

Getting to know your Bible – Part 5

Getting To Know Your Bible

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Sunday, February 4, 2024

Crossroads Ministries

301 S. 8th Street

Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, tonight, thank you so much. In 2 Timothy 1:7 it says you have not given us the spirit of fear but a power and love and of a sound mind. So God, I pray today That as we open your word, as we study it, Lord, as we look at it somewhat from a macro perspective, God, would you instill in us the power of your word, the love of your word and, God, would you give us a sound mind so that we might live it out? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tonight, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of John chapter 21. As you turn to John 21, if you're new with us either in person or online as far as Sunday nights are concerned, allow me to kind of give you a little backdrop or backstory to why we are where we are tonight. Collectively as a church body, I'm sure many of you are aware that the entirety of this calendar year, there's a very strategic and specific focus on the Word of God. Not just a reading the Word of God, understanding the Word of God, but actually taking the words of God and not only applying them to our lives, but meditating upon them, memorizing them, and hiding them in our heart. Again, I did, so this morning, a little update. We're down to about 140 chapters that are left for us to have the totality of scripture reserved. Now, let me remind you, those of you who have not yet signed up to be a part of that, let me go ahead and squash some of the fears. We're not going to test you, okay? We're never going to pull you aside on the spot and say, okay, what is your chapter? Recite it now, all right? We're not going to do that. We're never going to ask you publicly to proclaim it as far as the worship service is concerned. However, one thing I would make each and every one of us aware of, number one, I cannot think of one single bad reason for memorizing scripture no matter which chapter it is, and number two, in the event that our culture continues the path that it is, we may find a day where we have to have the chapter you've memorized because it is inaccessible and unavailable in any other capacity. With that being said, on Sunday nights, at least for these foreseeable weeks, we're kind of taking a 30,000 foot view of the Bible, the respective, what we might call, sections thereof. We began with just kind of an overview of scripture, then we talked about the Torah, the Pentateuch, the first five books. We talked about the writings last week. We talked about the prophets. And today, we're entering into that section where most of us are somewhat comfortable, the New Testament. If we'd be honest with ourselves, this is the section of the Bible that we feel

the most comfortability with. Tonight, we're going to deal with what we know is the respective four gospels of the Bible. But I want to begin by reading John chapter 21 verse 25.

Before I read, one thing to note is this, and we're not going to get necessarily very academic tonight, but of all the four gospels, it is without question that the gospel of John was the latest of the four. Meaning Matthew, Mark, and Luke were already circulating among the families of faith prior to John's inspiration and existence. So when I read verse 25, I want you to understand of all the gospels, I know it's the last verse of the four gospels, but it really is the last verse. It says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Now let me put that in a very contemporary illustration. You and I both know that one of the most momentous world events, one of the most significant American events, is what we know as the Civil War, okay? That war was so impactful that still to this day, on average, a book a day is published regarding what we know as the Civil War. Can you imagine just the room that would be necessary to contain the books on just that one event in world and American history and yet here it says, if we took everything that Jesus said, if we took everything that he did, we actually wrote it down, I suppose the whole libraries of the world could not contain it.

Now what's also fascinating is this was a time period where the Library of Alexandria was still in existence, one of the world's largest known libraries in the history of the world. And so why is that important? When we study the four gospels, the gospels themselves do not claim to tell us everything but they do claim to tell us what we need to know. So for example, within the four gospels, Jesus communicates 32 parables. Could he have told more? Absolutely. There's probably more stories he told. We are told of the miracles he performed. Are there miracles he performed that are not recorded? Most likely there are. We know for a fact that there were messages and there were lessons that he taught, particularly the disciples, because according to the end of the gospels and the beginning of the book of Acts, for 40 days he taught them, and the book of Acts gives us about a four to five verse summary of what took place. And so when we come to the gospels, do not expect them to be completely exhaustive but you can expect them to be complete in what is needed on our behalf.

So by simple definition, the word gospel means good tidings or good news. Now this is important on many reasons. Obviously, when we read the end of each of the respective gospels with the resurrection, that is good news for us. However, if you think about it, from the time we left off last week, it's been 430 years. When the Lord quit or ceased speaking through and to the prophets and we pick up the gospel count, it was 430 years from the time of the last prophet until the incarnation, what we know as the Christmas story, and because none of the gospels were given till the resurrection of Jesus, it is literally almost 500 years from the last writing of the Old Testament to the first writing of the New Testament. So it is good news, not only about the resurrection, but it is good news that the Lord has and has spoken to his people again. The four gospels record an elaborate account of the ancestry, birth, life, ministry, death, and the resurrection of Jesus

Christ. Though individually selective, as I mentioned, they offer a complete picture, not a biographical one. Now just out of incidence, what we know as the gospel of Luke is the only one of the four that even claims to put the story in chronological order. None of the others claim to put in chronological order. In fact, most of them are very thematically ordered, even though they are somewhat chronologically conducive.

So let's talk about the approach of the gospels. This is one of my favorite aspects about the gospels, and then we'll deal with them individually in respect. Each gospel writer offers a perspective of Jesus that is unique. It should be noted all four gospels contain with themselves an underlying theme or motif concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. This quadruple unified declaration of the person and work of Jesus declares emphatically that the heart of Jesus' mission on earth was, quote, to seek and to save that which was lost. Now before we get to the four approaches of the four respective gospels, I want to deal with a necessary topic, and that is the lack of congruency yet the symbiotic knowledge of what we see here. We have Matthew, we have Mark, we have Luke, and we have John. And by the way, just as an aside, those of you who have gotten in the weeds on this subject matter, if you've studied it, there were other gospels. There are gospels that are attributed to Thomas. There's one gospel attributed to Nicodemus. But what we know is that the Spirit of God inspired four of them and that the church of God validated these four.

So Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, this is kind of a classic illustration that I want to give you tonight. I'm not trying to be gruesome. I'm just trying to give you an illustration that is most fitting for the subject matter. I want you to imagine that in any respective intersection, there was a car wreck. Okay, just picture it in your mind. There's a car wreck in the intersection and that there are four individuals on each four respective sides of the intersection that observed that accident. Now, you know, even today, if that story were to take place and law enforcement were to show up and they were begin to take an account of the event therein, that all the four individuals would somewhat tell the same story, but from a different perspective. One of them may have actually seen the directions of the respective vehicles before they collided. One of them may have actually heard more than they saw. There's a whole lot of factors there. But at the end of the day, whoever's writing out the police report takes the respective testimonies, paints one big picture, and there it is filed, and there it is.

Now when it comes to the gospels, there could not be four more unique and distinct personalities that the Lord could have used. I want to look at these men from whom they were as an individual before we look at the content of the respective gospels. Let's begin with Matthew. When it comes to Matthew, in today's context, he would be a CPA. Now, I'm not being disparaging against CPAs because the Bible says he was a tax collector. CPAs don't collect tax. They just tell you how much you gotta pay. But nonetheless, his role, his responsibility in his respective culture, you think about somebody who, you know, it's, I know double ledger accounting as we know it wasn't created technically at that time, but CPAs, one of the jokes, and if you are one, I don't mean this offensive, one of the jokes is you're bean counters. Okay, you make sure that every bean is in the right slot at the right place and if the numbers don't add up, you stay up until they do add up.

One of my best friends in the whole world is the CPA and he can spend more time chasing down a nickel, right, because that's how God wired them. They are into details. They are into specifics and if it doesn't add up you get more information until it does add up.

That was Matthew. Now, Mark, boy, we don't really specifically know who this guy is, but I think I do. The gospel of Mark, chapter 15, it says that in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Judas came and the 500 soldiers with the staves and such, and they apprehended him and they took him to the trial that was illegal in every aspect, it says that there was a young man in the garden, and that young man, you ready for this, that young man fled naked on foot. You know, he's actually the second naked person that God spoke of in the Bible. Do you know the first one was Isaiah? Isaiah chapter 20, God tells the prophet, "Their hearts are so hardened, preach naked for three years and nobody will listen to you." That's one of those Bible facts you didn't know that was there. Nonetheless, we make our way to Mark. He's a young man. Now, I guess because I'm living this, when it comes to young men, don't expect details. Expect all kinds of inflammatory, descriptive language, but don't expect it to be as far as the beans are concerned, necessarily lined up, and don't expect it to be in order. Have you ever listened to a teenager tell a story? I mean, it's all over the place, right? But at the end of the day, you kind of take a deep breath and go, I think I understand, right?

Then there's Luke. According to Colossians chapter 4, Luke was a doctor. Now you think accountants are into specifics. I mean doctors, I mean they're going to get into the details. And we're going to talk about this in a moment, but the gospel of Luke itself, contains the most elaborate description and understanding of what we know as the virgin birth, a doctor would be interested in that but secondly, half of its material is regarding the crucifixion, which was a very physical event. But when you think about doctors, I mean, doctors are so, they're so gifted at seeing the big picture that this medicine's connected to that medicine and this procedure leads to that, and so even though an accountant may get into the beans of making sure all the slots, a doctor sees things from a very, when I say fleshly perspective, how do these numbers, how do these details impact you as a person. If you've ever seen these reports they get when you draw blood, there's numbers everywhere. What does the doctor do? The doctor takes all those numbers and explains, "Well, because of this, we've got to change your diet. Well, because of this, we've got to alter this." That's kind of the role they play.

And then there's John. John by trade was a fisherman. That's not good or bad, but in respect to the gospels, John was the beloved disciple. In fact, Jesus, mentions in John 21 that he actually laid on Jesus' breast. He was probably the closest to him as far as an interpersonal relationship, and there is great, shall we say, understanding that even though Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, John was a distant relative of Jesus. So in other words, he was connected to the family. He had a relationship that went beyond getting called from the tax collector's desk, or quote, being naked in the Garden of Gethsemane.

What does that mean? I want you to imagine the same scene. You've got a wreck in an intersection and on one corner, you have a CPA. On the other corner you have a teenager,

probably on their phone, but you've got a teenager on the other corner. One corner you've got a medical physician, a doctor, a surgeon. And on the fourth corner you have somebody who's actually related to somebody that was in the wreck. Now do you understand why the gospels have such a different feel? When it comes to Matthew, when Jesus heals somebody, he may not give us the names, but he's gonna tell us exactly how many were healed. He's gonna tell us exactly how many were there. For example, in the gospel of Mark, this famous story about Bartimaeus being healed of his blindness. In Mark, I mean the teenager, he talks about how he left his cloak, which is a great story because how's a blind man gonna go back and get his coat if he can't see? You know what Matthew says? Matthew doesn't give his name. Matthew says there were two of them that Jesus healed. And so you have the details of the accountant with a somewhat flamboyance of the teenager. The accountant's gonna tell us exactly how many people were in the vehicle, how fast the vehicle was going, and probably the angle of which they collided. The teenager, if you can get him off his phone, he's probably got it on YouTube. He's already recorded it. He said, "Hey, look at this, I got it." And he's gonna talk about how loud the crowd was, he's gonna talk about how many people scattered, and probably not be able to give you a whole lot more details than that, except that, wow, he's never seen anything like this before. Then there's the doctor. The doctor probably can't tell you the color of the cars, probably can't tell you the speed they were traveling, but he can tell you every possible injury that somebody might have suffered because of what has taken place. Then there's that fourth character whom we know as John. He's not a trained physician. He's not a CPA. He's not young at heart or age. But one of those individuals is his cousin and he's going to talk about that cousin, and he's going to talk about what this means to their family, and he's going to discuss how this is going to impact the generations to come, and he may not even mention anybody else that was involved, much less the specific.

So that's kind of a contemporary picture of what we have when it comes to the gospel. So let's begin with Matthew. This is the CPA. This is the detail-oriented. This is the one that begins, you guessed it, with a genealogy. I mean, is there a chapter in the New Testament more Old Testament than Matthew 1? So and so beget, so and so that beget, so and so that beget, so and so. Now something to know about the genealogy of Matthew, not only does our CPA tell us how we got to where we are, but it's very different than any other genealogy in the Old Testament. For one, it is the first genealogy in the Bible that contains a woman. That's right. All the Old Testament genealogies are only the names of men. The second thing that's different is this, in the Old Testament, it says that so and so lived X number of years, had these children, and he died. In Matthew chapter 1, nobody's ever mentioned as dying. Now we know they physically died, but we see women in the lineage, we see Gentiles in the genealogy, and nobody is mentioned as dying.

It actually begins the book of the generations of David and then of Abraham. Why is that important? This is the key to Matthew, this is a CPA who makes sure everything is lined up in the right order and in the right position. David came after Abraham so why would David be mentioned first? Because what we know as the gospel of Matthew sees Jesus as the fulfillment and the embodiment of the anticipated Messiah. He is the King of Jews.

He is Immanuel. He is the Christ. He uniquely portrays Jesus as the one who fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies.

And one of the statements, one of the phrases that you will see all through the gospel of Matthew, that you will see in none of the other gospels, is what this phrase called the kingdom of heaven. Now that's another discussion for another time because in the other gospels we see a phrase, the kingdom of God. But the kingdom of heaven is this picture, it's this illustration of a king upon his throne who is reigning with authority and with power. That is why the connection to David. That's why the connection to Abraham. That's why the genealogy in chapter 1. This is the King that has come among us who will one day rule over us and it is the gospel of Matthew that spends more time and more attention on what we know as the second coming than any other of the gospels. And that makes perfect sense because if Matthew is showing Jesus as the fulfillment of the King and the reigning Messiah, it is what we know as the second coming where Christ comes and he will reign. For example, Mark chapter 13, second coming. Luke chapter 21, second coming. Matthew takes chapter 24 and 25 to discuss those respective subjects in his gospel.

So that's Matthew. Now there's Mark. Mark primarily portrays Jesus as a suffering servant. He came to serve and not to be served according to Mark chapter 10 verse 44 and 45. Mark's approach, his fast pace. I mentioned he's a young man, right? One of the most famous scenes in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is what we know as the temptation. In Matthew and in Luke, they take up 12 and 14 verses respectively. In Mark, two, that's it. In fact, read Mark's account of the temptation. He went in the wilderness, he came out, all's good. That's it. That's the whole story, right? In fact, there is a phrase that is used all throughout the gospel of Mark, 16 times in 16 chapters, "and immediately, and immediately, and immediately." Have you ever noticed that when a young person is passionately communicating a story, they will have a phrase or a series of words that they overly repeat while they're telling the story, right? Now hold on to those words, because that'll give you the tone of what they're saying. The entire gospel of Mark can be summed up in, "and immediately, and immediately, and immediately." Think about this for a moment, Jesus, his entire ministry, three and a half years, that's it. He gave us, according to what we read a while ago, he gave us everything we need to know in three and a half years. And I know, I don't mean to speculate, and please forgive me for doing so, can you imagine what Jesus could have done if he'd had a car? He walked everywhere. It took days. Can you imagine Jesus with social media? I mean, imagine that one, right? Can you imagine, "Oh my, Jesus just posted. He's walking on water." Can you imagine, I mean, imagine the world we live in and all that was accomplished, all that took place. In fact, many have called the gospel of Mark the gospel of action. It's the shortest of the gospels, but it actually contains the greatest breadth of material because it is so quick and it's so fast. There's no genealogy, there's no virgin birth. We just get down to action and get to what we know as the cross.

Then there's Luke. Luke approaches Jesus as a universal Savior, he's the Savior for all, not just for some. He's seen as reaching out to those that nobody else would reach out to. Can you see the doctor that the Lord's using in this? He's portrayed as bringing perfection

out of imperfection through his death and resurrection. Incidentally, it's the longest book of the New Testament and yet half of its contents are about the Passion Week of Jesus Christ. Now think about that from a medical doctor's perspective. Here you have an individual who defies everything you've ever been taught, everything you've ever known. A medical doctor pronounces the date, the time of death, and signs their certificate, and Jesus defied it all. Why? Because he came back. And so here you have an individual, Jesus of course, who has raised from the dead. So you can understand why God would use him to give us such a physical perspective of that Passion Week, a physical perspective of that which he gave. You have the most detailed, and if you allow me to say, the most gruesome explanations of the crucifixion from Luke. He's the one that talks about the blood. He's the one that talks about the robe being pulled off his body to give these visuals of how much was actually happening and how we can picture it occurring.

Now tonight, and many of you are familiar with this, if you want to go and somewhat research on your own, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to by the professionals as the synoptic gospels. Now, you notice I put somewhat an air about me when I said that. The word synoptic just means the same as. And there are those that will say, well, these three, they tell the same story, yes, from different perspectives, but essentially the same. And then there's John. John is somewhat of this outlier of sorts. Let me give you the exact percentage. Only 7% of the gospel of John is contained in the other three gospels. Now this is critical, and I believe, and please hear me, I don't want to just get academic tonight, I don't want to just get in the weeds tonight, but the reason I think this is important is when you begin to look and research at the gospel accounts and how they were circulating in the early churches of the day, these accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they had been circulating for some time before the Lord inspired John to write what he wrote. In fact, I subscribe to, feel free not to, I subscribe to the theory that the Lord gave John these words after the destruction of Jerusalem. Now think about that for a moment. That means everything in their faith heritage, everything in their history has been destroyed, everybody has been scattered, and all of a sudden, you start hearing a little different perspective. John doesn't begin with a genealogy. John doesn't begin with this action packed trailer to a movie. John doesn't begin with a medical analysis of a virgin birth. John begins with, "In the beginning." Now think of, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, the Word was God. There's nothing without." In other words, there's this grandiose macro level explanation.

And that being said, it's filled with what we call the sevens. There are seven signs, seven miracles, and seven "I am" statements. These statements define or describe John so differently than the other gospels. Yes, there's the miracles. Yes, there's the teaching. Yes, there's all the things that are involved. But you think about these seven statements. Jesus is described as, he says, "I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door of the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I am the way, the truth, the life. I am the true vine. And I am the resurrection." Now, it's not just those seven descriptors, although those are key and important but Jesus, in the gospel of John, gets in a disagreement with the Pharisees. I know you're shocked, that happens all the time. And in this disagreement, they are arguing with one another of who has the proper lineage, who has the proper, shall we say, ancestry. These Pharisees are puffing out their chests, claiming that because

they're connected to so-and-so and so-and-so, they're the rightful heirs. You know what they're saying about Jesus, they're saying to him, "You've even claimed you don't know who your earthly dad is." Well, he didn't have an earthly father. And so they're getting in this dispute and at the end of the chapter, I love what Jesus does. He says, "Y'all remember Abraham?" He's like, "Of course we remember Abraham. We're descendants of Abraham." Here's what Jesus says, "Before Abraham," he said, "I am," which is that connection to Exodus chapter 3 where God said, "I am that I am." At no point, in fact, what we see throughout the gospel of John is Jesus's overt declaration he is God in flesh. Now we see it in the other three, but we really see it in the gospel of John.

And so again, what we see is the same story from four different perspectives and what the Spirit of God does, he takes all that and he paints this incredible picture that we can all understand and identify. Here's the outline. The events and the teaching of Jesus come in two forms, singular and repetitive. The feeding the 5,000, it's in all four gospels. The woman at the well, she's only in John. Now the reason that's an important clarification is just because it's there only once doesn't make it less important than if it's four times. Just because it is in Matthew but it's not in Luke doesn't make it more or less critical to our understanding. The frequency or the infrequency of an event or teaching does not credit and/or discredit, however, there needs to be a harmonization of events. Depending on how you divide the gospels up, at minimum, we have 184 events in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, at maximum we have 274.

Now let me clarify, you're saying that's a wide discrepancy. Yes, but let's go to Luke chapter 15. Luke chapter 15, we talked about it this morning, we alluded to what we know as the prodigal son. Luke chapter 15 has four accounts within it. Remember, there's the story of the lost sheep, there's the story of the lost coin, there's the story of the prodigal son, and then there's conversation that the father has with the other son. There's four sections to Luke 15. But if you've read Luke chapter 15, it begins with this statement, "And Jesus told this parable." Now the reason that's important is some people will say, well, that's four different stories. Some people say that's only one story told four different ways. That's why you can have this wide range from 184 to 274 accounts. It's not that some people think these should be and should not be in, it's do we make it all one big account or four separate accounts? So I don't want that numerical difference to cause concern. Nothing has changed. Nothing's been altered. It's just, is it four or is it one, they all occurred.

Here's the grand conclusion, what do they all have in common? I'm gonna share with you what all four gospels, no matter who the Lord used, no matter where they were, their age, their stage, their education, their approach, their quote corner of the intersection, every one of them talks about John the Baptist. That's important, because the last chapter of the Old Testament is Malachi chapter 4 and it said very clearly that Elijah would precede the Messiah. And it is in the gospel of Matthew chapter 14, remember Matthew's the one connecting us to the Old Testament, where Jesus makes this statement, "If you receive me, then he," John the Baptist, "is Elijah." Every one of them mentioned John the Baptist, because without the forerunner, then you don't have a fulfillment of the Old Testament no matter what one's perspective may be.

Secondly, all four gospels record the feeding of the 5,000. It's the one miracle that's in all of them. The reason it's so important is in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 18, Moses makes this statement that Jesus Christ will be a prophet in like manner as he is. What is the miracle of the Old Testament? The parting of the Red Sea, impressive, don't get me wrong. The plagues, incredible. But the one miracle that stands above all miracles is that for 40 years, God could bring Krispy Kreme donuts out of the sky each, I'll just make sure y'all are awake, each and every day. It's the one miracle that the Jewish people of the Old Testament identify with more than any other and so that feeding of the 5,000 again connects us to that singularity.

Here's one, all four gospels include the betrayal of Judas. All four of them. All four of them share about that one who betrayed, how he betrayed, where he betrayed, and the why he betrayed. All four gospels deal with the denial by Peter. Now that's interesting because the betrayal and the denial are two different things. Judas betrayed, Peter denied. But all four of them deal with those respective stories. Obviously all four deal with the trial of Jesus. And of course you expect this, but it's critical, all four of them elaborately describe the crucifixion as well as the resurrection. The last chapter of all the respective gospels, with the exception of John, has the resurrection. John's the last two chapters in the implications thereof.

Hopefully you still have the gospel of John open. I want to encourage you to turn one page to the left and I want to share with you in conclusion tonight why we have the gospels. Do we have the gospels just so we can see God work through four different types of personalities to accomplish one goal? That's not why. Do we have the four gospels so that we can have discussions on should that be four stories or one story? Nah. Do we have the four gospels so that we can have endless debates on do we have all the events or some of the events or none of the events? I want to share with you in conclusion why do we have them? Verse 31 of chapter 20. You see that first word? "But." Y'all know that's my favorite. Now, if we have a "but" in verse 31, that means we gotta go to verse 30. It says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name." The whole reason that we have the gospels is so that we will understand our need for a Savior and that Jesus is the only one qualified in the fulfillment therein.

You know, each and every one of us has a testimony. All of our testimonies are the same in the sense that we come to faith through Christ alone, but they're all different in the aspect of the manner and the story by which the Lord leads us to that point. Tonight, I want to share with you a story of one of my lifelong friends that resides in another state who's a college student, much like the thousands of individuals that we have in our respective community. As a college student, he grew up in a home that was not churched, faith was not discussed, the Bible was never read, church was never attended. In fact, he would tell you if he were here tonight that he became by default somewhat of a pragmatic atheist. He wasn't like a Richard Dawkins who just is vilely anti-God, he just didn't

believe there was one. He didn't believe God was relevant and that he kind of had to fend his way through life.

Fortunately for him while he was a college student living in a dormitory, that there was an organization on campus that it was faith-based and it was going through the dorms, this was years ago, they walking through the dorms just having gospel conversations, making offers to invite to Bible studies, etc. They knocked on his respective dorm room. He very emphatically and clearly by the way, he's an attorney by trade by now so he was emphatic and clear even as an atheist, he very emphatically shared with them that he didn't want to have a thing to do with Jesus, he didn't believe in Jesus, and that they should not come back to his dorm room. Well, whoever it was that knocked on his door was a wise soul and he asked the question, "What is it about Jesus that you can't believe?" The problem was he never really understood who Jesus was. And so they got in a conversation where basically this wise soul told this young college student, "How can you deny or reject somebody you've never even studied?" He said, "Fine, what do you want me to do?" And so he asked him not just to read the gospel of John, he asked him to read all four gospels. He said, "I want you to read the whole story of Jesus from beginning to end, and then tell me why he isn't who we claim that he is." Well, time went by, conversations ensued, and I'm grateful to tell you that that young man not only put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ, he did so, he was saved, he was baptized, and for many years he actually proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ all over the world.

Now, that's a story that we love and appreciate, but let me tell you why it's important. This young man asked him, "As you read through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, what was it that got your attention? What was it that caused you to believe?" You ready for what he said? This is what's amazing. He said, "I'm believing in Jesus because even his enemies did." He said, "What do you mean even his enemies did?" Now remember, he's a lawyer by trade. He said, "I read the stories. Nobody who hated Jesus denied that he walked on water. Nobody who hated Jesus denied that he fed 5,000. Nobody denied that he raised Lazarus from the dead. They only claimed that he did it according to the power of the devil." And he said, "When your enemies cannot discount you, you must be the real deal."

"These things I've written that you might believe." For some of us, we read of Jesus healing three blind men and say, "If he can heal them, then he can save me." For others of us, if the enemies of Jesus didn't discount him, then how dare I? All of us, the Lord uses a different path of a different gospel, but it all leads to one place. It leads to Mount Calvary and an empty tomb which is where every gospel finishes.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Tonight, as we come to our time of decision and response, I know it may be a Sunday evening, but you might be that soul, you might be that person even here tonight who said there's never been a time, there's never been a time where I've confessed my sin condition and I've asked Jesus to save me. You know, as we study the gospels, there's no place in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John that tells you that you have to hit a certain standard of performance or expectations to be saved, there's no place in the respective gospels that says you must undertake this ritual

or that rite to be saved, in fact, all four gospels lead to an empty tomb and say if you'll call on Jesus to save you from your sins, you'll be saved. "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Maybe tonight is the night that you call on Jesus. But I know many of you here, at least in person, you're already a believer. You're already, as we heard tonight, you're already a child of God and that being said, maybe tonight the enemy has whispered for years in your ear, "Your testimony's not as powerful as that one. Your backstory is not as impressive as that one." Maybe tonight, your decision to be rendered isn't about walking forward, it's about walking out of here knowing, "You know what? I'm just as saved as anybody else. My story's just as valid as anybody else because everybody has to go through an empty tomb." Or maybe tonight, you entered this place with questions and with doubts and all the issues and struggles of life and maybe a study of the gospels simply says Jesus was, is, and always will be who he was and I should never let the feelings supersede the facts. Whatever the decision tonight, however the Lord has spoken, may we respond appropriately.

Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you inspired and you preserved your holy words. You didn't tell us everything, but you told us enough. God, you didn't give us every detail, but you gave us enough. So God, I pray tonight, that you would simply allow us to respond to whatever it is you reveal to us with the information that you've given us. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.