

## ***Introduction to the Bible – Week 4***

Editors note:

- *italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline*
- **bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline**
- regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis

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**Looking back on last week's readings, was there questions?** (check the homework for their written questions)

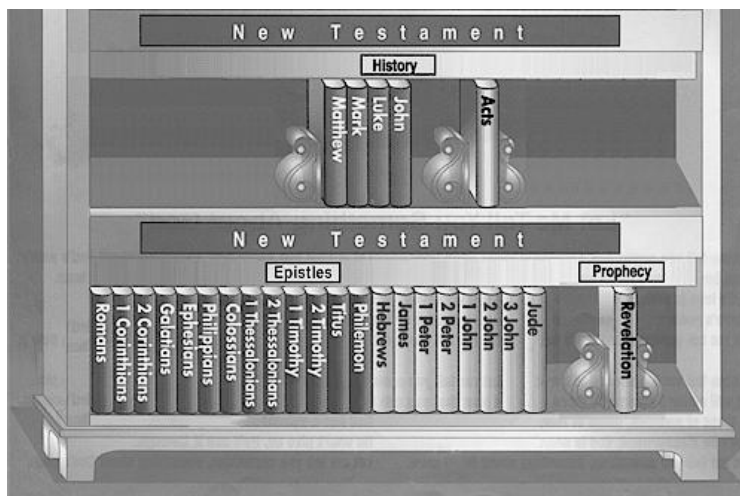
Again, I'll ask you, what is the Bible?

*The Story of God's Loving Pursuit of Rebels in Jesus Christ*

### **The New Testament**

**27 books:**

- **history (the Gospels and Acts)**
- **epistles (letters) (Romans – Jude)**
- **prophecy (Revelation)**



### **The Gospels**

**Bible books:** *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*

**Timeline:** *Jesus' birth, public ministry, death, & resurrection*

The Gospels describe what Jesus did while he was on the earth. They cover his birth, parts of his early youth, his 3-year public ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Before we start into the lecture, I want you to think about the following question:

### Do you see Jesus?

**Seeing and savoring Jesus Christ is the most important seeing and savoring you will ever do. Jesus spoke of two kinds of seeing. He said of the uncomprehending crowds, “*Seeing they do not see*” (Matthew 13:13). One kind is seeing with physical eyes, and the other is with spiritual eyes. When we see with our spiritual eyes, we see the truth and beauty and value of Jesus Christ for what they really are. Everyone can read the stories of Jesus and “see” the portraits painted by the words of those who knew him. But not everyone sees truth and beauty and infinite value. *Savoring* Jesus Christ is the response to this second kind of seeing. When you see something as true and beautiful and valuable, you savor it. That is, you treasure it. You cherish and admire and prize it. Spiritual seeing and spiritual savoring are so closely connected that it would be fair to say: If you don’t savor Christ, you haven’t seen Christ for who he is. If you don’t prize him above all things, you haven’t apprehended his true worth. (John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*)**

I like what Piper is saying because it is easy to make bible study into mere information. I want what I say tonight to help you see and savor Jesus.

### What is a gospel?

**Mark 1:1,2 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup> As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:**

**"BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,  
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY;  
<sup>3</sup>THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,  
'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,  
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'"**

Mark in this passage is signaling that the great events of Isaiah 40-66 (atonement, restoration, peace and justice) have begun in Jesus. He picking up on a term that would be used when a Roman Emperor made an important announcement.

### **Gospel means good news.**

“Gospel” was a secular term that meant the announcement of “*good news*” that had empire-wide implications. Each of the four Gospels announce the momentous events of Jesus the Messiah—the Promised one and His surprising (but planned) death. The gospel is good news about what Jesus has done for you, not advice about what you must do (like religion).

The Gospels as literature are a unique mixture of narrative and teachings, and “parables” (brief, engaging stories that teach spiritual truths) that clarify the good news to the reader.

### Why are the Gospels important?

- Jesus is the central figure of the Bible (John 5:39; Luke 24:44) and the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1).

Everything we've studied so far, even though it was written centuries before Jesus ever lived, has been preparing you for the coming of Christ. Moving through the rest of the New Testament to the book of Revelation, everything will look back to the significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Your study of the Old Testament will be richly rewarded when you read the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. I'm excited that you've learned a little Old Testament over the last three weeks. Keep it up in your own study and you'll read the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament with new eyes!

Matthew (1:1) is eager to tell us that Jesus is a descendant of David and Abraham, men who each received important promises from God, promises that frame the story of the Old Testament. God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne and rule the world forever. God promised Abraham that though one of his descendants, the whole world would be blessed. As the New Testament begins, we find out that both promises are fulfilled in one person, Jesus Christ.

- **In Jesus God became a man**

### **John 1:14, 17**

The "word" (logos) mentioned in 1:14 was introduced in John 1:1-3. "The word" was "was with God and is God." In 1:14 the word takes on flesh and becomes a person! The Creator has entered his creation. Jesus is the word ("logos")! To see Jesus in action is to see God in action!

Remember on the first night of this class, we looked at Exodus 29:45,46 "I will dwell." God desired to "dwell" or live in their midst—to be RELATIONAL with them, but He couldn't dwell fully among them because of their sin. Now God in Jesus has come to "dwell" or "tabernacle" among people! Soon He will tear down the barrier through His atoning death.

In John 1:17, we are told that "the law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus." It is not that there was no grace and truth before. It is that Jesus has brought a fuller revelation of grace and truth. He embodies it and will demonstrate it in the most vivid terms on the cross.

### **Phil. 2:6-8**

Here Paul tells us that Jesus gave up his perfect environment of total love in the trinity (Jn. 17:24) and became a servant unto death! How remarkable!

**When you read the gospels, ask: what does this passage tell you about the character/love of God?**

### **Example: John 12:23-28**

The idea of God's glory can seem lofty. But not in Jesus. The supreme example of God's glory is about to be seen in Jesus' coming crucifixion ("now is the time for the Son of man to be glorified,"—that is crucified). When Moses said, "Show me your glory" (Exodus 33:20), he never expected a scene of violence to be God's display of glory! God is glorified because the cross dramatically draws attention to His

heart of justice and love. And He is glorified because there was nothing that any man did to deserve His love.

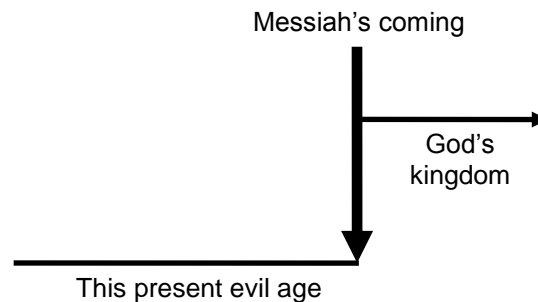
### **Example: John 11:33-35**

At the grave of Lazarus Jesus was angry (a better translation of “deeply moved” in 11:33 ) at death and He wept (11:33). Why did He weep? I don’t think it was for Lazarus, because He knew He would raise him in a few minutes. He must have been weeping for the mourners. This reveals that God sees death was an enemy and that death is profoundly abnormal. At the same time, He feels deep empathy for human pain and grief. In Jesus’ reaction, we can see that God allows Himself to feel human pain and He is angry at the abnormality of death. Jesus hates death and He came to kill it (2 Tim. 1:10).

### **Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God.**

The Kingdom of God was a central message in Jesus’ ministry. Understanding this concept will help you correctly interpret the Gospels.

#### **The Jews’ view of the kingdom of God:**



“This present evil age” – Since Adam and Eve chose to live independently from God, humanity lives in what the Apostle Paul calls “this present evil age,” a time dominated by rebellion and evil.

“God’s kingdom” – God is in control of history and one day, he will replace the present evil age with his own eternal kingdom. Then, wickedness will be judged and righteousness will reign.

“Messiah’s coming” – The event that separates the present evil age and God’s kingdom is the coming of the Messiah. The arrival of the Messiah is the fulfillment of God’s promise to David that one day, one of his descendants would rule the world. The Messiah will crush all of God’s enemies and be exalted above all other authorities.

See also Daniel 2:44 and 7:13,14

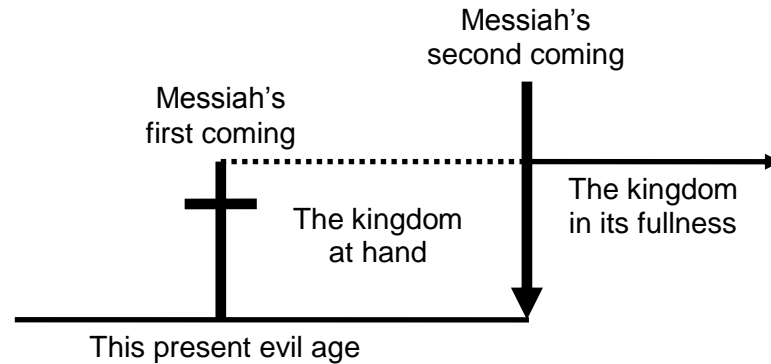
The Jews’ view of the kingdom of God was accurate, but INCOMPLETE.

#### **Jesus and the “Kingdom at hand”:**

**From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand..." 23Jesus was going throughout all Galilee,**

**teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:17; 23)**

You can imagine why his audience would be excited to hear this! They expected that Jesus would soon start a political revolution and overthrow their Roman oppressors. Unlike the kingdom the Jews expected, however, Jesus went on to describe an unseen phase of the kingdom, what we will call the “kingdom at hand”:



Jesus affirmed the Jews’ picture — but he added some crucial additional information about the coming of Messiah and the establishment of God's kingdom. What the Old Testament prophets called the coming of Messiah is actually his Second Coming. Prior to that time, Messiah would come—not as a reigning king but as a Suffering Servant—to die for the guilt of a rebellious humanity whom God loves. The first coming of the Messiah would usher in an unanticipated form of God's kingdom, “the kingdom at hand,” that is different in important ways from the kingdom in its fullness.

Illustration from WWII: D-Day in 1944 and VE (Victory in Europe) Day in 1945. While the war was not officially over until May of 1945 (VE Day), the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944 struck a decisive blow to Hitler’s Fortress Europe. Victory was assured—it was just a matter of time. The same is true of Jesus’ entry into the present evil age and His work on the cross. It was a decisive blow to Satan. Yet, the final victory is not until Jesus returns.

## **The Kingdom Parables**

### **What are parables?**

*concrete stories that reveal abstract truths.*

**Parables almost always make a single point and are designed to illicit a response.**

## The kingdom parables: contrasting “the kingdom at hand” with “the kingdom in its fullness”

Jesus described this phase of the kingdom in a series of parables in Matthew 13. Each is designed to contrast the kingdom at hand with the kingdom in its fullness.

Matthew 13:44-46

<b>The Kingdom at hand</b>	<b>The Kingdom in its fullness</b>
<i>The kingdom is barely noticeable &amp; only some realize its supreme value</i>	<i>the supreme value of the kingdom will be apparent to everyone.</i>

The fundamental application of the kingdom of God:

A study of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ ministry is not just a matter of curious theology. It confronts us with His Kingly claims. Having studied the kingdom, we are called to give an account to the King.

### *Repent and Humbly Bow to the King*

“To repent” is to change your mind about your rebellious independence from God and turn to Him, acknowledging your sin and His right to judge your sin.

### **Matt 4:17**

Jesus is letting us know that the kingdom has arrived in Him, and to be granted entry, you must repent. Later (below in Matt. 5:3), Jesus said that those who enter the Kingdom are “poor in spirit.”

### **Matt. 5:3**

To be poor in spirit is to be aware that you are “totally broke” morally. You have nothing to pay God, no deal you can make.

Are you broke (“poor in spirit”) or do you think you’ve got some moral “cash” to offer?

### **Matt. 5:20**

In case you wondered what the moral standards of the kingdom are, Jesus said “your righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees or you will not enter the kingdom of God.” He knew that relative to other people, the Pharisees were more law-abiding. But even that won’t do. You are going to need mercy. Only His righteousness, the righteousness of Jesus Christ will get you into the kingdom (Romans 3:21 describes a righteousness FROM God, apart from Law” NIV). Jesus will grant His righteousness to the poor in spirit who repent. This is part of what Jesus meant when He said He came to “fulfill the law” (Mt. 5:17).

**Matt. 6:10, 33**

“Your kingdom come, your will be done” (6:10) Here we can see that God’s kingdom is a rule we must bow to. To live as a servant of the King is to submit to His will as a way of life. And since we fail so often to submit to His rule, repentance is also a way of life, not just a one time decision when we enter. It is not that we repent again and again to enter the kingdom. We repent again and again to enjoy the kingdom! Repentance brings you back again and again to your poverty of spirit and the mercy of God. That is why repentance is joyful!

“Seek *first* the kingdom of God” (6:33) Choose to put God at the center—make Him Priority #1! What is your “center”? Sports? Stuff? Self? Comfort and the feeling of happiness?

“If you put first things first, you get second things thrown in. If you put second things first, you lose both first and second things.” (C.S. Lewis)

**The Road to the Cross****Mark 8:31-34; 9:31; 10:32-34; 10:45**

Jesus repeatedly defined his death on the cross as His mission.

**Mark 14:24**

Jesus compared Passover to His coming blood payment at the cross.

**Mark 14:32-36**

Jesus agonized about drinking “the cup” of God’s wrath on the cross.

**John 12:31,32**

Jesus looked ahead to vanquishing “the ruler of this world” (the serpent) by being “lifted up” on the cross.

**Statements from the Cross*****“Father forgive them” (Luke 23:34)***

Jesus refuses to hate his Roman executioners and the Jewish mockers as he hangs from the cross.

***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34)***

What sounds like a cry of confusion, is actually a quote from Ps. 22 that describes the symptoms of crucifixion.

Jesus really was being forsaken in that moment as he bore the judgment of God for the sins of the world. This is confirmed in Gal. 3:13.

***“It is Finished” (John 19:30)***

Jesus is declaring that the sin debt is paid in full!

### The irony of the mocking

Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, “Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” <sup>31</sup>In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. (Mark 15:29-31)

The fact is, Jesus could have come down from the cross! Nothing held him there other than His love. It is not that He “could not save Himself,” as they mocked, but that He WOULD NOT save Himself because He was committed to saving you!

### Temple Veil Torn (Luke 23:45)

This signaled that the barrier between God and humans had been removed by the work of Jesus. We saw this in week 1 and 3.

### Burial, Sorrow & Doubt of the Disciples

The disciples did not expect Jesus to die, and therefore were stunned by it. They wondered if they had made a mistake in following Jesus. None expected a resurrection.

Why didn't the disciples “get it?”

“He said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead.’ *But they didn't understand what he was saying, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.*” – Mark 9:31,32

*It clashed with their understanding of the Messiah-King*

### Resurrection (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20,21)

Jesus appeared over 40 days to assure the disciples they were not hallucinating and to show them that His death was according to scripture.

### Great Songs about the Cross

The reason I like songs about the cross is because they drive the gospel deep into my heart than study alone can do. Sometimes, ONLY A SONG can deliver me from sorrow. Here a couple that are rich in cross-centered grace.

<i>In Evil long I took Delight,</i> by John Newton	<i>How Deep The Father's Love For Us,</i> by Stuart Townend
In evil long I took delight, Unawed by shame or fear, Till a new object struck my sight, And stopped my wild career.  I saw One hanging on a tree, In agony and blood,	How deep the Father's love for us, How vast beyond all measure That He should give His only Son To make a wretch His treasure  How great the pain of searing loss,

<p>Who fixed His languid eyes on me, As near His cross I stood.</p> <p>Sure, never to my latest breath, Can I forget that look; It seemed to charge me with His death, Though not a word He spoke.</p> <p>My conscience felt and owned the guilt, And plunged me in despair, I saw my sins His blood had spilt, And helped to nail Him there.</p> <p>A second look He gave, which said, "I freely all forgive; This blood is for thy ransom paid; I die that thou mayst live."</p> <p>Thus, while His death my sin displays In all its blackest hue, Such is the mystery of grace, It seals my pardon too.</p>	<p>The Father turns His face away As wounds which mar the chosen One, Bring many sons to glory</p> <p>Behold the Man upon a cross, My sin upon His shoulders Ashamed I hear my mocking voice, Call out among the scoffers</p> <p>It was my sin that held Him there Until it was accomplished His dying breath has brought me life I know that it is finished</p> <p>I will not boast in anything No gifts, no power, no wisdom But I will boast in Jesus Christ His death and resurrection</p> <p>Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer But this I know with all my heart His wounds have paid my ransom</p>
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### A Prayer Meditation on the Cross

Christ was in anguish that I might be all joy,  
cast off that I might be brought in,  
trodden down as an enemy  
that I might be welcomed as a friend,  
stripped that I might be clothed,  
wounded that I might be healed,  
tormented that I might be comforted,  
made a shame that I might inherit glory.  
My Savior bowed his head that I might uplift mine,  
experienced reproach that I might receive welcome,  
expired that I might ever live.  
(from a book called *The Valley of Vision*, edited by Bennett)

### Understanding the Gospels

- **Learn about the diversity of the gospels. They each have a different structure different themes and a different purpose.**

This helps us answer the following question:

#### **Why are there four gospels?**

*Because of their diverse readers*

The answer seems to be that there were four gospel because each gospel author was writing to different readers who were in different situations with different needs.

**See the handout titled: *Overview of the Four Gospels*.**

Overview of the Four Gospels				
writer	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
readers	Predominantly Jewish	Probably persecuted Christians in Rome .	"Most excellent Theophilus" (1:3) – a Gentile. First of two volumes (Luke - Acts)	Gentiles Non-Christians
purpose	To prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the eternal King.	To portray Jesus as a servant and redeemer. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many."	So that Theophilus might know the truth about Jesus and the early church (1:1-4)	That readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing they may have life in His name. (20:31)
themes	Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Jesus has authority. <b>KING</b>	Miracles demonstrate the power and compassion of Jesus. Glory comes only through suffering and service. <b>SERVANT</b>	Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (19:10)  God's special concern for outcasts: gentiles, Samaritans, tax collectors and sinners, women <b>SAVIOR</b>	Jesus is a source of life Importance of belief  <b>LIFE GIVER</b>
structure	Narrative mixed with 5 main sections of teaching (ch. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25) that close with variations on: "when Jesus had finished these words."	Ch 1-8: Works of power Ch 9-16: Rejection & suffering	Loosely organized around geography: Ch 1-2: Infancy Ch 3-9:50: In Galilee Ch 9:51-18:34: Journey to Jerusalem Ch 18:35-24: Death and resurrection	Ch 1: Jesus is God among us Ch 2 – 12:50: Jesus reveals himself in signs and teachings Ch 13-20:31 The final Passover – Jesus dies for the sins of the world Ch 21: Epilogue

Compare Mark's shorter length with Matthew's longer, discourse-filled gospel. While Matthew contains large sections of Jesus' teaching, Mark has very little teaching. Instead, Mark narrates a fast-paced action narrative. Each has different readers and different pastoral concerns. Mark was writing to Christians suffering deadly persecution in Rome (thus his emphasis on Jesus as the suffering servant), while Mathew was helping Jewish Christians to teach their people "to obey all that I commanded you." (Matt. 28:20)

**The theme of Luke's Gospel: salvation**

**See Luke 19:10**

**See Luke 5:29, 30**

- **Learn about Jesus' world.**

Knowing the culture, geography, and history of the time will help you understand the Gospels.

**See the handout titled: *The Gospels: Jesus' Supporting Cast*, which summarizes the major groups Jesus interacted with: Jews, Gentiles, religious authorities (Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes), tax gatherers, Romans, Samaritans, etc.**

For a great summary of the political, religious, and socioeconomic background of the Gospels, see **Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997) pp. 5-71.**

## Parables of Salvation

As we saw, Jesus uses a variety of methods to convey truths to his listeners. Parables are one of his favorite communication methods. As I told you earlier about concerning

the kingdom parables, parables are concrete stories that reveal abstract truths. Parables almost always make a single point and are designed to illicit a response.

For example, a good joke has a punch-line that catches you off guard. That's what makes you laugh. Like a joke, parables usually have a surprising twist that catches the listener's attention and evokes a response.

**Jesus' parables are *subversive*.**

“Subversive” means “to turn from beneath, to overturn or overthrow from the foundation: to *undermine*. It also connotes “dissident,” “rebellious.” Jesus was seeking to undermine the false assumptions of Pharisaic Judaism. He was “rebellious” in a good way because He wants to free people from legalistic bondage.

**His parables expose misconceptions, pride and dishonesty.**

**They reverse expectations about wealthy, powerful, & religious people.**

**Jesus' parables *undermine, challenge, threaten, weaken, & destabilize our personal agenda.***

As Jesus subverts our faulty agenda, this enables us to be subversive like Him. As a result, people that we interact with are “subverted” as we get to know them because our changed lives prompt them to reconsider the values of the American Dream.

#### **An example of a revolutionary parable: Luke 18:9-14**

Luke 18:9-14 is a familiar parable to many readers—so much so that its revolutionary character is often missed. Jesus is taking a very respected person in Jewish society (the Pharisee) and contrasting him with the most despised member of society (the tax collector). Today, to call a person a “Pharisee” is to cast an insult. We cheer the tax collector as the underdog. We like outsiders and rebels. Not so the original listeners. They could not have known until the end of the parable what Jesus was leading up to. His readers would have listened with approval as Jesus talked about the Pharisee praying. They would have been disgusted as Jesus talked about the tax collector. “He can beg for mercy all he wants. He's going to hell!” Only when Jesus said, “I tell you, this sinner, and not the other” would the punch line have hit them. That is why I read the parable to the class line by line, suggested the way the audience would have heard it before Jesus brought down the boom.

**What point is Jesus making in this parable?**

*God honors humility, not works-righteousness.*

The relevance of this parable is not just for those who are not Christians. It stands as a warning to believers who compare and compete and judge. It will always be true, no matter how mature you are, that all you can do it fall upon the mercy of God. In fact, one of the truest indicators of maturity is a deepening awareness of your sin and a deepening appreciation of God's mercy.

## Another revolutionary parable: Luke 15

15:1, 2

### Who is the parable addressed to?

*The religious leaders (not to rebellious sinners)*

“Throughout the centuries, when this text is taught, the almost exclusive focus has been on how the father receives his penitent younger son... The targets of this story are not “wayward sinners” but religious people who do everything the bible requires. Jesus is pleading not so much with moral outsiders as with moral insiders. He wants to show their blindness, narrowness, and self-righteousness, and how these things are destroying both their own souls and the lives of the people around them.

“No, the original listeners were not melted to tears by this story, but thunderstruck, offended, and infuriated... Through this parable Jesus challenges what nearly everyone has ever thought about God, sin, and salvation. The story reveals the destructive self-centeredness of the younger brother, but it also condemns the elder brother’s moralistic life in the strongest terms. Jesus is saying that both the religious and the irreligious are spiritually lost, both life-paths are dead ends, and that the every thought the human race has had about how to connect to God has been wrong.” (Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 9-11)

### What attitude is Jesus speaking to?

*Smugness, self-righteousness*

15:3-10

### What is the emphasis of this section?

*The finding of the lost brings great joy to God*

15:11-32

**Learn what you can about the historical and cultural setting of your passage.**

**Don’t assume your associations are the same as the original listeners!**

*Pharisees (religious leaders) were respected*

*Rebellious sons were not glorified*

“To ask one’s father for one’s share of the inheritance early was unheard of in antiquity; in effect, one would thereby say, “Father, I wish you were already dead.” Such a statement would not go over well even today, and in a society stressing obedience to one’s father it would be a serious act of rebellion (Deut 21:18–21) for which the father could have beaten him or worse. That the father grants the request means that most of the hearers will not identify with the father in this parable; from the start, they would think of him as stupidly lax to pamper such an immoral son.” --Keener, Craig S., *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) 1997.

**Don't lose the main point by trying to attach significance to every detail.**

*Stay focused on the "lost and found" theme (3, 8, 24, 31) NOT what the famine meant, etc.*

**What part of the parable would have shocked this audience?**

*The Father's compassion/excitement*

**The point of the parable (s)?**

*The finding of the lost brings great joy to God*

*The Pharisees should celebrate!*

**Applying the main point**

*Beware of the "older brother" syndrome*

**See Keller, *The Prodigal God***

He [the older brother] refuses to go in to what is perhaps the biggest feast and public event his father has ever put on... It is not his sins that created the barrier between him and his father, it's the pride he has in his moral record; it's not his wrongdoing but his righteousness that is keeping him from sharing in the feast of his father. (*The Prodigal God*, 25,26,)

The brothers' hearts, and the two ways of life they represent, are much more alike than they first appear. What did the younger son want most in life? He wanted to make his own decisions and have unfettered control of his portion of the wealth. How did he get that? By a flagrant defiance of community standards, a declaration of complete independence. What did the older son want? If we think about it we realize he wanted the same thing as his brother. He was just as resentful of the father as was the younger son. He, too, wanted the father's goods rather than the father himself. However, while the younger brother went far away, the elder brothers stayed close and "never disobeyed..."

They each wanted to get into a position where they could tell the father what to do. Each one, in other words, rebelled—but one did so by being very bad and the other by being extremely good. Both were alienated from the father's heart; both were lost sons... Neither son loved the father for himself. They both used him for their own self-centered ends rather than loving, enjoying, and serving him for his own sake. This means you can rebel against God and be alienated from him either by breaking his rules *or* by keeping them diligently.

It's a shocking message: Careful obedience to God's law may serve as a strategy for rebelling against God. (*The Prodigal God*, 35-37)

## Acts

**Timeline:** 33 – 60 A.D.

**Key events:**

Acts provides an account of how Jesus guided the growth of the early church through the Holy Spirit.

See 1:8

- Jesus ascends to heaven.
- Birth of the church at the day of Pentecost.
- Rapid growth of the early church.
- Counter-attack by God's enemy: persecution, hypocrisy, division.
- The Gospel spreads to the Samaritans and Gentiles.
- Paul's conversion.
- Paul's missionary journeys.
- Paul's imprisonment and journey to Rome.

**Assignment:** Continue following the reading plan in the *Bible Reading Assignment*.