

JESUS LIFE AND WORK

SERMON OUTLINES

BY

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1. THE BIRTH OF JESUS

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came...to worship him (Matthew 2:1).

The logical beginning to a study of any person is his birth. When we read “Jesus was born” we are in the presence of mystery. He will be affirmed as Lord of his ancestors! How can the Lord of all become the son of one?

The practical beginning to a study of Jesus is the account of his birth. He stands before us on the pages of the New Testament as a man who served as teacher, healer and savior. He was divine yet fully and truly human, and who a person is and what a person does begins with his or her birth.

This particular portion of Scripture reminds us that

1. Jesus was born in a tiny place: “Bethlehem in Judea...”

Bethlehem is what we would call today “a spot on the map.” It was a little village near a large city. It reminds us of the irrelevance of size. Many a “one horse town” has produced citizens whose lives changed the map and altered the course of history.

Bethlehem reminds us also of the relevance of character. Where any person is from pales in significance beside what that person is and does. Men are a credit or discredit to their birthplace by how they live, by whether the world is better or worse for their having lived.

Jesus gave to tiny Bethlehem an eternal significance.

2. Jesus was born for a huge purpose: “Magi came...to worship him.”

Jesus came to unite the separated. The wise men were “from the east.” They were not Jews but Gentiles. They were not homeboys but strangers. They were among the first to worship Jesus, and the growing circle of his

worshippers would include people from every nation and tribe under heaven. They have been, through Jesus, reconciled to God and joined to one another to form the church.

Jesus came to receive our worship. He came as the God who is creator of all and savior of all who trust in him. By virtue of who he is and what he does, Jesus is worthy to receive the adoration of our hearts and the praise of our lips. His person and mission make him not less than the greatest of earth but infinitely more than the best of them. They deserve our respect but Jesus merits our worship. The difference is gigantic.

Historians of that day ignored Jesus, yet *no other birth has been so celebrated*. They have been forgotten. His birth is annually celebrated by millions.

Millions preceded him, millions have followed him, but *no other birth has been so significant*. He does for the world what no other has done, what no other can do. He reveals God to us and he reconciles us to God. He is more significant for humankind than all the kings, presidents, dictators, inventors, artisans who ever lived. He is more significant for you than parents, spouses, or friends; more important than instructors or employers or doctors or lawyers or pastors. What they can do for you ends at death. What Jesus can do for you is eternal.

2. THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52).

Luke gives us our only glimpse into Jesus' boyhood. He lifts the curtain once to allow us a quick glance at what biblical scholars have termed "the hidden years. It doesn't tell us much, but what it does tell us is filled with truth that we need to think about and act upon.

The quality of Jesus' boyhood is best seen in his manhood. We carry our childhood, for good or bad, into our adult lives. What formative years instilled we live out in our relationships and situations. In the meager passages of Scripture about his childhood we have

1. A glimpse into Jesus' self-consciousness.

We learn that he was aware of a unique relationship to God (v. 49). He was conscious of God as his Father in a unique way. He speaks as a child about the temple as "my Father's house," not "our" Father's house. As a man, when including his disciples with him, he would speak of "my Father and your Father...my God and your God" (John 20:17). He knew himself to be related to God in a way that none of us are or can be.

We have also in the childhood passages

2. A glimpse into Jesus' priority.

Where the NIV has "my Father's house," the KJV reads "my Father's business and another version reads "the things of my Father" (v. 49). Throughout his earthly life Jesus lived by a principle he affirms in prayer, "Father...not my will but yours be done," So devoted was he to the Father's will that he could say "My food is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

In the brief statements about his childhood we have too

3. A glimpse into Jesus' love.

The record tells us plainly that “they [his parents] did not understand him” (v. 50). Yet we are also informed that he “was obedient to them” (v. 51). Jesus defined sonship, not as privilege but as responsibility, and he equated love with obedience. Jesus said to his first followers, “If you love me you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). Obedience is the fruit of love and the proof of sonship.

When Jesus was baptized into his mission the Father spoke from heaven saying, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21-22). These words have been rightly understood as the Father’s approval of Jesus’ boyhood.

The implication of that approval for our past lives is significant. The Father cannot say that of our past for “all have sinned.” He is well-pleased with us only when we trust in the Son who was “obedient to death, even death on a cross,” for on that cross Jesus atoned for our sins.

Yes, the manhood of Jesus evolves from his boyhood and reveals that boyhood to be one of single-minded devotion to the Father’ will.

3. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

The baptism John administered was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Penitents came to him “confessing their sins.” The heart of his message was repentance, a turning from sin.

The nature of his message and mission explains the surprise that John registered upon seeing Jesus standing before him awaiting baptism.

1. John resisted. “John tried to deter him...” He regarded Jesus as an improper candidate for baptism. How closely John observed his cousin Jesus when they were growing to manhood we aren’t told, but he saw Jesus as a man with no sins to confess, no need to repent, and tried to talk him out of being baptized.

He also saw himself as an improper administrator of baptism where Jesus was concerned. Jesus should baptize him; he should not baptize Jesus. In the presence of the Holy One he was aware of his imperfect character and behavior. Jesus said a greater than John had not been born, yet John shrank steadily in comparison to Jesus--as do all men and women.

2. Jesus insisted: “Let it be so now...”

By his baptism, Jesus said, righteousness would be fulfilled. These words have provoked debate among scholars. At least it means that his baptism was what God, the righteous One, willed. The Father’s desire overrode John’s demurrals.

The baptism meant also that representation was established. Jesus was closely identifying with the sinners he came to save. His baptism was a foretoken of his atoning death on the cross. He took our place that we might share his place in the family of God.

3. The Father attested: “This is my Son... I am well pleased.”

As we have seen, the words of the Father constitute an endorsement of “the hidden years.” John was right in his moral assessment of Jesus. At no point in his life did Jesus rebel against the will of God. He always did what pleased the Father regardless of the cost to himself.

The Father’s words also make clear his acceptance of the mediator. He is well-pleased just when Jesus was identifying with us and taking our place, The Father’s good pleasure is to accept Jesus as our substitute, our savior. When we identify ourselves by faith with Jesus, God accepts us for Jesus’ sake.

God was pleased when Jesus came for us. Indeed, the Father initiated the Savior’s mission. As John wrote, “The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”

God is pleased when we come to Jesus. It is God’s will that none be lost, but to be saved we must trust in Jesus. As the author of *Hebrews* wrote, “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he ever lives to intercede for them” (7:25).

The best time to come is now.

4. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil Matthew 4:1).

“Then”--after his Father’s voice Jesus heard the voice of the tempter. High moments are invariably followed by low ones. That is why we must live by faith and not by feelings.

1. The Spirit leads to testing grounds.

The Spirit chose the time and place of Jesus’ temptation; not the devil. We who follow Jesus are in God’s hands, not in the tempter’s hands.

The Spirit led; he did not merely send from behind the lines. Where the Spirit leads the child of God can safely go.

2. The devil seizes weak moments for strong attacks.

In the case of Jesus, the devil confronted a hungry man. The severe temptations followed a lengthy fast. The devil at his strongest attacked Jesus at his weakest. Human weakness, as Paul learned, is completed by divine strength.

In the case of Jesus the devil confronted a lonely man. No support group was there to cheer Jesus on. There are times when we bear one another’s burdens, but there are times when we must bear our own without the help of friends.

3. The Bible is an adequate weapon for spiritual victory.

The word of God is “the sword of the Spirit.” Jesus skillfully deflected each temptation by a quotation from the Bible. The Spirit who leads us into combat also arms us for that combat. The man of God lives “on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

The word that triumphs is the word we “live on.” As Jesus taught, we live invincibly when we both hear and put into practice the words he speaks.

To hear is not enough; one can, like the devil, experience defeat while quoting the scriptures.

“Then the devil left him.” The devil leaves when he loses. However, he never goes far off or stays away long. He looks for “an opportune time” to renew the conflict, a Luke tells us.

A change of venue doesn’t require a change of weapon. Wherever the tempter confronts us, our victory is achieved by obedience to the word of God. There are words of God appropriate for every relationship and situation of our lives.

5. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

The risen Jesus possesses “all authority,” not just some authority or much authority or even most authority. That means all other authority, whoever exercises it, is permitted and limited. Jesus is “Lord of all.”

Authority is for doing, not for resting. It is power to achieve a purpose. The resurrection that signified his authority did not result in retirement. It led to his continuing ministry as our mediator and intercessor.

1. The extent of His authority.

The authority of Jesus is total. No person escapes that authority, and no part of any human life is excluded from that authority. We are accountable to him for all that we do, all that we say, all that we are, and all that we have.

The authority of Jesus is global. Even nations that have never heard of him are under his authority. That is why he can command his followers to “make disciples of all nations.” “The earth is the Lord’s...and all who live in it.”

The authority of Jesus is eternal. Death interrupts the reign of earthly rulers and ends their power over people. Having conquered death, Jesus has absolute authority. He has no peers and will have no successors. He shall reign for ever and ever.

2. The effect of His authority.

As our sovereign Jesus directs our mission. He told those first disciples where to go and what to do. Their mission was to extend his mission in the world. He will tell the last disciples where and how to serve

him. He will never abdicate his throne or surrender his sovereignty. If he cannot be your Lord he will not be your savior.

As our sovereign Jesus decides our destiny. All lives terminate at his judgment seat, and he alone decides our eternal residence. To his faithful followers he will say, "Come." To those who chose to continue through life as rebels against his authority he will say, "Depart." And anywhere away from him will be hell. We used to sing, "Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there." We can also say, "Where Jesus isn't, hell is."

6. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS (2)

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (Matthew 7:28-29).

The authority of Jesus was rooted in self-consciousness. He knew who he was--the Son of God in a sense that no other was and no other could be. He possessed and exercised the authority of his Father.

The authority of Jesus was expressed in teaching. His words, by which he clothed his ideas, were “spirit” and “life.” They “acquitted” and they “condemned.”

1. Jesus was aware of having unique authority.

He deepened and extended the law of God by his own authority. In addition to what the law declared, or in contradiction of what mistaken teachers of that law had said, Jesus said often, “But I tell you...” No prophet, no priest in Israel dared to claim that authority. They quoted the Lord: “This is what the Lord says,” and to that they could add their own “amen.” Jesus prefaced his sayings with the “amen.” He was more than a prophet speaking for God; he was God speaking to people--to us.

He made the practice of his teachings the test of enduring life. He closes this “Sermon on the Mount” by insisting that only those who hear and do his words will survive the storms of judgment. A hearer who is not also a doer is self-deceived and will self-destruct.

2. The authority of Jesus was demonstrated in deeds and words.

His amazing teaching was followed by an amazing healing. After concluding a summary of Jesus’ teachings Matthew records the cleansing of a leper by the touch and words of Jesus. This is followed by the healing of a centurion’s servant, and then the healing of a fevered woman. That leads to

the healing of “many.” He had authority over demons and disease and death.

His authority was beneficial but never superficial. Jesus never used his authority to show off or to amuse others. He had a purpose, a serious and significant purpose, in his mighty words and deeds. They were prompted by his compassion for the hurting and the lost.

The lordship of Jesus implies the servanthood of all others. Either they use their authority to further his purposes or they misuse them.

Our servanthood is defined and directed by his lordship. What we do must be done in his name and must reflect his love.

7. THE CALLING CHRIST

Jesus called them... (Matthew 4:21).

John the Baptizer is described “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’” (3:1-3). He had the high and holy task of telling Israel that the messiah’s coming was imminent.

Then Jesus came, and the people heard another and greater voice calling (4:12, 17). That voice still calls and is still heard. Jesus is the calling Christ.

1. Jesus calls the wicked to repentance: (v. 17).

“From that time on”--the time when imprisonment stilled the voice of the intrepid forerunner--“Jesus began to preach” (v. 17). His message was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

All who hear may come. Jesus calls persons from all nations and from all situations. He calls persons of all races and classes and vocations. He calls persons of all ages and stages of life. He calls in all places. His voice is heard in homes and offices and schools and prisons and hospitals and in the streets. From every sort of venue he has spoken and people have come.

None who come will be rejected. His call is sincere. His offer is genuine. He will accept and forgive every one who comes to him, who believes in him, who intends to follow him. He promises, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

2. Jesus calls workers to reassignments: (vv. 18-22).

The voice that called sinners to repentance was soon heard as the voice of a recruiter, summoning a task force to share his redemptive mission to the world. Among the first to be called, according to Matthew, were

Andrew and Peter and James and John. Later Matthew himself would be called.

Jesus calls workers, not loafers. These brothers and cousins were commercial fishermen, and that is hard work. Kingdom work is not easy. It takes the most and best anyone can bring to the task. Therefore, Jesus calls those who are at work, not at ease, and reassigns them to new careers and new efforts.

Jesus calls to discipleship at designated tasks. He dispatches them and uses them where and how he decides, not where and how they choose. “Come, follow me,” he said to this pair of brothers, “and I will make you fishers of men.” To Matthew he would assign the task of writing a gospel. No one can do everything but every one can do something. Jesus knows what we can do best. He will not waste a life committed to him.

The call of Jesus is always costly. These first disciples gave up their careers, gave up their kinfolds, and gave up their comfort zones to follow Jesus. His call is always costly: Someone or something must be left.

The call of Jesus is always rewarding. He gives to his followers more than they give up to serve him. Best of all, they are with him, and he is his own best reward. He gives himself to us and we can receive nothing greater.

8. THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him (John 2:11).

The essential ministry of Jesus when he went public was preaching and teaching. That ministry of spreading light and defeating darkness, however, was attended and reinforced by miracles of various kinds. In this passage John tells us of “the first of his miraculous signs.”

1. The venue for the miracle.

Jesus wrought this initial “sign” at a wedding feast “in Cana of Galilee...”

The tiny town tells us that Jesus is at work in places big and small, in one-horse towns as well as great, sprawling cities.

The wedding celebration tells us that Jesus takes an interest in all of life--in the occasions for joy and in the occasions for sorrow. He is Lord everywhere and everyday, not just a Sunday-at-church Lord.

2. The purpose of the miracle.

By turning water into wine Jesus “thus revealed his glory...”

The glory of Jesus was a visible glory. In the opening chapter of this Gospel John exclaims, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only” (1:14). His glory shone through all Jesus said and did.

John speaks also of a vacated glory. As Jesus neared the cross he prayed, “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (17:5, 24). This glory he laid aside to visit earth and redeem us. He wants those who beheld his glory on earth to see this glory in heaven.

The glory of Jesus was also a victorious glory. Anticipating the cross Jesus prayed, “Father, glorify your name.” “A voice from heaven” responded, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again” (12:28, 29). The death and resurrection of Jesus was a revelation of God’s glory in its triumph over sin and death.

3. The consequence of the miracle.

When Jesus wrought this first miracle “his disciples put their faith in him.”

Their faith was in him, not in his mother’s influence. She could only advise, “Do whatever he tells you.” That was the best advice ever given.

Their faith was in him, not in the servants’ obedience. Their brimful obedience of the servants brought brimful blessing to the wedding party, but Jesus and not the servants turned the water into wine.

Their faith was in him, not in their collective attendance. “Jesus and his disciples” attended the wedding feast, but only Jesus rescued the event by this miracle. We can miss the miracles by not meeting together, but we cannot compel the miracles by meeting together.

Miracles are Jesus’ responses to prayer and faith.

Prayer and faith are consequences of miracles.

9. THE PREACHING OF JESUS

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17).

The preaching of Jesus was linked to his temptation. Victory over the tempter is a prerequisite to effective preaching.

The preaching of Jesus was linked to John’s imprisonment. When one messenger was silenced another’s voice was heard. The word of God will always have someone to proclaim it.

1. Consider the place Jesus chose.

“Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum...” Nazareth was his hometown but there he was rudely rejected by a foolish crowd. He established his headquarters at Capernaum, a place where many Gentiles lived. The choice was wise for his ministry would encompass “all nations.”

2. Consider the prophecy Jesus fulfilled.

Isaiah had said that “in the future” the Lord will honor Galilee of the Gentiles,” and there people who had walked in darkness would behold “a great light.” The choice of Capernaum by Jesus was made “to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah...” After seven centuries prophecy flowered into history.

There was an Isaiah-context to John’s ministry. He was, as Matthew tells us, “spoken of through the prophet Isaiah.” There was also an Isaiah-context to Jesus’ ministry. He “lived in Capernaum” as fulfillment of “what was said through the prophet Isaiah.” John’s ministry emphasized the light that dawned for Israel; Jesus’ ministry was a light that dawned for all nations.

3. Consider the preaching Jesus did.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” is a summary statement of his preaching.

The kingdom was near for the king was present. Where Jesus is the kingdom of heaven is, for that kingdom has no geographical borders and no time limitations. God’s kingdom is essentially a sovereign power and Jesus exercises that power wherever he is and whatever he says and does.

The kingdom is near when the gospel is proclaimed. The gospel is a proclamation of what the king has done to save us from sin. At the same time it is an invitation for those who hear to enter the kingdom by yielding their lives to he king. Paul said that he and his colleagues preached “Jesus Christ as Lord.” To embrace the king is to enter the kingdom.

“Near” is not close enough. To be saved we must enter the kingdom.

Entrance demands repentance. Only those who are sorry for their sins will be saved from their sins.

10. THE FRIENDS OF JESUS

You are my friends if... (John 15:14).

Love is commanded by Jesus: “This is my command: Love each other.” In the same context he refers to this as “a new command” for he adds “as I have loved you.” His was a doing love, not just a saying love.

Fellowship is conditioned by Jesus: “You are my friends if you do what I command.” Failure to love each other forfeits his friendship, and that we cannot do without.

1. Jesus offers a friendship without limits.

Jesus was a friend to sinners (Matt. 11:19; Luke 15:2). In both places that was a complaint lodged against him by his enemies. What they intended as an insult was the truth for which every Christian adores him. He befriended us when we were rebels and freely forgave us when we repented.

Jesus was a friend to traitors (Matt. 26:50). When Judas approached him at the time of his arrest, Jesus called him, “My betrayer.” But when Judas reached him Jesus called him “Friend.” He loved even the one who sold him out for thirty pieces of silver. He has been betrayed for less, but still he loves.

Jesus was a friend to failures (John 21:5). The risen Jesus appeared to the disciples who “forsook him and fled” when he was arrested, and he “called out to them, ‘Friends...’” His friendship was greater than their failure. His first act, upon meeting with them after his resurrection, was to reinstate them as his partners in ministry (20:21).

2. Jesus offered a friendship within limits.

Friendship with Jesus is conditioned upon obedience, as our text makes clear. Those who reject his commands will lose his friendship. He is Lord, and his being determines his demands. He cannot relate to us as a

non-Lord. He calls the shots or we forfeit his presence and power in our lives.

Friendship with Jesus is expressed in shared knowledge (v. 15). “I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you.” He makes known to us the mind of the Father, the truth of a love that surpasses our sins and provides our salvation. Sharing that knowledge with those who need Jesus is our finest gesture of friendship.

Friendship with Jesus is sealed by answered prayer (v. 16). To those he called “my friends,” Jesus promised, “the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” That isn’t a blank check bearing his signature, but it does assure us of the resources we need to live as loving Christians. What he gives we will share and what we share he will bless.

The offer of friendship that Jesus extends forces upon us these probing questions:

Do we love Jesus?

Are we obeying Jesus?

Should we pray about this?

11. THE ENEMIES OF JESUS

The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (Luke 9:22).

The confession of Christ furnishes the context of this verse. Peter called him “the Christ of God,” i.e., the messiah whom God had sent to Israel.

The rejection of Christ supplies the text. His messianic claims would be rejected and he would be put to death. But to their surprise and for our salvation he would be raised from the dead.

1. Jesus’ chief enemies were the power elite.

Opposition to Jesus was led by “the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law,” the political and religious VIPs in Israel. Jesus was “the truth” but they had the clout. They had formed a picture in their minds of what the messiah would be and do and Jesus didn’t sit for that portrait. They prejudiced the people against him and persuaded the Romans to execute him.

His enemies were lovers of place, power and payoffs. They wanted to be admired, envied and feared by the people. They would brook no interference with their control; they would tolerate no threat to their prestige and perks. Jesus was their polar opposite and they determined to rid the nation of him.

His enemies hated him because they could neither subdue nor silence him. With courage and candor he exposed their pretensions and hypocrisy. He came to offer salvation to them; they responded by imposing suffering upon him.

2. Jesus’ power vastly exceeded that of his enemies.

They had political and social power. They had thought-control and life-directing power. He had the power of God and proved invincible.

His power was reflected in his title. “Son of Man” was more than a way of saying “man.” Jewish minds would be transported to the vision of Daniel in which the “Son of Man” received an everlasting kingdom from “the Ancient of Days.” The eternal Father bestowed upon Jesus an eternal kingdom.

His power was manifested in his miracles. He healed the sick and raised the dead. He stilled the storms and commanded the demons. He fed the hungry and preached to the poor. These were the activities of the messiah that were prophesied in the Scriptures and performed by the Spirit.

His power was demonstrated in his resurrection. Though “he must be killed” he would be “raised to life” on the third day. In the minds of his enemies his death would be an elimination of trouble, but in the purpose of his Father his death would be an atonement for sin. The resurrection, as Paul wrote, powerfully declared Jesus to be the Son of God. He who conquered death has power adequate for whatever he wills to do.

This portion of John’s Gospel has important lessons for us.

Confession of Christ must be followed by commitment to Christ.

To reject him is to become his enemy and leads to self-destruction.

12. THE ARREST OF JESUS

The men seized Jesus and arrested him (Mark 14:46).

Men could arrest God's Son, but only because the Son consented to their insulting actions. He could have summoned legions of angels to defend him and foil them, but he chose to be arrested, tried, and executed because that was part of his mission to earth.

While evil and misguided men could arrest God's Son, they could not arrest God's purpose. They worked with such freedom as God allows his human creatures, but God was in charge and unwittingly they were helping to fulfill his purpose. We will survey the actors in this scene of the drama.

1. **The betrayer:** "Judas...appeared..."

We are told who he was: "one of the twelve." He had belonged to the inner circle of Jesus' followers. He had been ringside at nearly every message and miracle. He traveled, ate, drank, slept and conversed with Jesus and the apostles who would proclaim Jesus to the world. What immense privileges he had--and yet he betrayed Jesus for "chump change."

We are not told why he did it, but we can infer the main reason. Judas never called Jesus "Lord." "Rabbi"--teacher--was his highest title. Life that is not brought under the lordship of Jesus is capable of the grossest sins and crimes.

2. **The protector:** "one of those standing by drew his sword and struck..."

Peter attempted a defense of Jesus with swordplay. He was a fisherman, not a swordsman. His intention was good but his aim was bad. He intended to take a life and only got an ear--which Jesus promptly restored, as Luke informs us in his Gospel.

We need Jesus' protection; he doesn't need ours. He could have evaded arrest by walking away under the Father's protection. He could have destroyed the betrayer and the mob at will. His power was adequate for his escape, but he chose to undergo the cruel abuse for our sakes.

2. **The deserters:** “everyone deserted him and fled.”

In threatening situations adrenalin prepares us for fight or flight, and these disciples had a sudden, huge inrush of adrenalin. With fighting forbidden, flight seemed their only option, and they scurried away in panic, fearful for their own lives. The risen Jesus would find them huddled in shame and fear behind closed doors. When he most needed them they were conspicuous for their absence. When they most needed him he embraced torture and death to provide for their salvation from sin and reconciliation to God. He never deserts even those who desert him.

The false arrest led to miscarried justice. That should teach us that sin cannot solve problems; it only worsens them. Love triumphed over hatred and weakness triumphed over force as the arrested and crucified Jesus finished the work the Father gave him to do.

13. THE SENTENCING OF JESUS

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified (John 19:16).

“Finally” implies deliberation. Following lengthy conversations, Pilate was convinced of Jesus’ innocence. His actions were not impulsive but calculated. He could not plead ignorance for he was not rushed to judgment. He deliberately chose to condemn a man he knew to be innocent.

“Finally” releases consequences. Once a decision is reached and an action is taken, consequences are set in motion. We choose our conduct; we can’t choose their consequences. Ultimately, Pilate’s choice destroyed him, not Jesus.

1. The cruelty of the soldiers: (vv. 1-3).

The merciless soldiers struck Jesus. They wanted him to hurt and bleed. They did it just because they could. Worst of all, they enjoyed the cruel abuse of the helpless prisoner.

The heartless soldiers mocked Jesus, which proved they enjoyed his misery. They added insult to injury, viciously demonstrating the fact that man’s sin is God’s pain.

2. The cowardice of Pilate: (vv. 3-16).

Pilate’s compromise was weak and pathetic. He “tried to set Jesus free,” and hoped a flogging would satisfy the blood-thirst of Jesus’ enemies.

His contempt for those who put him in this dilemma is shown by the title he gave Jesus--“your king.” He hated the mob but he feared them, especially when they painted Jesus as a rebel against Caesar.

Pilate’s collapse is one of the saddest events in history. Before he would risk disfavor with Caesar he would deliberately impose a death sentence upon Jesus. “Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified,” and in so doing he handed over his conscience, his integrity and his future,

3. The composure of Jesus: (vv. 8-11).

Through all of this Jesus remained dignified, courageous and strangely unresisting.

He was silent when tortured. Most prisoners would have screamed curses or begged for mercy.

He was confident when threatened. When Pilate boasted of having life or death power over him, Jesus told him that he could only exercise the power that was given to him “from above.” Jesus knew that the Father and not the governor was really in charge.

He was unprotesting when sentenced. He did not rage, he did not plead, and he did not threaten. He “endured the cross, scorning its shame,” and accepting it all as the way to deliver us from our sins.

All this tells us that our world is deeply and cruelly evil.

All this tells us that our God is invincibly and persistently good.

14. THE DEATH OF JESUS (1)

So this is what the soldiers did (John 19:24).

The soldiers were a small squad with a huge assignment. They were to carry out the cowardly sentence imposed by Pilate. While he washed his hands in pretended innocence, they dirtied their hands by their mistreatment of Jesus. They shared a noble occupation and a tragic distortion.

1. They tortured a helpless prisoner (vv. 1-3).

This was not demanded by the legal proceedings. It was their way of asserting their power and getting their kicks. The agony of Jesus became the amusement of the soldiers. A crown of thorns, a purple robe and mocking salutes had them laughing it up as they struck in derision the already flogged victim. This was the nadir of coarseness, contempt and cruelty.

2. They crucified an innocent victim (vv. 16-18).

They did not believe that this pale and silent rabbi was a threat to the empire they represented. Obedience to men became defiance of God. They could plead, "We had to obey orders." When Caesar clashes with God, to honor Caesar and defy God is a route to spiritual suicide. What they excused as duty God will judge as murder.

3. They profited from miscarried justice (vv. 23-24).

At the foot of his cross the soldiers divided the clothes of Jesus and then gambled for his seamless robe. Here theft paraded as legal confiscation. This has been a favorite strategy of greedy public officials throughout history. The vineyards of earth's Nabobs are subject to the plunder of earth's Jezebel's. Legal loopholes allow a court-protected robbery.

4. They fulfilled some ancient scriptures (vv. 24, 36-37).

“These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled.”
Prophecy flowered into history as Jesus was tried, condemned, tortured and killed.

God's good purpose was fulfilled through man's evil deeds. He makes even the wrath of men a servant of his purpose.

This exalts his loving power but it doesn't excuse their wicked actions. Their fulfillment of scriptures was freely done, not coerced. That God intended for good what they intended for evil does not alter the moral character of their deeds.

"What the soldiers did" they will answer for.

What we do we will answer for.

“What will you do with Jesus?” That remains the biggest question Pilate or the soldiers ever faced. It is the most important question any of us ever face.

15. THE DEATH OF JESUS (2)

Pilate handed him over.... Pilate had a notice prepared... (John 19:16, 19).

It was Pilate's misfortune to be Rome's man in Israel at the time Jesus was arrested. He had the awful responsibility of trying Jesus, made a coward's botch of the situation, and doubtless spent the rest of his life regretting his unwanted involvement in the death of Jesus. Two things stand out in today's passage of Scripture.

1. **Pilate's defensive injustice:** (vv. 12-16).

He was irresolute. Fear produced his indecision. He knew Jesus was innocent and wanted to release him. He tried several ruses to achieve that but was foiled by the crowd that kept shouting, "Crucify him! Pilate was afraid to let him go and then face an angry Caesar, whom the crowd hypocritically claimed as their king.

If fear produced his indecision, it also produced his decision. He consented to a guilty verdict and a death sentence and handed Jesus over to a squad of brutal soldiers for execution. His fear of losing face, of losing favor with Caesar, of losing his cushy job and high-level income compelled him to butcher his conscience and issue a fatal sentence.

3. **Pilate's offensive notice:** (vv. 19-22).

He had a placard fastened to the cross of Christ naming him as "the king of the Jews."

Pilate intentionally lied. He lied to himself and lied to the people, and his lies sprang not from ignorance but from deliberate efforts to keep the peace and to keep his place at any cost. He treated Jesus at last like a common criminal worthy of the worst form of death Rome could mete out, all the while knowing his own and the crowd's hypocrisy. "What I have

written,” he said, “I have written.” He could have issued a single, simple order and the offensive placard would have been instantly removed from the cross.

Pilate unintentionally told the truth. He ordered the sign to read “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” He didn’t believe for a moment that Jesus was their king. The mob had turned Pilate into a cornered rat and this was his way of venting his hatred and rage.

They had said, “We have no king but Caesar.” That silenced Pilate’s attempt to spare Jesus from death. He used the placard to strike back at them. But it was the truth; Jesus is king of the Jews and the Gentiles. He is the king of all earthly kings. He alone has a forever kingdom. Caesar, Pilate, the Jewish leaders, none of them believed that Jesus was king, but the truth was hung on the cross and would be bill-boarded by the resurrection.

“What I have written, I have written.” That is true of our irreversible records of sin.

“What I have written, I have written.” That is also true of God’s amazing promises of forgiveness to sinners. .

16. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS (1)

Come and see.... Go and tell.... (Matthew 28:6, 7, 10).

Sorrowing women came to the tomb of Jesus. Both were named Mary, which is incidental. Both revered Jesus, which is essential. They grieved his death and came “to look at the tomb.” Sometimes all you can do in a situation is look and weep. It’s good to have a friend who shares your sorrow.

The sorrowing women met a comforting messenger--“an angel of the Lord.” His message was the greatest of news: “I know you are looking for Jesus ...He is not here, he has risen, just as he said...”

1. The angel’s invitation.

To the startled women the angel said, "Come and see the place where he lay."

They examined the evidence for his resurrection. Those who deny the resurrection make little of the empty tomb. The Gospels make much of it. All attempts to explain it away are weak and foolish. The only logical explanation of the empty tomb is the risen Christ.

Having examined the evidence they soon encountered the reality. “Jesus met them” as they ran from the tomb. They did the one thing all should do--"They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.” Their questions were suspended and their fears were dissolved as they obeyed their hearts’ impulses and worshiped. “Who” was more important than “how.” They didn’t need theory or theology; they needed Jesus who is greater than our thoughts but welcomes our devotion.

2. The angel’s commission.

Having invited them to “Come and see,” the angel now commands them to "Go and tell..." The worshipers were to become witnesses.

Their starting point was “his disciples.” Later they would tell others, many others, for the news was too good to wrap in silence and keep to themselves. At this point those who most needed the good news were his disciples, afraid for their lives and ashamed of their failures.

The starting point soon yielded the supportive presence: “Suddenly Jesus met them.” He repeated the angel’s commission / command: “Go and tell my brothers...” Knowing that he was alive, knowing that he could meet them at any point he chose, the women hastened with inner reinforcement that shrank their fear and enlarged their joy.

Proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus is a continuing task. It is still the most needed message anyone can transmit or receive. Our response to the news determines our character and destiny.

The continuing task created a passing torch. First to carry the news was the angel, and then the women, and then the disciples--and now us. Nothing else we do in life is more important than bearing witness to Jesus as the living savior and Lord.

17. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS (2)

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it... The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men (Matthew 28:2-4).

The words translated "earthquake" and "shook" have a common root. They describe the effect of Jesus' resurrection upon nature and upon human nature.

1. The quaking ground.

"A violent earthquake" shook the garden when "an angel of the Lord" arrived from heaven to "roll back the stone" that sealed the borrowed tomb in which the dead body of Jesus had been hastily but reverently laid to rest (v. 2).

Sleep was Jesus' metaphor of choice for death. "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep," he said, and would not say, "Lazarus is dead" until the misunderstanding of his disciples forced him to forsake the metaphor. Jesus preferred "sleep" because sleep implies awakening and family reunion.

When a sleeper awakes and leaves the bed it shakes. That's what happened when Jesus forsook the tomb as the conqueror of death.

2. The quaking guard.

They had been given an impossible mission (27:62-66). They were to secure the tomb of Jesus. Rome didn't have enough soldiers throughout the entire empire to keep the tomb from quaking and being vacated by Jesus.

They expressed a rational fear (vv. 2-4). They shook as did the earth. In the face of a force they could neither understand nor overcome they became terrified. These were grizzled veterans, not ROTC students, but

they had never witnessed anything so frightening as an angel and a resurrected corpse.

They circulated a damning lie (vv. 11-15). They took a bribe to spread the lie that while they slept on duty his disciples had removed and hidden the corpse.

The truth that saves is the affirmation of Jesus' resurrection.

The lie that condemns is any denial of Jesus' resurrection.

18. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS (3)

Jesus came to them and said.... I am with you always...(Matthew 28:18, 20).

"Always" embraces us. His promise extends to "the very end of the age," which has not yet occurred. The first to hear the promise are long since dead. He was speaking to assign and to assure all his disciples throughout this age. His "you" includes us. He is with us always.

1. Jesus is with us as a commander.

He told these disciples where to go and what to do. He stationed himself, in the person of his Holy Spirit, at the control center of their lives.

He is now our commander. We call him Lord and we dare not let that become an empty title. He is Lord and we are servants. We cannot "take charge of our lives" as the world keeps telling us to do. Instead, we must yield our wills to his in every situation of our lives. If we cease to be servants we become rebels, and that swaps the way of life for the way of death.

2. Jesus is with us as a commissioner.

He calls us to be disciples--a learning process. We are to sit at his feet, like Mary of old, and learn from him how to live and work for him.

He commissions us to make disciples--a teaching process. We are to win others to him and share with them what we have learned from him. Everyone can teach something about him for everyone has learned something about him. All cannot teach the same measure of truth with the same degree of skill, but what we have received we can transmit.

3. He is with us as a companion.

He goes with whom he sends. He is not a commander who remains behind the lines of conflict. He is with his troops on the front lines and under the enemy fire. In all our afflictions he is afflicted.

His presence assures our success. We will not finally report “mission accomplished” because we are smart enough or strong enough or brave enough to insure our success. He with us is the force and reinforcement necessary to complete the task he assigns.

Learn from this magnificent closing paragraph of Matthew’s Gospel these essential lessons:

Jesus defines the mission.

Jesus empowers the mission.

Jesus accompanies the mission.

19. THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

...he was taken up... (Acts 1:9).

Only Luke records the ascension. There were other witnesses, even eye-witnesses, but the one written report we have we owe to Luke.

Only the Father determined the schedule. Jesus declared that the times and dates of the events in his ministry are set by the Father's authority. He does not always tell us when epochal events will occur, only that they will occur.

1. Jesus appeared to his disciples.

Verse 3 tells us that "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God."

He appeared to convince them by "infallible proofs" that he was alive. They were slow to believe for his conquest of death seemed too good to be true. To accommodate their weak faith he came to them, talked to them, and even shared meals with them.

He appeared to command them. As Lord he ordered them to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. They had a message to preach but needed power to proclaim it with courage and with conviction.

2. Jesus disappeared from his disciples.

Verse 9 tells us that "he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

He disappeared after assigning a task, and a challenging task it was-- to be his witnesses "to the ends of the earth." These men, who were proven failures, were given a global responsibility. It must have seemed and sounded like "mission impossible."

He disappeared after promising a power. Their own resources were small and inadequate, but Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” Only the king can effectively proclaim his kingdom, and the Spirit who powered his ministry would be the power of their ministry.

3. Jesus will reappear to his disciples.

Verse 11 tells us that “two men dressed in white” declared, “This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

He is coming back in the same way--personally, visibly and bodily. He will be the “same Jesus.”

He is coming back with a different word. He will be speaking then, not as the world’s savior but as the world’s judge. Those who reject his words now cannot escape his words then. Those who have believed his words will greet his return with joy and in peace.

We live with the same responsibility that those first disciples faced. We look for the same return that inspired them to advance that awesome mission.

20. JESUS COMES TO OUR TOWN

For the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19: 10).

"Jesus entered Jericho," the place of the curse. Every city is under the curse of sin and death. Jesus came to bless what sin had cursed.

No man was more cursed than Zacchaeus. As a Jew who collected taxes for Rome he was despised as a traitor to Israel.

Jesus, the lover of the hated and friend of the friendless, came "to seek and to save what was lost" (v. 10).

1. The title Jesus assumed: "Son of Man."

Neither his disciples nor his enemies called him that; he called himself that. The title has its roots in the Old Testament. It was used as a way of saying mankind (Ps. 8:4); as God's way of addressing Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:1); and of a ruler in Daniel's vision who received from God "an everlasting dominion" (Dan. 7:13-14). A man, a prophet, a divinely ordained ruler--these tributaries emptied into that ocean of grace and glory who was Jesus.

Jesus came as man, as a prophet and as a king. This was the Christ who passed through Jericho and passes through our town, offering himself as a savior and friend.

2. The mission Jesus pursued: "I must stay at your house today."

Jesus' mission took him to odd places and brought him to strange people. To a despised tax-collector--not to the mayor, the chief of police, a popular politician or a leading businessman--Jesus spoke, inviting himself to lodge overnight. And he didn't merely ask, he ordered: "I must stay at your house today."

Our word "must" translates a tiny Greek word with a huge meaning. Luke uses it to express a necessity created by the Father's will for the Son's

life. Jesus was powerfully conscious of being sent on a mission from the Father. He was consumed with a passion to please the One who sent Him. The mission mattered more than life itself. The mission created the must.

3. The purpose Jesus expressed: "...to seek and to save..."

That was what took him through Jericho and brings him to our town. He didn't choose Zacchaeus because of what the tax collector had; he chose him because of what the tax collector needed--"salvation." He comes to us, not to be enriched by us, but to invest our poor lives with the greatest of all treasures, God's forgiving and renewing grace. He comes to seek and to save the lost.

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through." When Jesus comes, opportunity arrives, but opportunity is dynamic, not static. We must seize it when it comes. And when opportunity is seized, salvation comes--and it comes to stay.

The Son of Man is seeking you today. Let him save you. As did the tax collector in this old story, welcome Jesus gladly!