




Editor's Note

“What are you praying for at ESN?” Thank you for asking! Here's a partial list of some things we bring before the Lord:

— A secretary to replace Marianne Fusco who is now with the Lord. This is “light duty,” mostly sending cards with gifts to writers and workers, and notes of thanks to those who share with the ministry.

— We need a searchable index on our websites of all past subjects for both English and Spanish versions. This would expand usefulness beyond the current issue.

— We'd like to see more input from readers: comments, suggestions, and even gifts to help the work (but note Phil. 4:17).

Heartfelt thanks to all who pray for this small—but growing ministry! 

New Testament Overview

The Gospels, Part 2 by Warren Henderson

Mark's Gospel

About ninety percent of *Mark* has parallel content in *Matthew* and *Luke*, yet the commonalities are presented more chronologically and with a different focus. *Mark* briefly speaks of John's ministry and the Lord's baptism and temptation, and then quickly has the Lord engaged in ministry (1:14). This abrupt introduction fits well with Mark's theme—Christ the humble and industrious servant of God. *Mark* may be outlined as follows:

- The Servant Introduced (1:1-13)
- The Servant Serving (1:14-10:52)
- The Servant Suffering (11:1-15:47)
- The Servant Successful (16:1-20).

Though Mark's introduction is brief, he does safeguard against having a degraded view of God's Servant: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*” (1:1). The character of the Son of God is revealed in what He does as the lowly Servant of God. This is why there are almost no authoritative decrees by the Lord in Mark's account. No sentence is passed on Israel. No “woe” message to Pharisees. Mark will show us the gentle, kind, humble nature of the Lord Jesus while enduring distress, rejection, and hardship in His God-given ministry. God's summons to “Behold My Servant” is an invitation to admire the Person as much as His tenacious ministry (Matt. 12:18).

Mark writes of the busy life of Christ in ministering to the broken-hearted and those in need. Accordingly, Mark records sixteen of Christ's miracles, yet only four of His parables. Mark depicts Christ serving God's covenant people, while Matthew reveals Christ

as testing Israel. *Mark* is addressed to a wider audience, the Romans, while *Matthew* is distinctly Jewish. At this time, half of the Roman Empire was composed of slaves; therefore, Mark's audience would readily relate to his servant perspective.

Twelve of Mark's sixteen chapters begin with the word *and*, and a fair majority of the verses in *Mark* begin with conjunctions and adverbs such as *and*, *now*, and *then*. *Mark* presents a serving Savior to his audience. Furthermore, he frequently uses two Greek adverbs: *eutheos*, meaning *directly*; and *euthus*, meaning *at once* in conjunction with describing the Lord's service to better display the exhaustive nature of Christ's daily minis-

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try. Day in and day out, at any time of day or night, people were coming to Christ with their problems and ailments. Mark reveals to us not just a serving Savior, but One who relentlessly served others selflessly. The last verse in Mark reminds us that although the Lord has ascended back to heaven, He continues working through those who represent Him on the earth (16:20).

Luke's Gospel

The Gospel of Luke was written by a Gentile doctor to a Gentile audience. Luke addresses his work to a Gentile named Theophilus,

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Practical Ministry

“Things Most Surely Believed” by Jack Spender

In introducing his account of the life of Christ, Luke the beloved physician describes its contents as “things most surely believed among us.” That’s a beautiful and interesting phrase! But what does “most surely believed” mean? Does it mean that some truths are lightly believed by Christians, while other truths are firmly believed? More likely, Luke is pointing to the heart of our Christian faith in the Person of Christ. In any case, it reminds us that believers need to be firmly grounded in Bible doctrines; truth must be appropriated by faith.

Luke’s phrase came to mind recently in a conversation with a young believer who was explaining a lesson she was learning about faith in her walk with the Lord. I found it helpful, and thought you might, too. Some might wonder, why cover this in a publication for church elders? Because faith is one of those crucial subjects with which elders must be continually occupied as they feed the flock of God. Too often it is taken for granted: you either believe or you don’t believe, and on we go. But it can be very helpful to growing Christians to define and explain and even illustrate what exactly is meant by this word “believe.” Spiritual food that nourishes is not just a collection of facts; it is truth taken into the heart to become a life-changing part of the person.

I’ll summarize most of her testimony as I remember it, quoting where necessary. One night, she was so distressed by a difficult situation in her life that she was unable to sleep. It was late, and there was no one available to talk to, so she decided to pray about the matter, and that’s what she did.

She prayed, and then prayed some more, and then prayed earnestly—as earnestly as she knew how—and felt no change or peace. I was interested in the question that she posed to herself, and for this I’ll quote her exact words: “Why don’t I feel comforted?”

Now before we go on, I can antici-

pate some readers pointing out that our feelings are not meant to be the measure of our faith, and this is true. But let’s remember that the need at the time was peaceful sleep, and if sleep is impossible in a time of turmoil, then theological discussions can seem to be missing the point. To continue...

After asking the question, “Why don’t I feel comforted?” she then asked herself, “But do you really believe? Do you really believe that God is good, that He has heard your prayer, and that He will care for the matter in His own time and way?” And then she asked one final question: “If you really did believe that with your whole heart, how would you act?” “Well,” she decided, “I’d be praising and thanking Him!” Having reached that conclusion, she opened a song of praise on her phone, and began to sing along with it, praising and thanking the Lord. Then she said: “I fell right asleep, and slept like a baby.”

Thinking About It

In our walk with the Lord, we’re all in different places. Some will find this subject hard to grasp. Giving thanks “in everything” (1 Thes. 5:18) is difficult; thanking Him “for everything” (Eph. 5:20) can seem impossible. Others look back on many years of praising the Lord even in difficult circumstances.

But my desire in relating this story is to press the point upon those who lead in the assembly, that in opening the Scriptures, whether publicly or one-on-one, we must not suppose that head knowledge by itself is life-changing. It is not “heart knowledge”!

Multitudes say they believe in Jesus but are lost. Both in salvation and in sanctification, there must be “living faith.” We rejoice in that fruit when—through the work of God’s Spirit—a believing person says, “Now I’m beginning to understand!”

Now, since communication is both a science and an art, it’s relevant to ask how we can become better communica-

tors of truth. How can food for the flock better nourish the hearers? The answer, of course, involves both God’s work, and man’s work. Only by the Holy Spirit can truth be taken in and renew the mind (Rom. 12:1,2). But the one who speaks the Word has some God-given responsi-

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bilities, too. As I have pondered this subject of avoiding the desire to dominate, but being “helpers” of people’s faith and joy (2 Cor. 1:24), a few questions have challenged me, and I’ll list them for any help they might offer:

— Do we follow the example of Ezra and his coworkers in opening the Scriptures? “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Neh. 8:8). Here are three qualities that need thoughtful consideration, because, “if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle” (1 Cor. 14:8). “So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

— Do we provide clear and easy-to-understand definitions of key words in the text, remembering that the definition given in the dictionary might not accurately convey its full biblical meaning (as, for example, the word “hope”)?

— Do we follow the Lord’s practice of explaining Bible truths where appropriate by using illustrations from nature or real-life situations meaningful to the hearers? The testimony above provides an example.

— Is our ministry edifying in that it builds a bridge between hearing facts with the ears and hearing truth in the heart, with the resulting evidence of obedience to the Word?

(Continued on next page)

— Does the assembly provide times for people to discuss or ask questions about what has been preached in the Bible hour or in personal Bible readings? This point has often made the difference between little and large fruit in teaching

ministry.

The illustration given above must not, of course, replace what Scripture teaches us about faith, but it can illustrate the difference between dead faith and living faith as described, for example, in

James 2! Healthy assemblies work toward an ever-increasing number of saints who take seriously “things most surely believed among us”!



Gospels (continued from page 1)

meaning “beloved of God.” Luke wrote an “orderly” account of the humanity of Christ from information obtained through multiple eyewitnesses (1:1-2). Hence, Luke provides an in-depth account of the conception and birth of Christ—his foundation of the humanity of Christ is like no other. Luke’s Gospel is less chronological than Mark’s and John’s, but more systematic in presentation.

“The Son of Man” is a term that links Christ to earth as a man. Luke applies the title to the Lord Jesus twenty-five times in his Gospel, while in contrast, John, whose theme is Christ’s deity, only refers to the Lord as the Son of Man twelve times. The Lord spoke more often of Himself as “the Son of Man” than as “the Son of God,” for the title identified His mission and not His essence. In relationship to this title, Luke’s Gospel may be outlined as follows:

- The Son of Man’s First Advent (1:1-4:13)
- Ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50)
- Ministry in Judea and Perea (9:51-19:27)
- Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28-24:53)

Luke records twenty-two of Christ’s parables (only five of these are found elsewhere) and twenty of Christ’s miracles. Mark shows the busy ministry of the Lord, whereas Luke adds more detail concerning Christ’s miracles and His interaction with people to show His compassion and concern for them (e.g., Luke notes six dining episodes: three with the Lord’s enemies and three with His friends). The Lord spent time with people; He saw, He touched, He listened. He was genuinely concerned for those He associated with.

Luke also refers to the Lord’s prayer-life more than any other Gospel writer. The Lord often sought the face of His

Father early in the morning. Humanly speaking, the Lord was dependent upon His Father. He received instruction and strength from heaven. Throughout his Gospel, Luke focuses his audience’s attention to human events surrounding Christ’s life, the humanity of the Lord Jesus, and the human appeal of His ministry. Luke presents a touchable Savior who is more than willing to touch and to bless others.

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John’s Gospel

John addresses the whole world with his Gospel. John refers to the world eighty times, which is over twice as many references as the other three Gospels combined. *John* is vastly different than the synoptic Gospels and is the most exalted in tone: John reveals the glorious splendor of Christ’s deity as the “Son of God.” John introduces “*the only begotten Son*” and “*the only begotten of the Father*.” In response, the world should “honor the Son,” an exhortation found six times in John’s Gospel.

John recounts—

- the public ministry of the Lord in the first twelve chapters
- His private ministry with His disciples in chapters 13-17
- and then Christ’s passion and resurrection complete his record.

John swells with unique content, planned omissions, key words, “types” of Christ, and declarations of deity. For example, *John* reveals the fuller relation of the Holy Spirit’s work concerning believ-

ers in his Gospel (He is our Comforter [Advocate], Helper, Teacher, Convicter, and Guide). Where Matthew presents Christ as fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, John shows that Christ, as “the Word of God” (1:1) is the literal fulfillment of Old Testament “types.” He is the Lamb of God (John 1), the Serpent on the pole (John 3), the Well supplying living water (John 4), the Manna from heaven (John 6), the Rock supplying living water (John 7), the Light of the World (John 8), the Good Shepherd (John 10), and the Vine (John 15).

John abounds with key words and phrases that distinctly highlight his theme. These include: “Son of God,” “My Father,” “I AM,” “eternal life,” “honor,” “love,” “light,” and “life.” John’s purposed omissions further develop the theme of Christ’s deity. For example there are no parables, no genealogies, no baptismal account, no temptation, no transfiguration, no apprehensions of the cross, and no ascension recorded in John. God cannot be birthed, tempted, or anxious. John presents Christ from the heavenly view and the transfiguration of Christ narrowly declared His glory on the earth. Lastly, He, who is omnipresent, does not need to ascend anywhere.

God’s number of perfection, seven, is illustrated about twenty times in John’s Gospel. For example there are seven “I AM” declarations ascribed by Christ to Himself: “The Bread of Life,” “The Light of the World,” “The Door,” “The Good Shepherd,” “The Resurrection and the Life,” “The Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and “The True Vine.” John eloquently motivates every human soul to peer in and look beyond the veil of the Lord’s flesh. In so doing, the Lord’s divinity, lordship, moral splendor, and holy personage are appreciated and esteemed.



Wives' Corner

The Puzzle by Rachel Kichar

“What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”

—John 13:7

The other night, I lost myself in a thousand-piece puzzle. The scene was brilliant yet peaceful: a quaint farmhouse, a barn relaxing into old age, hillside pastures, ruddy autumn foliage, and a farm pond. Of course, it didn't arrive as a completed scene, but a jumble of pieces with unrecognizable color patterns. As my hands sorted, searched, and fitted together the pieces, my mind slipped away to the far greater puzzles that are life's decisions: “What next, Lord? Where, Lord? When, Lord? Who, Lord?”

I spent a good part of the night working on a field of curious dun green—I was sure it went on the right side of the picture. Eventually, the field itself was together, but not anchored to its place in the scene, and I was stumped. I hunted all over the board for another piece that would provide the clue. Nothing. Just like the urgent decisions that seem almost obvious—but also impossible. We pray and pray, but the way does not open, and no alternative appears. There is nothing to do but wait, and watch for the answer.

In the midst of my search for a link to the green field, I did stumble upon the

final piece of the chimney. Funny how I could not find it when I was looking for it. Yet now the farmhouse was completed, and its perfection proved that the final piece, slow to be revealed, was just right. It reminded me of when a seemingly spontaneous decision turned out to be the capstone of a structure that had been long in the building. My Father had been guiding me when I didn't even realize it.

Still no progress on the field. I had to leave it alone, and turn my focus to the more obvious sections as their pieces came to hand. I was reminded that every day we have opportunities to “do the next thing,” the painfully insignificant, right thing. Society may be collapsing, all the world's anchors slipping loose—but God's just asking me to wash the next sink full of dishes, change another diaper, or smile at my neighbor.

At long last, I found a piece that looked like it could solve the green field problem. It even fitted, in a way. Not quite perfectly, but—wouldn't it do? I tried. I tried again. No, it wouldn't do, no matter how much I wanted it to. I prayed for my friends who are looking for spouses—that they won't settle for a partner who is almost just right. And I remembered all the times

I've tried to maneuver for my will—and nearly broke the pieces in my efforts to make it work. You'd think I would know by now: God's will is never “almost perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

When I went to bed, the puzzle was still unfinished. But I know the picture will be completed someday, and it will be beautiful. As I read the news, it seems that not many pieces can be missing now in the puzzle of history—and yet the beauty is hard for me to find. But that's okay. Seeing it all as it shall be, summed up in Christ, God has always been able to look down on the assembling fragments and say, “It is good” (Gen. 1:31).

Meanwhile, He's teaching me to trust His ways. Even the most urgent questions will wait for God's answers. I can trust His guidance. I can do the next thing. I can reject human solutions. I can rejoice as I anticipate the

perfect revelation of His masterpiece. I can wait to understand “after this” (John 13:7).

Did I mention that I finished the green field? In one moment, after I put in one of the random, “unrelated” pieces, it all became so obvious. The field fit perfectly along the *left* border of the puzzle.

ESN

I can trust His guidance.

I can do the next thing.

I can reject human solutions.

THE SMALL PRINT

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Specific Bible versions used are indicated at the first quotation in each article.

Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers” 1 Peter 5:2a NKJV