> William E. Hull, "John," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 9 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 333.

## **Boots on the Fence Post! The Book of Acts: THE FENCE POST OF THE CHURCH! Lesson One**

### **Introduction:**

*In Cowboy History it was said that when a cowboy established a strong bond with the horse, he might choose the horse as his daily workhorse. Should the horse ever be sold or die, the cowboy will sacrifice a pair of boots to the fence post in remembrance of that horse.*

When a good hired hand that was loyal, dedicated and practically a member of the rancher's family would die. The Rancher would put a pair of boots on the fence post in his memory. In most cases, if the hired hand dies, the hand's boots will be the ones up on the fence.

There are some great events and people that God used in the Book of Acts to turn the world upside down. Luke, the human author takes us down the trail of Fence Post Historical Markers.

The last Book of what we call the History Section of the New Testament is the Book of Acts: How the Gospel was spread! Acts is the History of the Church. In 30 short years, the church grows and multiplies from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke the Physician chronicles the journey of the spread of the gospel.

***"I will build My Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it."***

Matthew 16:18

Acts is Luke's account of the early years of the church. This Book is the History of the early Church and the Acts of the Apostles and the Acts of the Holy Spirit. Some have described the Book of Acts as *"The Continuing Work of Christ."* Luke, the Human Author writes about what Christ did while He lived on earth in the Gospel of Luke. In the Book of Acts, he shows what Christ continued to do by the Holy Spirit. The human author, Luke the Physician, is the same author of the

Gospel of Luke. Both of Luke's writings are addressed to an official in the Roman Government named Theophilus. Theophilus was either a Follower of Christ or a Seeker of Christ.

**Acts 1:8 is the outline:**

*Witnesses* in Jerusalem : Chapters 1-7

*Witnesses* in Samaria: Chapters 8-12

*Witnesses* to the ends of the earth: 13-28

The word, *witness* is used more than 30 times.

***Acts 1:8 tells us what to look for in this book:***

Jesus has commissioned Believers to be His *witnesses*

The Holy Spirit empowers Believers to be His *witnesses*

**Two Significant Chapters:**

Chapter 2; The Church begins

Chapter 9: Paul's Conversion

**The Three missionary trips of Paul:**

Acts 13:2-14:28/One Year

Acts 15:36-18:22/ Two Years

Acts 18:23-21:16 Four Years

**The Book is divided into Two Sections:**

From Jerusalem to Antioch (1:1 to 12:25)

From Antioch to Rome: (13:1- 28:38)

**Timeline: Acts 1:8 "Witnesses to Jerusalem & Beyond."**

A.D. 35-Judea & Samaria

A.D. 40 - Syrian Antioch

A.D. 48- Paul's First Missionary Journey

A.D. 52-Paul's Second and Third Missionary Journey

A.D. 60- Paul's Journey to Rome

**The Force of the Holy Spirit:**

Jesus said assured His Disciples that after He was gone from earth that He would send the Holy Spirit and He did, starting with the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

#### **The Fence Post of the Book of Acts:**

1. *Jesus is Taken Up/Chapter 1:1-26*
2. *Pentecost and the Ushering in of the Holy Spirit/Chapter 2:1-41*
3. *The Growth & Fellowship of the Church/Chapter 2:42-3:26*
4. *Peter & Apostles before the Sanhedrin/Chapter 4:1-31*
5. *Ananias & Sapphira; Deacons Chosen; Stephen Stoned; Believers Scattered; Ethiopian/Chapters 5-8*
6. *Conversion of Saul of Tarsus/Chapter 9*
7. *Peter's Vision/10....Peter's Escape/Chapter 12*
8. *Paul & Barnabas Mission Together/Chapters 11;13-15*
9. *Ministry of the Apostle Paul /Chapters 16-28*

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- The word "witness" is a key word. What does it mean to witness and be a witness?
- Have you ever presented the gospel to a lost person? If you did how did it go?

## When the Church Prays! Lesson Two

**Passage: Acts 1-4**

*"Every time I pray, I move the hand of God  
My prayer does the things, my hands cannot do  
For every time I pray, the mountains are removed  
The paths are made straight, And nations turn to You"* Copyright. Ng Wah Lok,  
1981

What did the Early Church do after Jesus ascended into Heaven? They gathered in the upper room and prayed. They followed the practice and teachings of Christ. He was constantly practicing and teaching on prayer. He taught them that little can be done apart from prayer. E.M. Bounds when we pray and serve then we can see what God can do. When we serve we can see what man can do.

Little will be lasting in the work of the church if it is not founded on prayer. The greatest work of the church is prayer. Prayer is the "Main Thing."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "Prayer pulls the rope below and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly. Others give but an occasional pluck at the rope. But he who wins with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously, with all his might."

"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none."—Ezekiel 22:30 New International Version



Are you standing in the gap for your family; for your church? So what takes place when the church gets serious about prayer? "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." Acts 1:14

**When the church really prays we will be Convicted, "*They were filled with the Holy Spirit.*" 2:1**

The Holy Spirit had a hold on the people of the church. They were under control of the Holy Spirit. When we pray then his will becomes ours and our spirit comes led by the Lord. Prayer empties us of our self and fills us up with the Holy Spirit. How can God fill our lives with the Holy Spirit if our heart and living is not right? The early church was not walking in the flesh but in the spirit. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, then we will be convicted about what is right and what is wrong. We will be going in the right direction because we have surrendered the reins of our will and mind.

**When the church really prays we will Cooperate! "*All the believers were together and had everything in common.*" 2:44**

It is so important that there is consensus with each other in the Cowboy Churches but more important that we are in consensus with God and God's Word. Jesus prayer for the church was that the world would see us as one. When God's people pray together, they will think together, they will act together and will work together.

I remember years ago in a pastorate I had a deacon who was against my leadership. I went to the deacon and asked him to pray with me once a week. I told him that he could set the time and the place. He refused and eventually left the church. His actions hurt the church for a few weeks but the people knew that I had tried to reach out to him. Several years later, he came to me and apologized and said that he had regretted his actions. I still believe to this day that if the two of us could have prayed together then we would have worked out our differences.

**When the church really prays we will Celebrate! *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."* 2:46**

True joy comes when we are at peace with God and peace with each other. All of that comes after we spend time in prayer. The disciples and the early church experienced all of this because that prayed.

**When the church really prays together we will be Convinced. *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus."* 4:13**

The early believers were uneducated and untrained. Yet, they shared the gospel convincingly. They had confidence and courage. Prayer helped them in facing their problems with courage and boldness. What was their secret? "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." 1:14

We get this confidence and courage through prayer. *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."* Hebrews 4:16

God is for us! That is the good news, so have confidence and courage by praying.

**When the church really prays together we will have Companionship. *"...they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus."* 4:13**

### **Do you believe in the Power of Prayer?**

*"You do not have, because you do not ask."* James 4:2

*"Ask and it will be given to you?"* Matthew 7:7

I want you to join me in asking God to help us.

1. Think of your sins and confess them to God and ask His forgiveness. (I John 1)
2. Thank God for you salvation and for your blessings and problems. (Psalm 103)
3. Tell your concerns and problems to God. (Jeremiah 33:3 )

After you give your concerns and problems to God then have faith to release them to Him. When you are reminded about those concerns and problems then say out loud, *"I gave them to God and those problems are His problems."*(I Peter 5:7)

Now rest on these words:

*"Oh what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer."*

# The Trail of the Church: Acts

## Lesson 3: Branded

### Background

The word, "church," is a translation of the Greek word, "ekklesia." The word *ekklesia* literally means "gathering" or "assembly" and it is derived from the root word, "to call out." The church is the gathering or assembly of those who are called. But who is calling and for what purpose is the assembly gathered?

The foundation of the church begins with God. It is by the unique understanding of the nature and character of God that the church is defined. The Old Testament tells the story of God choosing a people for himself and can be summarized in this way: "I will be your God and you will be my people (Ex. 6:7; 19:5; Deut. 7:6-8; Jer. 7:23). The relationship that existed between God and the nation Israel in the Old Testament is said in the New Testament to exist between God and his "called out people," the church. God chooses the church and the church is God's people (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Jesus died on the cross and arose from the dead to secure our salvation and create the "gathering" (church) of those called to salvation. Christ died for the church, and so the church is the body of Christ, serving Christ in the world. The Spirit, which descended upon the gathering at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), regenerates the church and the church is the fellowship of the Spirit. The Father chose the church in eternity. The Son died for the church in history, and the Spirit regenerates the church in experience. God's work in the church is not all in eternity and not all in the past. God continues to work in the church as a present spiritual reality today.<sup>1</sup> How did the church first begin? There are three distinct characteristics of the first gathering of the followers of Christ in the New Testament.

### The Message of the Church (Acts 2:14-41; 4:8-22; 5:17-41)

Before Jesus' followers were ever called a church, they descended on Jerusalem proclaiming the good news that Jesus was alive. The church was a movement that could not be contained because of the message. In the first meeting of the church, the disciples gathered together and the power of the Holy Spirit fell upon them as they began to proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection. Those who had gathered in Jerusalem from all nations for Passover heard the resurrection story in their native language. Some began to make light of the disciples accusing them of being drunk, but Peter stepped forward and proclaimed the first message of the church (Acts 2:14-41). Peter said that Jesus was the Messiah, promised by the prophets of the Old Testament and attested by miracles, wonders and signs. Wicked and sinful men crucified Jesus, but God raised Jesus to life and exalted him as both Lord and Messiah. Most importantly Peter said, "... we are all witnesses to it [his resurrection]." Peter called on all of the people hearing this message to "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38). On the first day of the church more than three thousand affirmed the message and received the gift of salvation (Acts 2:41).

The people could not help but proclaim the good news. Every day they met in the temple courts and went from house-to-house flooding Jerusalem with the message of the risen Christ. And every chance Peter had, he kept declaring the truth of Jesus' death, telling the Jews they had killed the author of life but God had raised Jesus from the dead. Moreover, Peter and all of the disciples were witnesses to this fact (Acts 3:13-15). The priests, Sadducees and religious leaders seized Peter and John putting them in prison for proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus and healing a lame man (Acts 4:1-4). Yet, even more believed in Jesus and the number of believers grew to over five thousand.

When the religious rulers, elders and teachers of the law questioned Peter about his message and by what power he healed the lame man (Acts 3:1-10), Peter could not help but proclaim the witness and message of the resurrected Jesus. Peter went so far as to tell the religious leaders that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name [Jesus] under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:1-12). Annas, the high priest and Caiaphas ordered Peter

and John to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John said, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have *seen* and *heard*." (Acts 4:18-20). Despite the threats of the Jewish religious leaders, Peter and John would not stop proclaiming the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

### **The Boldness of the Believers (Acts 4:22-31)**

When the high priest released Peter and John, they went back to the other disciples and told them all that had happened and the threats of the Jewish religious leaders. The disciples were so relieved that Peter and John were still alive. They raised their voices in praise and prayer to God and the first recorded prayer of the church is found in Acts 4:24-30. We would expect that the disciples would have prayed for protection from persecution. Perhaps they would have asked God for a hiding place and safety until the Jews and Romans calmed down. But notice their prayer. First, they acknowledged the sovereignty of God and his plan in all that had happened. They acknowledged the prophetic purpose and plan that even Herod, Pontius Pilate and the Romans played in the death of Jesus. Then in Acts 4:29-30, these disciples who had been threatened, who watched the crucifixion of Jesus, who faced death, prayed:

*"Now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great **boldness**. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

Boldness? Would you expect boldness? Protection and safety maybe; but boldness to continue to preach and share the message that would threaten your life? Boldness was the attitude of the early believers even in the face of persecution and death. This was their mission. When they prayed the Holy Spirit filled the disciples with power and they continued to speak the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31).

### **The Mission of the Church (Acts 4:33; 5:12-16, 40-41)**

In spite of the threats, the disciples boldly continued the mission of spreading the good news that Jesus was the Messiah. They were witnesses to the resurrection and with great power the disciples continued to testify to this good news (Acts 4:33). The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people and more and more people were added to their number. Crowds gathered from towns all around Jerusalem bringing the sick and those with spiritual affliction and all of them were healed in the name of Jesus.

The high priest and the Sadducees were filled with jealousy and wanted the apostles put to death (Acts 5:17-33). Gamaliel, a respected teacher of the law spoke to the Sanhedrin and said, "... Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." (Acts 5:38-39). Listening to Gamaliel, the Sanhedrin had the disciples flogged with whips, ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering for Jesus. The scars from the beatings were marks, brands, which identified the apostles and disciples as followers of Jesus. Even physical suffering could not stop the apostles from meeting in the temple courts and going from house-to-house proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. The scars became trophies for those who would not stop telling the good news about the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. The church exists today because the faithful followers of Jesus would not stop telling the good news.

### **Think and Apply:**

13. What does the word "church" mean to you? How is the church similar today to the early followers of Christ? How is it different?
14. What was the message of the apostles and disciples in the early church? Is the message today similar? Different?
15. What was the mission of the early church? What is our mission today?

16. What does it mean to you to speak the word with great boldness? In what ways can the church be bold today?

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Singer, Roger Miller**

- He was born in Fort Worth, Texas on January 2, 1936. During his boyhood, his father died and Roger was sent to his uncle's cotton farm in Oklahoma.
- Roger learned to play the guitar, fiddle and drums playing with various bands in honky tonks in Oklahoma and Texas.
- He was a gifted and imaginative songwriter who had many hits songs including "*King of the Road*" and "*Dang Me.*"
- His songs have been recorded by some of country music's biggest stars: Jim Reeves, George Jones, Loretta Lynn, Jimmy Dean, Ernest Tubb, Andy Williams, Faron Young, Johnny Paycheck, Willie Nelson and David Frizzell.
- He won six Grammy and seven Tony awards during his career.
- He died of throat cancer on October 25, 1992.

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<sup>1</sup>Fisher Humphreys. *Thinking About God*. New Orleans: Insight Press, 1977, p. 170.



# **The Trail of the Church: Acts**

## **Lesson 4: Riding for the Brand**

The church is not an institution and it is not a location. It is not a building. The church is not a list of beliefs or even religious rituals in which one participates. The church began as a movement around a very simple message, the Gospel message - Jesus is God's Son, the Savior. He was crucified on a cross for the sins of all who will repent and believe in him. God raised Jesus from the dead and he is alive. The early Christians were witnesses to this fact. (Acts 5:30-32).

The witnesses to Jesus resurrection were so overjoyed with the good news that Jesus was alive, they literally flooded the streets of Jerusalem to proclaim this simple message. Within weeks, eight to ten thousand people became believers, more than ten percent of the population of Jerusalem at that time. But this new movement was anti-Roman and anti-Jewish (Acts 2:23). And quickly these new followers of Jesus were persecuted, beaten and even killed. They had been "branded," and were pursued by the Romans and the Jewish leaders for this new message that was causing havoc in Jerusalem. One of the leaders of the effort to eliminate the Jesus followers was a Jewish Pharisee, named Saul.

### **Blinded by the Light (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-16)**

Saul is introduced at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:57-58). While Saul did not throw any stones, he did approve of Stephen's murder (Acts 8:1). As the persecution intensified, Saul increased the crusade to stop these religious rebels. He secured legal documents to bring any believers in Jesus to Jerusalem and imprison them. Saul, a learned Jewish scholar, was convinced he was right, and these followers of Jesus were all wrong. Saul was going to stop this religious rebellion. Unknown to Saul at the time, his life would be miraculously and dramatically changed.

On the road to Damascus, the arrestor was arrested. A light from heaven flashed around Saul, and as he fell to the ground, Jesus said, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" Saul did not recognize the risen Jesus. "Who are you, Lord," Saul

said. It is important to note that Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting "me." Saul was trying to eliminate the followers of Jesus. What Jesus made clear to Saul was whatever Saul was trying to do to Jesus' followers was done to Jesus himself.

Saul would soon discover that Jesus had a plan to change his life. Saul, the enemy of Christ and his followers, would soon become one of the greatest leaders and most courageous missionaries of the early church. Saul who became the missionary, Paul, would take the Gospel to the Gentiles fulfilling the prophecy that the entire known world would hear the message of Jesus (Isa. 44:3; Acts 2:39; 9:15). Paul would be branded by the same brand as those he sought to destroy.

Jesus told Saul to go into Damascus and there he would be told of this great plan and mission. When Saul got up from the ground, he was blind. Saul was spiritually blind and now he was physically blind. For three days he was in Damascus, waiting, wondering, and praying.

### **New Purpose, New Trail Boss (Acts 9:10-19)**

One of the very people Saul came to arrest was appointed by God to bless Saul and restore his physical and spiritual sight. A disciple named Ananias lived in Damascus, and God appeared to him and said, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." (Acts 9:11-12).

Saul's reputation preceded him to Damascus. Ananias had heard of Saul and knew that he was an enemy of Jesus who had come to Damascus to arrest Jesus' followers (Acts 9:13-14). God assured Ananias of two things: (1) that God would open Saul's spiritual eyes, and would use Saul as his instrument to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles, to Kings and to Israel (Acts 9:15), and (2) that Ananias was God's chosen instrument to deliver the message to Saul and see the mighty works of God performed. Saul was going to have a new purpose and a new Trail Boss. Ananias was going to be the instrument through which God would work to accomplish this miracle.

Jesus calls his disciples to speak the truth of the Gospel into the hearts and lives of those who are spiritually blind, and to be an instrument of God's mighty acts and miracles. God uses his followers to bring salvation, healing and hope to even those whom we perceive as our enemies. We are responsible to be faithful to God's call. We are not the source of salvation and hope. We are the instruments that God uses to bring the good news. God prepares the hearts and lives of those to whom he sends us. We are responsible for being faithful in going and being instruments of the Lord. We are Christians today because someone in the church was faithful and obedient to the Lord. Without someone to share the simple message of Jesus, we would not have heard the Gospel. Imagine if Ananias would have disobeyed God and failed to go to Saul? Think of all the people who would have never heard the Gospel. When we are faithful and obedient, the Saul's of the world become Paul's, and multitudes come to know and believe in Jesus.

When Ananias came to house where Saul was staying, he entered, placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord - Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 9:17). Immediately, Saul's eyes were opened and he could see. He got up and was baptized, and regained his strength.

### **The Persecutor Becomes the Proclaimer (Acts 9:19-26)**

Paul who came to persecute Jesus' disciples became the proclaimer of the good news he once sought to silence. He stayed in Damascus, and instead of arresting people with papers of imprisonment, he freed the Jews living in Damascus with the power of the Gospel proving that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 9:22). The very ones who welcomed Saul as a Jewish teacher now sought to kill him. He went back to Jerusalem and there spoke boldly in the name of the Lord and debated with the Hellenistic Jews about Jesus (Acts 9:20-30).

### **The Contributions of Saul/Paul to the Church**

1. Paul is considered by many to be the greatest missionary of the church.

He started churches in Greece, Asia Minor and modern-day Europe. While the other apostles ministered to the church in Jerusalem, Paul started churches throughout the entire known world at that time.

2. Paul conducted at least three missionary journeys and possibly four where he started churches, taught Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of a Messiah, and developed the model for leadership in the church.
3. Paul is considered by many to be the author of thirteen of our New Testament books. These books represent almost half of the New Testament.
4. Paul is considered by many to have given to the church the theological and ecclesiastical foundations that are still in use in many local churches today.

### **Think and Apply:**

17. How would you define the church? What is the message of the church? How effective would you say the church is in sharing the message to our world?
18. How did you hear the good news? Where do you think the church would be today if the early followers of Jesus had shared the message like we do today?
19. Have you ever felt God leading you to share the good news with someone that is opposed to God and faith? What is our responsibility in sharing the good news?
20. What are two things you can do to be an instrument of the good news?

### **Uniqueness of Country Western Singer, Michael Martin Murphy**

- He was born in Oak Cliff, Texas on March 13, 1945. He grew up working on ranches around Dallas where he learned the cowboy culture.
- As a boy, he wrote cowboy poetry and learned to play the ukulele.
- He became known as the "Singing Cowboy Poet" and in 1975 recorded his first Gold album, *Blue Sky - Night Thunder* from which the song *Wildfire* became a No. 3 Pop hit.

- In 1982, *What's Forever For* became his first No. 1 Country hit, and the next year he was named "Best New Male Vocalist" by the Academy of Country Music.
- He has earned six wrangler awards from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
- He is a member of the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame and the Western Music Association Hall of Fame.