

WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND

“...DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.” 1 COR. 11:24B NASB

Boxes filled with old papers and faded black-and-white photographs, bureau drawers crammed with yellowed and torn memories, dog-eared paperbacks, cherished bits and pieces of events well-lived... Collect together the scattered evidence and you have the portrait of a life.

What remains at the end of a life is the collected evidence of what that life was: what it accomplished, how it affected the lives of others. Closets bulging with tattered memories since forgotten tell the tale of the one who placed them there so long ago. Letters penned in ink long since faded, annotated snapshots stuffed into albums, childhood mementos pasted together, broken and torn—all comprise the journal of a person's life.

The books we've left on our shelves; the quiet trinkets we've placed in our underwear drawer; the notes we've jotted in the margins of cookbooks and cherished letters—all these paint a portrait of who we have been and what we have stood for. They give evidence for what was important to us.

AND THERE ARE ALSO MANY OTHER THINGS THAT JESUS DID, WHICH IF THEY WERE WRITTEN ONE BY ONE,

It is inevitable that we will leave something behind, so it is also inevitable that those remaining will be left with the evidence for our life. No life leaves behind a vacuum; everyone leaves a trail.

I SUPPOSE THAT EVEN THE WORLD ITSELF COULD NOT CONTAIN THE BOOKS THAT WOULD BE WRITTEN. AMEN.

JOHN 21:25 NKJV

Easter is the pinnacle moment in a year of remembering a life well-spent, a life that has, in one way or another, affected virtually every life that has followed. The Easter season, more than at any other time of the year, is when we open the cluttered closets of our memories and sift through the evidence for our salvation through Jesus Christ. From Thursday through Sunday morning, as if representing a compressed version of His entire life, we have opened the album containing His humility, His anguish, His sacrifice and ultimate victory over the grave. From the Last Supper, through His arrest, trial, crucifixion and ultimate resurrection we have seen, in compressed form, the entirety of Christ's life—a digest of His purpose in coming to earth in the first place.

Jesus left behind the evidence for His life in the words penned by His biographers—and in the lives of those who carried on His mission. He left behind the evidence for His life in the memories of those who sat at His feet, listening to His unearthly wisdom. He left it in the experiences of those who walked with Him along the dusty paths of Palestine. And He left it in the lives of all those who gazed upon His tortured body, left hanging upon the cross, and in the joy felt by those who discovered His empty tomb.

Jesus left behind no drawers stuffed with mementos, no faded photographs of Him arm-in-arm with His mates. Jesus left no essays of His own, no comments in the margins of a favorite book. We haven't even His signature upon a legal document.

Aspects

Encouraging believers to know God and His ways, and to enjoy a more intimate communion with Him

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What He left behind, instead, were the lives and memories of people; He entrusted everything He was—everything He accomplished, everything He stood for—to them.

To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God... And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. Acts 1:3,9 nasb

SYNTHESIS OF FAITH

There were twelve men in Christ's inner circle. Many more attended His steps, absorbed His teaching, even supported Him financially, but into the lives of those twelve Jesus invested more of Himself than in any others. Many years after He left them, two of those closest disciples—Matthew and John—wrote their versions of His life. Around the same time a Greek physician and disciple of the apostle Paul—Luke—set down his methodical account of Christ's life. But the earliest account of the life and ministry of Jesus belongs to a young associate of Paul, son of a woman in whose house the early church met in Jerusalem—John Mark.

So here were four different men, with four different perspectives on the Man who was God. They all knew Him—or knew of Him—in different ways. Two were close by Jesus for the span of His earthly ministry; one may have been around Jesus, on the fringe of His followers, an impetuous young man; and one probably never met Jesus at all, but compiled his systematic chronicle as would a modern historian: by research and interview.

Before he became one of Christ's disciples, Matthew, a Jew, was by trade a tax collector for the Roman government.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. Matthew 9:9

John, son of Zebedee, was a fisherman called from his nets by the Savior, and, along with Peter and James, was one of the disciples dearest to the Lord.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Matthew 4:21-22

Luke was a Greek physician who traveled with the apostle Paul, and along with his gospel account, wrote The Acts of the Apostles.

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 2 Tim. 4:11

John Mark was the son of a wealthy Jerusalem family who was probably present at Jesus' arrest, then was instrumental in the early church.

Then everyone deserted him and fled. A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. Mark 14:50-52

DISCREPANCIES

Some people are troubled by the apparent discrepancies between the four Gospel accounts. In some cases, the reader is left wondering which to believe: Which version is the correct story? The answer is simple: All of the above. Consider the following illustration:

Frank has a friend named Harry who attends the same church where he worships. Frank knows Harry quite well, but only at the church. He is a deacon, and head usher, and when Frank sees him, Harry is always dressed in his Sunday-go-to-meeting suit. Harry is gregarious toward visitors, sings the hymns lustily, and is studiously attentive during the sermon.

During the week, however, Harry works as a mechanic in the local railroad diesel shop. He wears overalls, and generally spends his days covered in grease and oil. His hands are rough, some of his fingernails smashed, and there is dirt in the fine cracks of his flesh that will never come out. Harry is a hard worker, and his mate, Robert, respects him for his commitment to a job well done.

CONTINUED...

These men wrote four different accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. Each writer emphasized something different about the God-Man; each man, as well, wrote a little of himself into the text. The four gospel accounts are not pure history, nor are they pure biography; not one of them is meant to stand alone as the be-all and end-all for proof-text for the Son of Man. They are, instead, an integral part of the synthesis of factual history, personal experience, and Spiritual anointing that becomes, in each human heart, a relationship with Jesus Christ.

THE BEGINNING
OF THE GOSPEL
ABOUT JESUS
CHRIST, THE SON
OF GOD. MARK 1:1

Many have asked, “Why is it necessary to have four Gospels? Why don’t we have just one Gospel? Why couldn’t one of these writers have gotten all the facts together and presented them for us?” Well, that would be like trying to make one photograph of a building adequately represent the entire structure. It would be impossible to take a picture which would show all four sides of the building at one time. It is impossible to get a full, four-dimensional view of a house without having four different pictures. Similarly it is impossible to get a full, four-dimensional view of the Person of Christ without portraying his four fundamental aspects. There are many features which are similar, or the same, in these four Gospels, but the writers were not trying to do the same thing. In fact, there is a distinct aspect of Christ set forth in each of the four Gospels. We find a different portrait of Christ in each one. We have no conception of the fullness of his Person until we have seen all four of these. You can’t get a clear, well-rounded picture of Christ until you have all four Gospels in view.
Ray C. Stedman

A SERVANT HEART

In the first church we joined in California, the pastor liked to play golf. Because he left the church not long after we arrived, I can’t give an accurate picture of the whole man, but in the time both of us were there, I don’t recall him ever getting his hands dirty. He left the impression with me of being rather above it all—and of favoring golf sweaters over suit and tie.

This pastor was replaced by a country boy who was in many respects his opposite. This new pastor was quick to lend a hand. Wednesday afternoons he could be found in the kitchen helping to prepare the evening meal. When the newspapers collected by the youth had to be loaded into the van and taken to a place of disposal, he was there to do the job.

This pastor was a servant.

In the same church there was an elderly lady, the unofficial matriarch of the church. She always sat near the front in every worship service, nodding sincere encouragement to whomever was leading from the platform.

She was a woman of venerable dignity and great Spiritual depth. So I was a little astonished, one Wednesday evening, to peer through the window into the Primary department and see this rather elderly woman physically involved with a roomful of boisterous children. Instead of finding her perched majestically out of reach, directing the session with the quiet dignity that her station in the church would permit, I found her in the thick of the fray, grabbing unruly kids, sweating from the August heat.

This woman was a servant.

To John Mark, Jesus was, as his account begins, the “Son of God.” But more than anything else, Jesus was to him a man of action. Mark opens his gospel without the preface and historical background of Luke, without Matthew’s listing of Jesus’ Jewish lineage, and without the mystical pre-

CONTINUED...

Harry lives alone, and, except for church every Sunday, doesn’t socialize much. He doesn’t make a lot of money, but with few other expenses he regularly sends a generous check to an orphanage in a nearby town. The administrator of the orphanage has never met Harry in person, but through the letters he has sent along with his checks, she has come to learn that he, too, was an orphan, and that his childhood included much sadness.

If asked to write a short biography about Harry, each of these three people—Frank, Robert, and the orphanage administrator—would tell a different story. Each story would contain material that only that person knows, but would also contain some overlapping information common to all the writers’ experience. Even the common material, however, would be slightly different from the next, since it would be interpreted by individuals with different experiences and perspectives on the subject.

Yet each biography would be telling the story of the same man—and each would be true.

creation verse of John. He doesn't even bother telling how Jesus was born. Mark's gospel begins with Jesus already moving at full speed: by the ninth verse of chapter one Jesus is baptized; by the fourteenth, Jesus is "preaching the gospel of God."

There is an *energy* about the story told by Mark—events happen "immediately," and the characters move quickly from scene to scene. There is a lot of horizontal movement, with little vertical contemplation. The Jesus in Mark's gospel is a ministering servant, not afraid to get his hands dirty.

Because this gospel was written for Roman gentiles, it is a story with universal appeal. One need not be familiar with Jewish history or its Law; one need not be a sophisticated, well-educated Greek; one need not be a philosopher, comfortable with lofty, spiritual concepts to read and understand Mark's gospel. It was written so that the common man might know that God came down to man in flesh: to help, to heal, to serve.

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-45

It is the Jesus in Mark's gospel who attends my deepest needs. He is the one who is so quick to reach down and embrace me when I am hurting, when I have failed, when I have really blown it. He understands that I am fragile, that I am made of dust that is disrupted by the faintest breeze. He is the one who listens to the wails of my grief, the joy bubbling out of the deepest regions of my heart, and our quiet conversation as we walk together in His garden.

NOW ALL THIS
TOOK PLACE
THAT WHAT WAS
SPOKEN BY THE
LORD THROUGH
THE PROPHET
MIGHT BE
FULFILLED,
SAYING, "BEHOLD,
THE VIRGIN
SHALL BE WITH
CHILD, AND
SHALL BEAR A
SON, AND THEY
SHALL CALL HIS
NAME
IMMANUEL,"
WHICH
TRANSLATED
MEANS, "GOD
WITH US."
MATTHEW 1:22-23 NASB

*In tenderness He sought me,
Weary and sick with sin,
And on His shoulders brought me
Back to His fold again.
While angels in His presence sang
Until the courts of heaven rang.*

*He washed the bleeding sin-wounds,
And poured in oil and wine;
He whispered to assure me,
"I've found thee, thou art Mine."
I never heard a sweeter voice;
It made my aching heart rejoice!*

*He pointed to the nail-prints,
For me His blood was shed,
A mocking crown so thorny
Was placed upon His head:
I wondered what He saw in me,
To suffer such deep agony.*

*I'm sitting in His presence,
The sunshine of His face,
While with adoring wonder
His blessings I retrace.
It seems as if eternal days
Are far too short to sound His praise.*

*So while the hours are passing,
All now is perfect rest;
I'm waiting for the morning,
The brightest and the best,
When He will call us to His side,
To be with Him, His spotless bride.*

*Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the love that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold!
W. Spencer Walton*

CONTINUITY

Citizens of England, Norway, Jordan or Denmark may be perfectly comfortable with the idea of a king, but there is no such tradition with the citizens of the United States. In fact, the roots of our republic, both historical and philosophical, are deeply imbedded in rebellion *against* a king—indeed, most forms of authority. We're an independent lot, imbued with the DNA of self-determination. (Some of us are even uncomfortable with the concept of a president!) A good republican says, "Just leave me alone to make my own way!"

Along with our Constitution, we have our first president, George Washington, to thank for this. Popular sentiment would have permitted him to become an actual king, but he insisted that

there be no change by usurpation; for though this in one instance may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.

Indeed, the strong foundation of a democratic republic is not in its *first* leader, but in its *second*; the critical moment is not the president's inauguration, but his departure from office. It was the peaceful transition from George Washington to John Adams that set the precedent for those that would follow. So the concept of a king—a monarch with absolute authority—is something to which the typical citizen of the United States would not be friendly.

Yet the Christian, regardless his country of origin or residence, has signed away all authority for his life to the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine king. He is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Lord of All.

Matthew's Gospel is rooted in the Old Testament—in fact, it was originally penned in Hebrew, then translated into Greek. In Matthew's account Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, the Messiah, the King. The book begins with the Jewish genealogy that led from Abraham, through David, to Joseph, the "husband of Mary." The first narrative is not about Jesus or Mary, but Joseph.

The text of this Gospel is peppered liberally with quotations and references to the ancient books we refer to as the Old Testament. Jesus Himself draws upon the Old Testament: all three of His responses to Satan, during His temptation in the wilderness, are direct quotes from Scripture.

The Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is the focal point of continuity with the ancient beginnings of the Judeo-Christian faith—indeed, creation itself. It serves as the perfect first book of the New Testament; though not the first written, it is an eloquent bridge, linking the New with the Old.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Matthew 28:18 nkjv

And even an American can embrace the King in Matthew's account.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

People often wonder why we have four Gospels. There is a very good reason for this. It is interesting to note that each of these Gospels is a development of an exclamatory statement that is found in the Old Testament. Four different times—and only four times—in the Old Testament there was an exclamatory statement made concerning the Messiah, introduced always by the word behold: In one of the prophets we read, "Behold thy king, O Israel!" In another place we read, "Behold the man!" In a third place we read, "Behold my servant!" In still a fourth place we read, "Behold thy God!" These four statements are amplified and developed in the four Gospels:

Matthew, the Gospel of the King;
Mark, the Gospel of the Servant;
Luke, the Gospel of the Son of man; and **John**, the Gospel of God, the presentation of the Son of God.
Stedman

SON OF MAN

"FOR THE SON OF
 MAN HAS COME
 TO SEEK AND TO
 SAVE THAT
 WHICH WAS
 LOST."
 LUKE 19:10 NASB

His flesh began as any other: male seed and female egg joined and nurtured in the human womb. But God the Son required the purity of a sinless birth. So the seed was from the Holy Spirit, and the egg was from a virgin. The two came together and became a baby. And the baby was named Jesus.

If we can imagine what God looks like, we might, since He is spirit, imagine Him in the shape of a spiritual being: radiant energy, a hovering pool of light. If the Father decided to send God the Son down to be the Savior for mankind He might choose to send Him down in His native form. So the Son of God—as a floating pool of light—would come down to earth, live among humans for a while, then be executed by the Jews and Romans. Mysteriously, the death is only temporary, and forty days later the globule of light would return to heaven. After the initial shock of His appearance had worn off, we wouldn't be surprised by *anything* He could do. After all, He was just radiant energy; the cross could not kill radiant energy.

But Jesus did not present Himself as radiant energy. He presented Himself as a rather normal human being. The baby Jesus was real. No china doll, He burped and spit up and filled His diapers like every other baby before or since.

WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND

He was human—flesh and blood. He was born of a woman, grew and slowly matured as a typical child, and did not even present Himself as Deity until he had been on earth around thirty years.

The Son of God had to become human so we would see His death and resurrection as a miracle—so we would know that, even though packaged in typical, normal flesh, He was truly, the Son of God. The Son of God became flesh because only as flesh could He die—and mankind could only be saved if He did.

In his Gospel, Luke emphasizes Christ's humanity. Where Matthew, the Jew, began his account with Christ's kingly line back to Abraham, Luke, the Greek, includes Christ's genealogy back to Adam—the first man.

More than any other of the Gospel writers, Luke sets the life of Jesus into a context of *family*, beginning his account with the parents of John the Baptist. John will be not only the prophet to announce Christ's arrival, but he is blood kin. The story of the birth of Jesus in Luke's Gospel is tender, intimate, and very human. One can almost smell the stable, and feel the weariness of the travelers. One can see the baby lying in His crude surroundings, wrapped in strips of soiled cloth.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:6-7

But Luke also emphasizes that this man Jesus will be the Savior of the world.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11

In His first public announcement of His purpose in coming, Jesus quoted Hebrew Scriptures that spoke of the coming Savior:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:17-21

The Jesus in the Gospel of Luke the physician is the hope for every man and woman, no matter their race, creed, or country of birth. His roots, along with ours, are traced back to the first man. So this Jesus, of lowly birth in a stable, is—while very God—our brother and kin. Through His salvation our birthright is the same as His.

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Thus, in ties of blood, Jesus, the Son of man, is one with all the heirs of heaven: "For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11). What reason we have here for the strongest consolation and delight, seeing that, "Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one." We can say of our Lord as poor Naomi said of bounteous Boaz, "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen." *C.H. Spurgeon*

*In the Paradise of glory
Is the Man Divine;
There my heart, O God, is tasting
Fellowship with Thine.
Called to share Thy joy unmeasured,
Now is heaven begun;
I rejoice with Thee, O Father,
In Thy glorious Son.*

*Where the heart of God is resting,
I have found my rest;
Christ who found me in the desert,
Laid me on His breast.
There in deep unhindered fulness
Doth my joy flow free—
On through everlasting ages,
Lord, beholding Thee.*

*Round me is creation groaning,
Death, and sin, and care;
But there is a rest remaining,
And my Lord is there.
There I find a blessed stillness
In His courts of love;
All below but strife and darkness,
Cloudless peace above.*

*'Tis a solitary pathway
To that fair retreat—
Where in deep and sweet communion
Sit I at His feet.
In that glorious isolation,
Loneliness how blest,
From the windy storm and tempest
Have I found my rest.*

*Learning from Thy lips for ever
All the Father's heart,
Thou hast, in that joy eternal,
Chosen me my part.
There, where Jesus, Jesus only,
Fills each heart and tongue,
Where Himself is all the radiance
And Himself the song.*

*Here, who follows Him the nearest,
Needs must walk alone;
There like many seas the chorus,
Praise surrounds the throne.
Here a dark and silent pathway;
In those courts so fair
Countless hosts, yet each beholding
Jesus only, there.
"T.P."*

SON OF GOD

If the Lord Jesus had a best friend, John was it. This was the disciple “whom Jesus loved,” the disciple who “was reclining on Jesus’ breast” at the Last Supper. It was into John’s care that Jesus gave His mother, Mary, as He hung dying on the cross.

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. John 19:26-27

No one on earth was closer to Jesus the man than John—which makes it surprising that his Gospel account would emphasize the *deity* of Christ. We might expect John to be the chronicler of the rich humanity of Jesus, but, instead, his purpose is to prove—through the telling of His miracles, teaching, and works—that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:37-40

Perhaps because he lived the longest, and wrote his Gospel so late in life, John’s account of Jesus’ life has a lofty, supernatural feeling to it. Where Matthew takes us back to Abraham, and Luke takes us back to Adam, the apostle John takes us back to the time before Creation in one of the most beautifully-written passages of the whole Bible:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. John 1:1-5 nkjv

It is as if by being so close to the *person* of Jesus, John came to understand in a profound way His *deity*. And therein lies the lesson for each of us: When we get to know Jesus, spend time with Him, rest upon Him in those moments of deep need, we come away from the experience with a more complete, authentic picture of who He is.

Jesus is the Man of action, the servant always ready to help when help is needed. He is the long-awaited Messiah, the King, the fulfillment of ancient prophecy come in the flesh. And that flesh was perfect, utterly perfect, and worthy of the sacrifice the Savior made on our behalf. But most of all, Jesus was the Son of God, truly all of God in flesh.

He is the living Son who breathed the air of this world, but now reigns in the lofty heights of the eternal throne. He is the spotless lamb, before whom all people will eventually bow.

In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” Rev. 5:12-13

JESUS DID MANY OTHER MIRACULOUS SIGNS IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS DISCIPLES, WHICH ARE NOT RECORDED IN THIS BOOK. BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, AND THAT BY BELIEVING YOU MAY HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME.

JOHN 20:30-31

Coming to John’s Gospel, we note a different emphasis. Luke had traced the genealogy back to Adam. Matthew had traced the ancestors of Jesus back to Abraham. But John goes back to the beginning of all things and appeals to all men and the whole world to consider the necessity for Jesus, the Divine Son of God, to become flesh and dwell among us. John, in his record, insists that Jesus antedates all biography and all chronology, and he goes back to the beginning to set forth the wonder and the mystery and the glory of Jesus Christ. *A.W. Tozer*

Aspects

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