

Sermon Guides for the Gospels, Matthew – John

Series Title: The Jesus Story

Tag Line: He Changed the World and Changes Us

Dates (2020): August 30, September 6, 13, 20, 27, October 4, 11, 18

Key Verse:

But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name. (John 20:31)

Series Overview

After spending eight months in the Old Testament as part of our journey through the Bible, we finally get to Jesus. In many ways, the stories will seem more familiar and more understandable than parts of the Old Testament we will have been reading. But in many ways, the scriptures will be even more challenging.

We often expect Jesus to meet us on our own terms, and advance our own agendas (much like the expectation of the crowds on the first Palm Sunday). But Jesus doesn't come to meet our expectations. He summons us to meet God's expectations, and those of the kingdom at hand. We discover that the way of Jesus summons us to live counterculturally, to the point of losing our lives in order to gain them. It is the way that leads us to true, abundant life (John 10:10), so that we might experience the Kingdom of God ready at hand.

Colors, Images, Mood, Vibe:

Bright, vibrant colors.

Images of hope, excitement, changing the world.

Feelings of hopefulness, inspiration, power.

Sermon 1

Title: The Jesus Story: Law

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-48

Key Word: Law

Theme: The Sermon on the Mount

Main Idea: Jesus is the Fulfillment of the Law.

Sermon Description:

Matthew was written to a Jewish-Christian audience in Antioch, modern-day Turkey. The original hearers would have been well-versed in Jewish law, symbolism, and metaphors. So this gospel's intent is to describe the person and work of Jesus as the fulfillment of Hebrew expectations. This section of scripture contains the famous lines with the form, "You have heard it said ... but I say to you." In these statements Jesus describes a new way of living—not as a way of undermining or abolishing Hebrew law, but of clarifying, reframing, and fulfilling it. As we read these texts, we should ask, "What is hard to hear about what Jesus is saying? Why is it difficult? What is preventing me from following his commands? And what is the cost if I don't?"

Sermon 2

Title: The Jesus Story: Hypocrisy

Scripture: Matthew 23:1-36

Key Word: Hypocrisy

Theme: Jesus's relationship with the religious leaders.

Main Idea: We must be holy on the inside and out.

Sermon Description:

No group of people served as more of a foil to Jesus than the religious establishment of his time. The Pharisees and Sadducees were teachers and lawyers of religious faith and practice, and Jesus himself was considered to be a rabbi and religious professional himself. In fact, in many ways, Jesus had many things in common with the Pharisees and Sadducees. But among the many things that set them apart was this: Jesus emphasized holiness on the inside as well as the outside, and accused the Pharisees and Sadducees of paying attention only to external practice. Hypocrisy is a common human condition, and it is a widespread criticism of people in the church. How will we ensure that our pious actions are motivated by pure motives?

Sermon 3

Title: The Jesus Story: Follow

Scripture: Mark 1:16-20

Key Word: Follow

Theme: Jesus calls the disciples.

Main Idea: Jesus calls us to follow him wholeheartedly, leaving everything else behind.

Sermon Description:

Mark was the first gospel written, evidenced by its brevity and emphasis on the works of Jesus. Later gospels would color Mark's narrative with more sayings and teachings of Jesus, but this gospel is one of action. Likewise, Jesus called his disciples—and calls us—to follow him with practical, full-bodied acts of commitment and conviction. In contrast to the many ways that the world would call us and woo us to follow it, Jesus tells us to drop our nets, leave the world behind us, and follow him, so that he might make us “fishers of people.”

Sermon 4

Title: The Jesus Story: Belief

Scripture: Mark 9:14-29

Key Word: Belief

Theme: Jesus casts the demon out of a boy.

Main Idea: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty.

Sermon Description:

This is one of the most compelling passages in the entire gospel. It depicts a man struggling with belief and doubt, much the same way we wrestle with what it means to have faith in Jesus. When the man said, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief," he was offering a way to hold in creative tension both faith and doubt. In some ways, they are two sides of the same coin, or the necessary shadow that accompanies light. They do not negate each other, but complement each other. This story is the gospel's way of reminding us that one of the best and most beautiful gifts we can offer to Jesus is our honest, earnest wrestling, which includes doubt and disbelief.

Sermon 5

Title: The Jesus Story: Good News

Scripture: Luke 4:14-30

Key Word: Good News

Theme: Jesus teaches in the synagogue at Nazareth.

Main Idea: The mission of Jesus.

Sermon Description:

Few passages capture the scope of Jesus's teaching and ministry more succinctly or poetically than his very first sermon, his "inaugural address" in the synagogue of Nazareth. He quotes the prophet Isaiah, then adopts its message as his mission statement. He had come to set free those who were oppressed, and liberate those who were held captive. Jesus understood this mission to not just be a spiritual one, in relation to sin, but to also be a physical one, in relation to economic, political, and social injustice. The mission of Jesus continues into today, through the work and witness of the church. How are we called to fulfill Jesus' calling in the world today? Who are the oppressed, captive, poor, and blind that need to experience the good news of Jesus?

Sermon 6 (World Communion Sunday)

Title: The Jesus Story: Found

Scripture: Luke 15:1-32

Key Word: Found

Theme: The parables of the lost and found.

Main Idea: God's grace relentlessly pursues those who are lost.

Sermon Description:

This is one of the most famous chapters in Luke's gospel. It contains the stories of lost things being found: 100 sheep, 10 coins, 1 son. In each case, God is revealed as one who cares as much for the one who is lost as the many who are still secure. In the parlance of a phrase common to our culture today, Jesus recognized that for all sheep to matter, the one lost sheep had to matter. For all the coins to matter, finding the one that was lost had to matter. And for both of the father's sons to matter, he had to seek out the Prodigal who was lost. This is how the grace of God operates: it will stop at nothing to pursue that which is lost, so that the heavens can rejoice when even one person experiences salvation, reconciliation, and healing. That is the hope that the gospel offers to us, and it is the way we ought to treat each other. All people are worthy of God's love and deserve to be found.

Sermon 7

Title: The Jesus Story: Logos

Scripture: John 1:1-12

Key Word: Logos

Theme: The Prologue of John

Main Idea: John's high Christology.

Sermon Description:

This is the grandest opening of any book in the New Testament. John portrays Jesus as the “Logos,” the “Word” of God who revealed God’s glory and light in ordinary, human flesh and bone. It offers a more poetic description of the Incarnation than any other passage, and reminds us that God’s choice to “dwell” among us is the greatest gift humanity has ever received. The Incarnation reminds us that God desires to be in relationship with us, rather than being distant or indifferent. As people made in the image of that same God, we are also called to be in full relationship with others, an Incarnation presence of God for people. In short, to take God’s love, and make it real.

Sermon 8

Title: The Jesus Story: I Am

Scripture: John 15:1-13

Key Word: I Am

Theme: The “I am” sayings of Jesus

Main Idea: We must determine how Jesus’s identity will make a difference in our lives.

Sermon Description:

John’s gospel contains the descriptions of Jesus found nowhere else in the gospels. It utilizes seven different “I am” statements that each describe a different aspect of Jesus’ character, purpose, and mission. Alongside each of the I am statements is a corresponding miracle or visual representation. For “I am the Bread of Life,” there is the feeding of the multitude. For “I am the light of the world,” there is the healing of the blind man. And so forth. In this way, John reminds us that Jesus is not only set apart from all others in human history (the “I am” phrase reminds us of the self-revealing name God gives Moses). John also reminds us that Jesus is revealed through both words and actions, both teachings and miracles. The question for us, then, is “So what?” What difference will this Jesus make in my life?