

## GOD'S SAVIOR FOR THE WORLD

During December we have been attempting to answer the age old question, *Why did Jesus come?* While we might think the answer is very clear, the fact is, since Jesus' arrival on Earth, the answer has been debated by most people in our world. People today still debate this age-old question. The answer is to be found in the eyewitness narratives of those who recorded His life. In any courtroom but the world's religious one, four eyewitnesses would constitute a compelling affirmation of the facts.

We have been looking at those eyewitness narratives, which are called the Gospels (good news). We started with Matthew's gospel. Matt was the Jewish bad boy, who dared work for the Romans as a tax collector, but who left all of that to follow Jesus. It appears that Matthew wrote about Jesus' life with his own Jewish people in mind as his audience. He included many Old Testament messianic prophecies in his account, that only a religious Jew would know about or be interested in. Matthew said Jesus came as **God's sign to the religious**. Last week we surveyed *Mark* written by John Mark, who was not an apostle, but was closely connected to Peter. Mark depicts the practical side of Jesus' ministry, saying, Jesus came as **God's servant to the suffering**. Today, we are going to look at Luke's account of Jesus' life. As some of you know, Dr. Luke was not an apostle or friend of one of the original 12, or even a Jew. He was a Gentile convert and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul, and he wrote this book to a Gentile audience after a considerable amount of personal research.

*Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4.)*

From Luke's Gentile vantage point, everything Jesus said and did pointed to one overwhelming fact: Jesus came to be God's savior for the world. He was much more than a Jewish religious icon. He did not come to promote Judaism or to start a new Jewish niche religious society. Luke points out that from the very beginning of His life, with His angelic birth announcement, Jesus came with the entire world in mind. In fact, Luke notes that Jesus identified Himself with the totality of mankind in mind.

*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)*

And throughout His entire earthly ministry and life, Jesus demonstrated that rescuing people, that human recovery was His primary mission. As we survey Luke, we will see the seven different ways the writer recorded how Jesus demonstrated His primary purpose in coming to earth. In one of Jesus earliest public actions, Luke records that as Jesus began preaching, He went home to Nazareth.

*And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all the people in the synagogue were intently directed at Him. Now He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)*

The rest of this story records that the response Jesus received was not too positive. The first time I tried preaching, men went to sleep. Jesus' first try in Nazareth ended with men trying to stone Him. But here's the point: Luke, recording Jesus' own words, makes it very clear.

**Jesus CAME to heal hurting people's spiritual BROKENNESS.** Jesus came to repair people that were broken, recover people that were lost, and release people that were trapped. Notice in Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus came with good news from God about freedom and God's favor. This proclamation was more than mere words to Jesus. He backed it up with the actions of His entire life.

Everything we do in life has a theological basis. Even if you are not outwardly religious all of our life priorities and pursuits have a theological conviction somewhere in the back of our minds driving them. It may be a belief that is based on the Bible or not based on the Bible, but as moral, spiritual beings created in God's image, our entire lives are driven by something we believe about God. This was also true about why Jesus came. Jesus claimed to be on a mission from God. That is what He said from the beginning, even though that got Him into a lot of trouble. Did that trouble and the severe opposition to Jesus, which arose from it, detour Jesus from His convictions regarding His life priorities or pursuits? No it didn't, not in the least. Jesus remained on task with His purpose in coming.

*Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near Jesus to listen to Him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to complain, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." And so He told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the other ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?" (Luke 15:1-4)*

**Jesus was CONCERNED about sinful people being spiritually LOST.** Do you find it ironic that the irreligious people of Jesus' day loved to hang around Him, were actually drawn to Him like a magnet, to hear what He had to say about God, while religious people were uncomfortable both with Jesus and the irreligious crowd He hung with? Makes you wonder if they were not basing their life priorities and pursuits on the wrong theological beliefs. Things have not changed much in 2000 years! Survey after survey indicates that many of the non-churched of our day are spiritually interested in God, but are turned off to organized American Christianity.

Maybe there is a parallelism here we need to pick up on. Jesus made Himself available to the irreligious of His day because He was deeply concerned about their spiritually lost condition. He saw them as cut off from God. And when criticized by the religious crowd, who used guilt by association as the means of evaluating who was from God or not, Jesus was very clear in His response. He said, "look I am fulfilling my divine mission in coming to earth. I did not come to rally the religious. I came to rescue the irreligious." Everyone does the same thing in his or her own lives. It just depends on and really all comes down to who or what you value in life. In real life, we look for anything of value that we have lost. Isn't that true? Jesus went on to tell three stories about lost property, possessions, and people to demonstrate this. In every case, the respective owner focused on finding that which was lost and of value to him until it was found.

I still remember from years ago temporarily losing one of my small grandchildren at Disneyland. One moment they were with me, and the next moment they were gone in the crowd. Knowing how independent and prone to wander kids can be, I found myself on the edge of panic. Where is he? Did someone snatch him? You know the thoughts that go through your mind at times like that? Well, I'll tell you one thought I never had: "Oh well, I still have the other four. One out of five isn't bad!" But you see that is exactly what the religious people of Jesus' day thought, because they did not value those irreligious people. They were glad about it! I enlisted the rest of the family to search and call until the missing one was found. If some of you had come by in those moments, seen my concern, asked what I was doing, and volunteered to join in my search, my heart would have been knit to yours because you took on my priority of what was valuable to me, my grandchild.

That is the point that Jesus consistently demonstrated, that religious people then and now don't get. Lost people matter to God! As evidenced by Christ's coming, God doesn't have any higher priority than this. Jesus made Himself available to irreligious people on their turf because they were valuable to the Father. The Father had said, "Son, go find them, members of our family that are lost, recruit everyone who is willing to help you look, and I will reward each who joins you and shares my parental heart concern." But Jesus was not only concerned about irreligious people who were spiritually lost.

*Now on that very occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus responded and said to them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans just because they have suffered this fate? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you think that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse offenders than all the other people who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-5)*

**Jesus CALLED seeking people to spiritual REPENTANCE.** Jesus took the opportunity to turn some life disasters into teachable moments that fit with His life mission of rescuing lost people. He knew that people are normally quick to assign blame when bad stuff happens in our world, sometimes even unfairly accusing the victim as though they deserved what they got. I think we all unconsciously do this! Our first human response is not to rejoice with those who rejoice, or sorrow with those who sorrow. We use both occasions to make value judgments in deciding if they deserved what they got or not, be it good or bad. In so doing, we often make ourselves out to be a little better than others. I deserved the good thing and didn't deserve that bad thing that happened. That is why it didn't happen to me. I didn't deserve it! God is just!

So Jesus clears up their confusion by telling those in the crowd who were spiritual seekers, "You know what? Everyone is in the same boat." But be clear about God. He doesn't bring His justice on people of this world through calamity. Bad stuff happens because we live in a fallen world. Even though it does not fall during this life, no one is exempt from God's justice falling on him or her. Anyone and everyone who seeks God needs to realize that they need to repent. This means to change your mind about your life, God, sin, Jesus, and your eternal destiny. Jesus said not to confuse natural calamity with coming judgment. No one will escape God's justice. Everyone needs to repent, change their ways, and seek God. Of course, a lot of people then as now didn't want to hear that. Their life focus was on the here and now activities of life, so matters of the heart concerning the hereafter had little value to them.

*Now someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one is affluent does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began thinking to himself, saying, "You have many goods stored up for many years to come; relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you;" Such is the one who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich in relation to God." (Luke 12:13-21)*

**Jesus CAUTIONED self-centered people about their spiritual APATHY!** I mentioned earlier that all of our life priorities and pursuits reflect a theological belief. Zaccheus' belief system said life is all about here and now, and there is no God and hereafter. Or if there is, my life accountability to Him is no big deal! I've got it covered. Jesus countered with a different perspective. Jesus said you have got it totally wrong. God believes that person is a fool to exchange so much (his soul) for so little (temporal gain). Jesus always had strong words for those who played earthly games with their eternal destiny. Why? Because He was on a mission from the Father to rescue lost people. They mattered to Him. It hurt Him to see wandering people go farther away from God. But in the same way, to those who were hungry for God Jesus offered great comfort.

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and he was unable due to the crowd, because he was short in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree in order to see Him, because He was about to pass through that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." (Luke 19:1-5)*

**Jesus COMFORTED alienated people's spiritual HUNGER.** Jesus was always quick to recognize a divine interruption in people's lives, especially in those alienated folks who lived their lives on the end and fringe of respectability. Zacchaeus, for all his money and positional power, had no respect. His people hated him for his dishonesty. From all outward appearances, he was the most unlikely candidate to be spiritually interested in God. But the Father had not sent Jesus to make human evaluations on the basis of appearance. Rather, Jesus came knowing that God was going to find His lost family by interrupting people's lives at the most inopportune times and in the most unlikely places. Jesus, true to the reason for His coming, was always ready to recognize those moments and offer comfort and hope to those unlikely candidates for God's forever family.

The critics were quick to accuse both Jesus and his host of wrong motives and choices. But Zacchaeus put his money where his heart was. He demonstrated the genuineness of his repentance with a changed life and value system of what is important. And Jesus affirmed that he had made the right choice for God. Jesus proclaimed today salvation has come to this house. This man's faith and repentance is the real thing! Consistent with His mission, Jesus comforted those religiously alienated but spiritually hungry for God.

And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love personal greetings in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive all the more condemnation." (Luke 20:45-47)

**Jesus CONDEMNED religious people's spiritual HYPOCRISY!** Jesus cautioned the spiritually apathetic, and condemned the hypocrisy of the religious because He knew that both the apathy and hypocrisy were spiritually self-destructive to any and all who used them to play the life game of religious appearances. He said don't misuse the privilege God has afforded you. Someday that will bring you a greater degree of condemnation than if you had not had that spiritual privilege. Jesus was always careful to make people distinguish between and decide what their theological basis for eternal hope was: their religious symbols and stuff, or their relationship with God.

Doctor Luke did all this research, interviewing the apostles and early-day Christians, some of whom appear in his book, like Zacchaeus. He collected everything he could about what people who heard Jesus remembered and what they saw Him do. Then he sat down and wrote Jesus' biography with the Spirit directing him. He did it for a Greek friend of his who was evidently spiritually interested in Jesus. As Luke completed this book, probably running out of scroll to write on, he brought Jesus' life and mission to proper conclusion as God's savior for the whole world, including how Jesus died.

*And when they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."...One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him...but the other responded and rebuking him...and he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."...And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." And having said this, He died. (Luke 23:33-46)*

**Jesus was CRUCIFIED to cover all people's spiritual GUILT!** He died, not just for Jewish people's guilt or religious people's guilt, but all people's spiritual guilt before God. And if ever there was any doubt about that, it would have been resolved by the inclusion of this unusual conversation, that only Luke includes between Jesus and the two criminals executed with Him. Jesus came to find and rescue those who were lost. And in His final dying moments, that still remained His primary mission. Jesus died to satisfy God's justice concerning the sin of the world committed against God's holiness. And there are no limits to that covering of guilt. It fully extended to each person who desires it as evidenced by the dying words of this thief. He simply repented of his sin and humbled himself before God the Son, asking to be remembered with favor and favor was given. Jesus came to cover all people's spiritual guilt. But it is going only to cover those who seek it and ask for it.

**Point to Ponder:** Luke points out that from the very beginning of His life, with His angelic birth announcement, Jesus came with the entire world in mind.

**Question to Answer:** Which of the seven groups of people Jesus came to save did you most identify with when you became Jesus' follower?

# PASTOR BRYAN'S PRAYER POINTS

Grace Family,

As we near Christmas, we ask for you keep Butte County in prayer. The following prayer prompts are being prayed over by all of the churches in our community. As we continue to gather on weekends, we ask that you keep our church and its leadership in prayer. It's a pleasure to serve you and your family at Grace Community Church!

For the Gospel,  
Pastor Bryan

## **Butte County Prays Prayer Guide: November/December 2020**

Church

- Pray that as we approach the new year, the church would seek God's heart for 2021
- Pray that God would bring reconciliation between pastors/congregations/denominations
- Pray that every believer would understand they have been called to pray, love, and share the gospel
- Pray that the church would Lead the way in racial reconciliation, filled by the love of Christ

Health

- Pray for the health care community as they continue to battle the coronavirus
- Pray for creative solutions to the opioid addiction crisis in Butte County and your city

Government

- Pray for your city staff: wisdom, understanding, and revelation from God on how to approach issues facing the city
- Pray for county staff: wisdom, understanding, and revelation from God on how to approach issues facing Butte County
- Pray for those re-elected and newly elected that God will provoke their hearts to walk in righteousness and pass laws/ordinances according to God's heart and standards

Family

- Pray for restoration in marriages, that we would see a drop in divorce rates in Butte County
- Pray that God would release a spirit of adoption, that no child would be unwanted

Education

- Pray for teachers and administrators as they continue to navigate teaching in context of COVID-19
- Pray for supernatural ideas on how to "catch up" children who fell behind during COVID-19

Media/Arts

- Pray that art, entertainment, and media would draw people closer to God as the first and consummate artist and Creator and would give God glory for and with their talent
- Pray for doors to open for Christians to bring positive, healing, and hope filled messages to our communities

Business

- Pray for an economic boom in our county despite the "Shelter In Place" order due to COVID19
- Pray for Christian business that they would thrive and extend transformational interactions with their customers

Agriculture

- Pray for wisdom for farmers as they face a reduction in the supply chain due to COVID19
- Pray for supernatural multiplication of local crops

Social Services

- Pray for supernatural ideas, wisdom, and revelation for solutions to the homelessness issues facing your cities.
- Pray for continued collaboration between service providers to meet the needs of our communities, especially as it pertains to mental health and drug addiction

### **COVID-19 Specific**

- Pray for NO spike in cases in Butte County due to Holiday Gatherings
- Pray for local business to flourish and grow exponentially
- Pray for supernatural protection for all essential employees and workers
- Pray for a quick economic recovery and boom in Butte County