

# The Story of Jesus

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## Introduction.

A few weeks ago, when I was teaching the high-school class, somehow or other, I got on the subject of the life of Jesus, and I rattled off a fifteen-second thumbnail sketch of His career. At the end, I added as an aside, "I'm sure any of you would be able to say the same," and one of the students replied, "Well, actually, I'm not sure that I would."

I have to tell you, folks, that one had me thinking for a while. First of all, I have nothing but admiration and respect for our high-school students. I know they are good Bible students and dedicated Christians. If they're not comfortable with their grasp of the general chronology of Christ's life, that doesn't point to a problem with them. That points to a problem with the teaching they've been getting from us. Of course, it's not just the folks in the high-school class who need this sort of basic instruction. There are several new Christians here, or Christians who have been restored after decades out of duty, who haven't heard a concise description of the life of Christ in years, if ever.

Nor is that all. Even the rest of us, those who have been faithfully serving the Lord for decades, still need this kind of core teaching. It's easy for us to get so caught up in all the nuances of being a disciple of Jesus that we lose sight of who Jesus was. We get so involved in the details of our spiritual battles that we forget whom we're fighting for. That kind of mental lapse can't lead anywhere good, so let's re-center ourselves this morning. This is going to be one of our special Lord's supper services, so at the end of the sermon but before the invitation, we're going to have an opportunity to partake. As we do, let's remember the things we're about to study. Let's turn our attention to the story of Jesus.

## His Life.

Naturally, our examination of the story of Jesus must begin with the study of **HIS BIRTH**. However, the most important things about that birth are not revealed in the Biblical descriptions of the actual event. They appear in what is said about the birth beforehand. We see one such significant statement in Matthew 1:20-21. Joseph has just discovered here that his fiancée Mary is pregnant, and he knows he wasn't responsible. He's considering whether he needs to quietly cancel the marriage, when this angel appears to him. The point is that Mary is no ordinary unwed mother. Instead, she is pregnant because the Holy Spirit caused her to conceive, and the child that she is about to bear is actually the Son of almighty God, and through Mary, He is being sent to earth to carry out a mission of cosmic significance.

As with so many other Biblical truths, the idea of the virgin birth has come under attack from all sorts of so-called "Biblical scholars." They want to diminish Jesus, to transform Him from the Son of God to someone who was merely a good man, a wise but ignorable human teacher. That might be a convenient story, but it's not what the Scriptural record actually says. In reality, the word describes Jesus as genuinely being the only begotten Son of God. Once we see that's the case, we don't get to ignore Jesus anymore. The story of the birth of Christ requires us to obey Him.

We also learn critical spiritual truths from the story of **HIS TEMPTATION**. We see the Cliff Notes version of the temptation of Christ in Mark 1:12-13. Matthew and Luke contain much more involved versions of this story, with descriptions, for instance, of Satan tempting Jesus to misuse His power to make bread, or taking Him up to a mountain and promising Him the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. In all versions of the story, though, the outcome is the same. Throughout the temptations, and throughout His life, Jesus defies Satan and remains sinless.

The sinlessness of Jesus despite temptation is centrally important to us for several reasons. First, because Jesus remained untainted by evil despite all the devil could throw at Him, He can serve as our example. When Satan is really coming after us and it seems like we can't possibly hold out against all the temptation, we can look to Jesus and see how He did it. If Jesus resisted every temptation to anger or greed or lust, through Him we can resist them too.

Second, the sinlessness of Jesus is important because it fitted Him to be our sacrifice. We haven't gotten to that part of the story yet, but it's important even here. Under the Law of Moses, God commanded the Israelites to offer animal sacrifices for their sins. Those sacrifices had to be unblemished. In other words, the bulls and goats they killed upon the altar couldn't be blind or sick or lame. Only the animals that were physically perfect were fit to be offered to God. Jesus had to be a perfect sacrifice, but He had to be spiritually perfect. Instead of an unblemished body, what fitted Him to be offered for our sins was His unblemished soul. Without His perfect obedience, we would be doomed.

Of course, Jesus didn't just go around resisting sin. Scripture also tells us about **HIS TEACHING**. A nice short description appears in Mark 1:14-15. You want to know what the message of the gospel is? This is it. Jesus went to the sinners of Israel and commanded them to repent. If they believed in the good news that He was bringing, they could come to Him, be saved from their sins, and be made a part of His kingdom. Jesus preached this to absolutely everybody.

That's the way the message of Jesus is today. It's for everybody, and there's nothing more tragic than the Christian who looks down his nose at a sinner. Brethren, we are not some kind of exclusive social club! We are the place where the world's most wretched and hurting people can come and find hope and healing in God. We ourselves are here

not because of our success in fighting against sin, but because we have admitted that we are failures. Thankfully, the grace of God is wide enough to cover even us, and it's wide enough to cover all others who seek Him.

Jesus, though, didn't ask us to believe Him just because. He demonstrated the truth of His words with **HIS POWER**. Look at what Luke tells us about the displays of His might in Luke 6:17-19. This, friends, would have been a sight to see. With other miracles described in Scripture, there's often only one lame man who is healed or one boy who is raised from the dead or whatever. Just one miracle is proof that God is with the miracle worker, but that's not what happened here. Instead, in just one session, multitudes of sick and demon-possessed people came to Jesus seeking help, and in that one session, He healed them all. Just imagine how awe-inspiring that would have been! It would have been like someone going into St. Joe's and cleaning the place out—going through every room, healing every sick person, and sending them all home to their families, perfectly healthy. What a spectacular display of power! It makes the hair stand up on my arms to think about it. The Bible tells of many great prophets, but none of them could hold a candle to Jesus.

That, friends, is the power of the Lord we serve, and He has to have that kind of power if He is to fulfill His promises to us. It's awe-inspiring to think of every patient in a hospital being healed, but it's even more awe-inspiring to think of every one of us being forgiven of our sins. Sometimes doctors are able to heal the sick, but no human being has ever removed the stain of even one sin. Jesus has the power not just to cure our bodies, but to heal our souls as well.

### **His Death and Resurrection.**

One would think that Jesus' goodness and greatness would lead to His exaltation, but in reality, it led to **HIS BETRAYAL**. We see the precise act of betrayal described in Matthew 26:47-49. Judas was one of Jesus' twelve apostles, one of His inner circle, yet he succumbed to the temptation to sell Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver, which would probably be the equivalent of about \$15,000 today. Once the Jewish authorities got their hands on Jesus in a situation in which the multitudes wouldn't riot, Jesus was as good as dead, and Judas surely knew that before he took the money.

This reminds me of an interesting question that came up in the high-school class too. We were talking about why God doesn't just display His existence in some undeniable way rather than trusting in His word and us to tell others about Him. I pointed out that at Mt. Sinai, when the glory of God was clearly visible at the top, at the mountain's base, the Israelites were busily making the golden calf. One of the students asked, "But wouldn't people have evolved in their understanding since then?" Well, fifteen hundred years after Sinai, God came in the flesh to a people who had been told for millennia to expect Him, and after He preached for just a few years, they hated Him so much they killed Him. I doubt the outcome would be much different if Jesus came in just the same way today. It always has been true and always will be true that most people are hostile to God and to His will. In our walk with Christ, we shouldn't expect anything different.

The betrayal of Jesus led inevitably to **HIS DEATH**. After the Jewish and Roman leaders run Jesus through a kangaroo court, which leads predictably to His condemnation, we see the events chronicled in Luke 23:33, 44-46. It's most likely that Jesus died by suffocating, when He no longer held the strength to pull Himself up by the nails through His hands to inhale. Regardless, the unique life of Jesus ended in a very non-unique way. He died.

Of all the deaths that have ever occurred since the beginning of time, though, this is the death that is most important to us. We've already discussed Jesus' significance as an unblemished sacrifice. This is the moment when the sacrifice was offered. All of us stood condemned by our sins, but on the altar of the cross, Jesus poured out the death that would balance the scales of God's justice. Because He died, His people no longer have to.

The story of Jesus, though, doesn't end there. It continues on to **HIS RESURRECTION**. We see the first human awareness that He had been raised from the dead described in Luke 24:4-7. These women have come to the tomb expecting to find the body of Jesus, a prophet of God killed by God's own people like so many prophets before Him. Instead, they find two angelic messengers who announce to them that the reason why Jesus' body has vanished is because God has raised Him. As a result of this, His disciples bear the gospel of His deity throughout the known world.

We often don't think about it in these terms, but the resurrection of Jesus is just as important to us as His death. The Bible teaches that His death paid the price for our sins, but the resurrection shows that the Bible isn't just fooling. Anybody could claim that some prophet died for their sins, but when the prophet comes back from the dead, that puts another spin on the matter entirely. As Paul reflects in Romans 1, it is the resurrection of Jesus that proclaims Him the Son of God with power. We don't honor Jesus as just another good man; we honor Him as the risen Lord.

Finally, though, the last point of Jesus' life that has relevance to us hasn't even happened yet. It is **HIS RETURN** in the skies to bring judgment to the earth and to rescue His people. This return is promised, once again by angels, right on the heels of His ascension, in Acts 1:9-11. The apostles had just seen Jesus ascend into the heavens and vanish; the angels tell these doubtless awestruck men that He is going to be coming back to them in just the same way.

Logically, if Jesus is going to come back and judge every human who has ever lived, He's going to judge us. He's going to hold us to account for whether we obeyed His word. We don't know when He'll come back. The Bible only says He'll return when we least expect it. Whenever it does happen, though, we need to be prepared for it.