



SECRET CHURCH

SURVEY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Good evening. If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me ask you to open to the New Testament. You also have some notes that will be a guide for our time together tonight. Someone called it a novel, but we are just going to call them notes for our time together tonight. Let me encourage you to pull those out.

It was almost exactly a year ago, at the very beginning of May last year at the very beginning of May last year, when I found myself in part of an Asian country where it is illegal to be gathered together as a follower of Christ. We were meeting there and had been snuck in, and we were in this apartment high up in this particular building, and it was basically being holed up in that apartment. We couldn't go out anywhere. It was eat, sleep and teach in this apartment for the days that we were there. These believers were gathered together for training. All of them were preparing to go to other Asian countries headed towards the Middle East with the gospel.

I was sitting there talking with the house church leaders that I have had the opportunity to partner with over the last couple of years, and we began talking more and more about their desire and their need for more biblical theological training. It was house church leaders saying to me, "We want to know the Bible more. We want to know the Bible more." So, I asked them, "If you were to put together a curriculum, so to speak, what do you need to know about the Bible?" And basically we began to list different things.

A picture of the Old Testament, a picture of the New Testament. How do you study this Bible? How do you teach this Bible if the gospel is advancing? Different things we began to talk about, and I sat there and wrote these things down. We had these discussions, and I got on a plane after sneaking out of that place and headed back over to the United States thinking, "Okay. I am about to..." At that time, I had just made the decision to accept God's call to come and lead this church, and I began to think, "How in the world am I ever going to be able to put this into practice in the context that I am about to go into Birmingham, AL?"

I praise God for the grace that He has shown over this year to bring over a thousand people together tonight to study his Word on behalf of brothers and sisters that I was with a year ago in that Asian country, and I want to remind you, from the very beginning of our time together tonight, that I do hope, I hope our time in the New Testament will be a challenge to you, an encouragement to you in your own personal intimacy with Christ, but I want to remind you that we are also studying tonight on their behalf. This is much bigger than what happens in the next room over the next few hours. This is being video taped so that it can be translated into different languages. We already have, in the next week, we will have the Old Testament translated into Chinese so that brothers and sisters who I was working with can take that. Or, we can take a video iPod, download that teaching on it, and basically take seminary on a stick, eventually, into house churches all around the world. What an incredible picture!

But you know what would be even better than video iPods? What if God's people in the United States of America began to get God's heart for the nations and rose up and took the Word that has been entrusted to us, and, instead of going to give iPods, we went ourselves to give them the teaching that has been entrusted to us? So, I remind you, by the virtue of the fact that you are here tonight, you are under obligation not to let the Word of God stop with you. You now have a responsibility, and, if you are not ready for this, then maybe this is not the place tonight because this is the responsibility that we have. We have been entrusted with this book for a reason, so that it would be multiplied through us. God, raise up a church that is not just receiving the Word, but a church that is reproducing the Word. May God raise up an army from The Church at Brook Hills as well as other churches that are represented here who are taking the New Testament around the world.

Okay. Are you ready now? Now it is going to be thick. I want to remind you that the purpose of our time together tonight, in light of that, is not to entertain. I am not going to say it is not going to be a long six hours, five and one-half hours, now, that we have in front of us. It is going to be in depth. It is going to be serious. You have notes in there. I want to encourage you to take those notes. You have fill in the blanks, but, then, I will talk about things that are in addition to the notes or elaborate on the notes. Let me encourage you to take notes in such a way that you would be able to teach exactly what I am saying to somebody tomorrow, next week, next year. So, take notes with that purpose in mind. All right.

At the height of his fame, Muhammad Ali boarded a plane that was preparing for take off, and the flight attendant came by his seat numerous times and gently reminded him to put on his seat belt. The plane was preparing to leave, and she came by one more time and saw that his seat belt was still not on, and she said, "Sir, please put on your seat belt." Muhammad Ali's response was looking up to her, and he said, "Superman don't need no seat belt." The flight attendant looked back at him and, with quick wit, said, "Superman don't need no airplane." So, strap on your seat belts. Here we go.

Survey of the New Testament. Survey of the New Testament. Okay. From the start. Are we ready?

HOW SHOULD WE STUDY THE NEW TESTAMENT? Examining Three Dimensions

How should we study the New Testament? We are going to look at it through three dimensions, three lenses so to speak.

First of all, the literary dimension. When we come to the New Testament, this is a book. It is a piece of literature, and so, the literary dimension is important to look at through that perspective.

How does it come together as a book, as a piece of literature? Second, the historical dimension. This is not just a story of some tales from long ago that may or may not be true. These are historical truths that we are looking at. Historical truths that we believe have ramifications for all people throughout history including us studying this now. That is why we need to study it because there is historical value to the New Testament.

The literary dimension, historical dimension and third, the theological dimension. What does the New Testament teach us about God? That is ultimately what we are going to get to. We are going to split the night up, as far as the teaching sessions, into two parts. We will have it spread out into four different teaching sessions, but two main parts. The first, we will look at the literary and historical, getting an overview of the books in the New Testament. Secondly, the last half of our time, we are going to examine and see how it all fits together to give us a description of Christ and God, and the ramifications that it has for our lives. So, those are the three dimensions that we are going to look through three lenses.

WHAT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT? The New Testament as Literature

What is the New Testament, thinking about the New Testament as literature? It is a collection of 27 books. Some of you are thinking, "I think it is 27, but I am not going to say it just in case I mess up." 27 books written by one divine author, and that is important to remember. The Holy Spirit of God, God is the author of Scripture. We are going to see that displayed a couple of different times. Approximately nine human authors. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. That is evident from the first books. Then you have Paul and Peter. Then you have James. You have Jude, and then you have the author of Hebrews. Your number may change based on what you believe about Hebrews. We will get into that, but you have, approximately, that is the reason for approximately, approximately nine human authors. Hebrews just throws us a curve ball.

It was written in Koine Greek, which is basically common Greek. It was written in the common language of the people. We are going to talk about that in a second. Over the span of less than 100 years. So, basically you had less than a century over which these books were written. Basically, from the life and ministry of Christ to, and things that were being recorded at that time which were not even finalized until after He had left the earth, and then you have through just one generation of people who have been eyewitnesses to Christ and still been associated with Him. So, you have less than a hundred years.

Three Key Genres in New Testament Literature

First is Historical Narrative. Historical Narrative. Basically, that means story. It is an account of history and how things work together. It is a narrative. Second is Epistle, which is a fancy New Testament word for letter. And then, third, is Revelation. Revelation is technically a letter also, but it is kind of weird. It does a Hebrews on us and throws us a curve ball. So, three different genres in New Testament literature. You have Historical Narrative, Epistle and then Revelation is just plain unique.

Three Key Characteristics of New Testament Literature

These are very important for us to understand the New Testament. First is historical accuracy. We need to realize that all the things that we are reading were written by people who were either eyewitnesses to Christ, or eyewitnesses to what they are talking about the church, or directly linked to eyewitnesses. If you look at the Gospels, for example, you have Matthew and John who were apostles. So, they obviously had seen Christ, been associated with Christ, walked with Christ. Then, you have Mark and Luke. Mark is very close to Peter. So, he is directly linked to Peter who obviously knew Christ well. And then you have Luke who is associated with Paul. We see Luke journeying with Paul on his missionary journeys. So, you see a link even from the very beginning. And the rest of the book is dealing with

people not just giving second hand accounts. It is the New Testament giving historical accounts of eyewitness, things that they had seen and heard.

Second, textual authenticity. Basically, what that means is we have to realize that the New Testament is authenticated by the manuscripts. We have more manuscripts than any book in antiquity can begin to compare with. We have thousands of manuscripts that go back all the way close to the times when this was originally written, and there are different, you even see it at a couple of points in the New Testament, you see some different textual variants which are basically different texts that seem to say different things. At the end of Mark, you have a whole section that there is a debate over whether or not it was originally a part of Mark. We will talk about that, but basically what we need to realize is that 99.9% of it is pretty clear. We have just a few textual variants and those textual variants don't have, in any way, a major, major effect on the way we would understand key doctrines or key truths about Christ and how we see them displayed in the New Testament.

Third is Divine authority. These are the books, these 27 books that God has established through His Church, for His Church. There are some people who have criticized the whole process canonizing the New Testament, and they say, "Well, the Church created the New Testament." Ladies and gentlemen, the Church did not create the New Testament. The New Testament created the Church. God, in His divine sovereignty, organized it so that, through the men and women of the first century, a body of material would be formed just a couple of centuries later. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "*(All Scripture) is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*" These books have divine authority, and so, the New Testament created by God through the Church. All right.

WHEN AND WHERE DID THE EVENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TAKE PLACE? The New Testament as History

When and where did the events of the New Testament take place? When and where did they take place? The New Testament is history. Basically, and if you were here at the last Secret Church, we ended up with the book of Malachi, and we saw how the people of God had been brought from exile. They rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem, and they had rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem and basically there they are for a few centuries with nothing going on. They had not heard an official word from God, so to speak.

The Intertestamental Time Period

During that time, it starts with the Persian rule, you see Cyrus, the king of Persia, at the end of the Old Testament. Then, you get into the Greek Rule led by a guy named Alexander the Great. Then, you get into the Maccabean Period, which is basically a time where there was a Jewish uprising against the Hellenistic Greek Rule that was present. For a while, almost 100 years, this royal dynasty reigned until General Roman Emperor Pompeii came and conquered Jerusalem.

That led finally to the Roman Period. We are going to see why this is important, the Roman Period from about 63 B.C. through the time of the New Testament. So, we need to realize that, when Jesus came, He came at a time when the Roman Empire was officially in control. Then, Herod the Great and his sons take control, and you see different people mentioned at different places throughout the New Testament that are almost always associated with the Roman Empire. So, just keep that in the back of your mind, what it all headed toward. This

is going to come into play in some of these books in the New Testament. It was around 70 A.D., the Roman Empire came and attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The Temple was completely destroyed in 70 A.D. It ravaged Jerusalem, the Jewish people and, in some aspects, the Jewish religion. So, all of that is the Intertestamental Time period.

The Timeline of the New Testament...

The timeline of the New Testament, based on the life of Christ, begins, many scholars think, 4 or 6 B.C. some time in there. Maybe not as clean a break as we would like the B.C./A.D. thing, but right around there. Then, the book of Revelation was written near the close of the first century. Most would believe that. Now, let me just say at that point, I am going to try my best to focus on the things that we know. There are many New Testament scholars that debate many different things, and we could spend time studying that, but I don't think it is worth our time. I think it is best to focus our time on what we do know in the New Testament. So, I am going to try my best for everything we see, to look at that which evangelical scholarship would be agreed on. If there is something that is kind of out there, I will let you know.

The Timeliness of the New Testament...

The timeliness of the New Testament, and here is what is really neat.

The right time. It was the right time for Jesus to come, first of all, theologically. Theologically, it was the right time for him to come. The Old Testament has led us precisely to this point. The Old Testament people of God, they are waiting for the long awaited Messiah. The Law in the Old Testament has shown their need for a Messiah. The right time theologically.

Second, the right time religiously. The Jewish people for the most part during this Intertestamental time had forsaken most idolatry. They had set up synagogues. There were places for worship, places for teaching, schools that were scattered throughout, and that is where we are going to see Paul going when he goes on his missionary journeys. He is going to go to the synagogue. Obviously, we see Jesus announcing the Kingdom in the synagogue, and so, that is going to be very important. Also, the right time religiously because they had completed the Old Testament pretty much by this time.

Next, the right time culturally. This is most evident in the Greek language. Basically, Alexander the Great, a few centuries before, had gone throughout the ancient world and established the common language, the "Lingua Franca." He basically established Koine Greek, which I mentioned earlier, as the official language. One of his goals was "one world, one language." So, it just so happened that there was one common language that the New Testament could be written in at that time that would be transferable across cultural lines.

Finally, the right time politically. In the Roman Empire, you had something called the "*Pax Romana*" which basically means "Roman Peace." Palestine had been built under Roman Rule, and what the Romans had done is they had established roadways for people to travel safely all around that area. Roadways through which the gospel could go safely all throughout these different areas. Now, I want you to think about those things.

Theologically, religiously, but even with this common language and the "*Pax Romana*," the "Roman Peace" that was there when Christ came, enabled the gospel message to go out. What I want us to see is that God was not up in heaven thinking, "Okay, okay, I think it looks about time. This seems to be the maximum time. Now, I am going to send you down there Jesus. You go down there." Instead, I want you to see that the sovereign God of the

universe has been orchestrating the events of all creation headed toward this one moment, when, in His timing, He would send Jesus Christ to come to this earth, die on a cross and rise from the grave and the New Testament Church begin. It was the right time.

You have got a map of Palestine I think on pages 6 and 7 in there. I hope that will give you just a little bit of a perspective as we see things. Different things happen, especially in some of the Gospels, but also when we start to look at Paul's missionary journeys, to think through the geography of this whole thing.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOKS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

But now, I want us to get into an overview of the books of the New Testament, and basically what I want us to do is go one-by-one through the books and encapsulate a picture of what these New Testament books teach us.

Three Primary Divisions:

We have talked about them in the genres, but three primary divisions. First of all, the story of the New Testament. The story of the New Testament. About 60% of the New Testament is a story. The first five books—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts—tell us the story of the New Testament.

Second, is The Letters of the New Testament. Those are Epistles, which are letters written to help us understand the story that is going on in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts. The New Testament books are not chronologically arranged here. You have most of these letters that are written in the context of what we see happening from Acts 1 to Acts 28. So, you have the story and the letters.

And, finally, the conclusion of the New Testament, Revelation, which is technically a letter, but it is also a lot different. So, we have a conclusion, Revelation.

What I want us to do in each of the books is that I want to give an overview in two ways. First, I want to give you at the very start just some primary information that will help us understand these books as we read them. Primary information for starters, and then, second, some practical advice for study. Some practical advice that you might take as you dive in and begin to study some of these different books. Primary information for starters and practical advice for study.

THE STORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT...

All right. The story of the New Testament. We are going to get into Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts first.

The Life and the Ministry of Christ (Matthew-John).

Basically, there are two categories in the story of the New Testament. First, the life and ministry of Christ, which is Matthew to John. All of these books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are united because they were written for the same primary purpose. They were written to show us a picture of Christ in the gospel. I want you to hear this. These books were not written to be biographies of Jesus that go chronologically through His life. Some of

these Gospels are not arranged chronologically at all. They were written for the primary purpose to show Christ to the people that were listening to them.

But why do we see some differences? Why we see different stories told by different authors is because, well, yeah they were written for the same primary purpose, but they were also written from different viewpoints and for different audiences. These are four different people, four different guys with different personalities, different perspectives, talking to different people. Now, I want you to think about how the audience is going to affect the way you write. We have to realize in order to understand Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, that we have to put ourselves in the shoes of the people that Matthew was writing to because, whenever you communicate with someone, you take into account what they already know. You take into account what they already understand, and this is the challenge for us 2,000 years later: to put ourselves in the shoes of Matthew's readers and to realize what was already in their frame of reference in order to understand why Matthew is doing this or that. That is why New Testament biblical study is more than just reading through the Bible. Not to minimize reading through the Bible, but in order to understand it, we have to dive into what this meant for the people who heard it at that time. We have to put ourselves in the shoes of the audience who was reading it at that point.

The Life and Ministry of the Church (Acts).

You have the life and ministry of Christ and, second, the life and ministry of the Church. The life and ministry of the Church. This is basically part two of Luke's Gospel. So, Luke wrote both the book of Luke and Acts. He wrote them both.

Matthew

Primary Information for Starters...

All right. Okay. We ready? We are going to dive in. If you want to just take notes during this time, you might in your Bible open up to Matthew, and, at the very beginning, put a couple of notes that stick out. We are going to look at some different verses. I will try to give you a little bit of time to write some extra stuff, but, at the same time, we have a lot to cover so I apologize if I get ahead, but I want us to look at each of these books.

First of all, Matthew. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector. Isn't this great? The way the New Testament starts, God would decide the first author should be a guy who is known and suspected for taking advantage of his people. The least likely candidate for writing the first book of the New Testament is Matthew. Aren't you glad we have a God that doesn't choose the most likely candidates, but He chooses the least likely candidates? Praise God that He has poured out his grace on those who could never begin to deserve it. We see that from the very beginning, even with the author here. Now, he wrote it in the 70s to 80s A.D., somewhere in there, which meant he wrote it soon after the destruction of the Temple. Now, this is important. What we are going to see is that Matthew, in his writing, is in a battle for the heart and soul of Judaism. You have Judaism that is going to go one way or the other. It is either going the way of the Pharisees, or it is going the way of Christ. He is urging Jewish Christians, or those Jews who were thinking about coming to faith in Christ, to follow Christ. That is why he gives us this picture in this book. He wants the heart of Judaism to realize that Judaism has been fulfilled in the picture of Jesus Christ. So, that is why he writes this whole book.

The primary theme is that Jesus is the King of the Jews. From the very beginning, he is pointing out over and over and over again, we will even see later tonight, the kingship of Jesus.

Practical Advice for Study...

I want to encourage you to look for the focus on the Kingdom of God all throughout Matthew. When you read through this book, you will see the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven mentioned over and over again. You see this outline in your outline, this structure that is here. It is emphasizing the King. Matthew puts a lot of emphasis on the teachings of Christ, and there are five major blocks of teaching in each one of these parts of this outline, this structure that you have in front of you. Five major blocks of teaching, and then his actions which show the meaning of those teachings. So, that is what Matthew is doing. He is not arranging things chronologically, but he is helping highlight what Christ is teaching. Probably Christ's most famous teaching at the very beginning of Matthew and the ministry of Christ, Matthew 5 through 7, is The Sermon on the Mount. Now, that shows an emphasis on the teaching of Christ throughout this book.

I want to encourage you, if you read through Matthew, look up cross-references. That is when the Bible is making reference to different points, allusions, quotations, or even just in a picture helping highlight something else that has been seen in the Bible. Cross-references. There are 129 references or allusions to 25 of the 39 Old Testament books. You see why the survey of the Old Testament was important because, in order to read Matthew, we have to know the Old Testament. He is referring to it over and over and over again. Twelve different times in this book he talks about how this was fulfilled or that was fulfilled. All throughout the beginning of The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "It was fulfilled" this, or "It was fulfilled" that. Strong link to the Old Testament. When reading about the teachings of Jesus, remember to put yourself in the hearer's shoes because we have to get into a Jewish mindset in order to understand the book of Matthew.

Mark

Primary Information for Starters...

Now, the second Gospel is Mark. The second Gospel is Mark. This was written by John Mark who was close to Peter. He wrote it between 65 and 70 A.D. So, this was written before the fall of the Temple, but it was written during a time where there was a lot of insurrection between the Jewish people and the Roman Empire over them. Obviously, if something is leading up to a battle where the temple and the city of Jerusalem are going to be ravaged, there is going to be tension that leads up to that time, so, Mark is writing to Gentile Christians in Rome who were suffering persecution. Mark is writing to Gentile Christians in Rome who were suffering persecution. Obviously, there is some conflict between Rome and Judaism. Christianity is this sect of Judaism, so to speak, in many people's eyes, and so, they are experiencing some major persecution in Rome. He is writing to them to encourage them.

Now, as a result of that, well let me show you this. Go to the very end of Mark. Look at Mark 16. What's happening is these believers are facing some pretty intense persecution, and many of them are wavering in their faith. When they started getting persecuted, they were starting to wonder, "Is Christ real? Should we really go on with this? Should we really move forward in our faith in Him?" I want you to look at Mark 16. You have the resurrection, and then look with me at verse 6. It says, "*Don't be alarmed,*" he said." This is the young man it says in verse 5 speaking to those who had come to the tomb. "*Don't be alarmed,*" ... "*You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'*"

Now, that is a picture that he is not here. One of my favorite parts of the time that I have spent in Jerusalem is we were taking a tour of one of the possible sites for the tomb where Jesus had been buried, and our guide was an English guide from the United Kingdom, and

he said, "I don't know why you have come here. All these people make all these kinds of trips here. There is nothing to see here. Jesus is no longer here." I thought, "Man, what a great picture. He is not here. He is risen. You have wasted your time. You are not going to see anything here. He is gone." So, that is the picture here.

Now, I want you to picture, if you are reading Mark for the first time, that you are in a situation where you are tempted to be quiet and not share your faith with anybody. Listen to where verse 8 leads us, and this is that point where some people think the book of Mark actually stops. So, let's imagine if it does stop here. Verse 8 *"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."*

Now, what if the book stopped right there? Do you realize what kind of message that puts in a New Testament church? To begin to think about what if no one said anything about the resurrection of Jesus Christ because they were afraid. Mark is reminding us that this is something we must tell people. If it stops with us, the resurrection of Christ is just a historical fact that doesn't expand into the second and third centuries. I praise God that the believers who read Mark did not walk away saying nothing to anyone! He wrote to these Gentile Christians in Rome who were facing persecution.

The primary theme in the book of Mark is Jesus is the "Suffering Servant of God." We see suffering over and over and over again mentioned. You see the key verses there (on your study notes). Mark 8:31-38. It is talking about the unexpected suffering when Jesus told his disciples that He was going to experience suffering, and Peter pulled Jesus aside and said, "Maybe you don't know what you are doing." Jesus said, "You don't tell me that I don't know what I am doing." And He says it pretty sternly. He says, "This is exactly what I am doing."

All throughout Mark, you see what is called the "Messianic Secret." You see this at different points. Do you ever wonder why Jesus wanted to keep himself a secret? These demons start telling about how he is Jesus the Christ, and the demons recognize Him when nobody else does, and He is like, "Shhh, don't tell anybody." Or sometimes, He heals people, and He says, "Don't tell anybody. Walk away and don't say a thing." Why is He doing that? Because He has a mission. He is headed to the cross. It is a much different mission than everybody else had in mind for Him. Everybody else's agenda was to bring in a Messiah, exalt Him, and put Him up as King, and He is going to take Rome out. So, they were not expecting in any way, a Messiah who was born to this girl named Mary, raised in a very humble setting, and then, least of all, put on a cross. That is not where the Messiah goes. So, it made sense that people were not seeing Him as the Messiah many times, and when people did expose that truth, he said, "You wait. I have got a mission that I am on." So, we see that over and over again, this theme of Jesus being the "Suffering Servant of God." Mark 10:43-45: *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Practical Advice for Study

Keep up. Mark shows Jesus constantly on the move. 41 times he says, "And immediately..." And, immediately, Jesus did this, and, immediately, Jesus did that. If you look at Mark 1, you will see a day in the life of Jesus that, if you ever think you are busy, just pull out Mark 1. He starts preaching in the morning and finishes up the sermon there. Then, He goes home to some friends' house while the friend's mom is sick, and so, He decides He is going to heal her so she can get up and be a part of our time this afternoon. Then, all the town starts coming, and it says the whole town lined up at his door to have demons cast out of them, to be healed of all their diseases, and so, all night He just spent time healing everybody in the town. So that is a full day.

The beauty of it is Mark 1:35 which says, "Jesus got up very early in the morning went to a solitary place where he spent time with the Lord." That is key. God help us to see Mark 1:35, that, in the midst of the busy world that we find ourselves in that, we go to a solitary place and spend time with the Father. Okay, I have got to resist preaching different sermons throughout here. All right.

Notice that almost half of his gospel is devoted to events in the last week of Jesus' life. The last week of Jesus' life, almost half the events are devoted to that. Mark 11. He enters into Jerusalem. He takes care of the Temple. He starts turning over things there, and we see the picture of Jesus headed to the cross.

Overall Structure. You see that based around this servant ministry. Now, to this point, I want to draw your attention to the Synoptic Gospels. Basically, that is a fancy word that means "to see together." What we need to realize, when we come to the Gospels, is that Matthew, Mark and Luke are very similar to each other. They see the life and ministry of Christ in a very similar way. John is sort of an odd ball. He is a loner out there, but Matthew, Mark and Luke are very similar.

However, the confusion basically centers around a couple of different questions. First of all, is Mark the primary source for Matthew and Luke? In other words, is Mark the anchor for what Matthew and Luke wrote? There is some evidence that would seem to point to that. 97% of Mark's words are in Matthew. 97%. Out of about 660 verses, 600 are there. Mostly, if you have read Matthew, you have Mark covered. It is a different perspective, different things emphasized, but it is pretty much, Mark plus some equals Matthew. Okay?

Then, you have for Luke, 88% of Mark's words are in Luke. 88% of Mark's words are in Luke. So, obviously, there is something going on. We have to figure it out, but these guys have gotten together, at some point, in some way. Now, there is another theory that proposes there is an unknown source that was the foundation for these books, and they call this unknown source "Q." Maybe there is this "Q" guy out there that wrote something too that helps things. Well, we are not sure exactly, and, obviously, the life and ministry of Christ was not confined to what Matthew, Mark and Luke were saying about it. So, obviously they are working together in some way, but the overall thing that we need to realize is that those three do come together pretty clearly. Now, they are written from different perspectives. We are going to see something really neat, I think, in Luke in just a second. However, Matthew, Mark and Luke did not write their Gospels in isolation from one another. They were connected somehow. Matthew, Mark and Luke did not write their Gospels in isolation. They were connected together.

Luke

Primary Information for Starters...

Now, let's get to Luke. I want to show you, kind of bring this whole Synoptic Gospel picture to life. Luke was written by Luke as you have already established. He is a Gentile physician, which means that he is the only Gentile author in the Bible. But about this idea that he is a physician. Let me show you something. Go with me to Mark 5. Now, if Mark was somewhat of a foundation, I want you to look at Mark 5. This is going to be an example where these books are written from different perspectives. Look at Mark 5:25. This is one of the healings by Jesus. Mark 5:25:

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard

about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed."

Jesus goes on to heal her. Okay. That is the story that Mark gives. Now, hold your place here and go over to Luke 8, and let's hear Luke's version of the story. Now, I want you to see if there are any differences between what Mark said and Luke said. Look at Luke 8:42. We will start about half way through the verse. It says,

As Jesus was on His way, the crowds almost crushed Him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak.

Do you notice what Mark put that Luke does not. Look at what Mark said. "*She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors.*" So, Luke takes this and says, "You don't have to tell the story and put a slam on doctors," and so, you see that left out in Luke. You know, just a forgotten little detail. Mark decides it is important. Luke decides for his own reputation, maybe this is not going to be included. So, you see the different personalities of the Gospel writers coming out in these different stories. Just kind of a neat thing.

He was a Gentile physician, a historian and a companion of Paul, a companion of Paul. Written in the 70s or 80s A.D. Again, after this Roman/Jewish war that ravaged the Temple, and it is written to a guy name Theophilus, but it is written primarily not only for him, but for Gentile Christians. Many people believe that Theophilus was a very strong leader as a Gentile. So, it makes sense that all throughout the book of Luke, we would see emphasis on the role of Gentiles in the mission of Jesus. It would make complete sense that we see that over and over and over and over again because, if you are Theophilus and you are a Gentile, probably at that point a leader in Rome, it is not going to be good to be saved or find salvation in a Jewish Messiah for you. That doesn't make sense. A Jewish Messiah is not very popular among the people around you, and so, Luke is writing to emphasize the Gentile nature of Jesus' mission. That is why Luke wrote the book of Acts. So, they go together. The purpose being what he is writing for.

The primary theme is that Jesus is the perfect "Son of Man" who brings salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. Salvation to both Jews and Gentiles.

Practical Advice for Study.

I want you to see how the overall structure of the book of Luke leads geographically toward Jerusalem. It is geographically aligned to take Jesus from Galilee to Judea to Berea, and, then, finally to Jerusalem where He is crucified. Hold that in your mind. We are going to come back to that later.

Notice the emphasis also on the Gospel as good news for the poor. Luke emphasizes how Jesus came for every strata of society. You see him emphasizing love for women and for children and especially for the poor. You see the parable of the rich fool. You have a bunch of Scriptures listed there. You have the rich man and Lazarus, parable of the shrewd manager, and Luke 16 over and over again. We don't exactly know what in Luke's audience would cause him to emphasize Jesus' love for the poor and Jesus' warnings against the rich, but I think there is a word there for us today because we live in a context that is incredibly wealthy compared to the rest of the world. We need to heed what Jesus has to say about how we handle the resources that He has entrusted to us. That is one of the things that we must learn from the book of Luke.

Make notes each time you see prayer and of the Holy Spirit mentioned. More than any other Gospel, it talks about prayer. Over and over again.

John

Primary Information for Starters...

So, you have Matthew, Mark, Luke and then you have got the odd ball, John. It is kind of out there, does things a lot different. Written by John. Over and over again in the book, he calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Isn't that a great way to identify yourself? If there is anything that I want to be identified as, it is as the one that has been loved by Christ. What an incredible picture to find your identification in the love and value that He has placed on you. See, even a name you preach. Written sometime between 70 and 90 A.D. You have Matthew writing to the Jews, Mark to Romans, you have Luke writing to Greeks, mainly, and you have John writing to the world. He is universal. You see the word "world" mentioned over and over again. John 3:16, *"for God so loved the world."* Over and over again, the cosmos, the world is mentioned.

The primary theme is that Jesus is the eternal "Son of God." Theme verse being John 20:30-31. He says, *"I write these things that you may believe in Christ,"* basically, so that people may know who He is and believe in Him.

Practical Advice for Study...

I would encourage you; word studies are really helpful in the book of John because you see certain words mentioned over and over and over again. Circle or underline some key words that summarize the message of the Gospel. So, if you are studying the book of John, circle or underline every time you see "Father." It is there 137 times. The next word in that blank there is "believe", 98 times. Over and over again, we see John emphasize the difference between faith and unbelief. Between John 7 through 12, let me make sure I get this right, between John 7 through 12, over 20 times, John mentions how the Jewish people were rejecting Christ by their unbelief. You do realize that is the way we reject Christ, by unbelief. So, either we believe and trust in Him, and it is a verb throughout the book of John, or we say it is not real, one or the other. We can't ride the fence between the two. The words "world," "sending," "loving," "life," "light," "darkness," "truth," "witness," "glory," "eternal," all of these words are very important throughout the book.

Notice the seven "I AM" statements of Jesus. "I AM." Remember, this was the way that God had revealed Himself in the Old Testament. Exodus 3, *"Who do I tell them sent me. Tell them I AM sent you."* So, when Jesus gets to the book of John, over and over again, we see it highlighted, Him associating Himself with the God of the Old Testament. In John 8:58, He tells a group of people who were anti-Jesus, *"before Abraham was born, I AM!"* That doesn't sound like that wild of a statement for us. If I were to stand up before you tonight and say, *"Before Abraham was born, I AM,"* you would say you are weird. What are you trying to communicate to us? However, Jesus was making a direct reference to His divinity, and that is why they wanted to stone Him right after that. I AM the bread of life, I AM the good shepherd, I AM the light of the world, I AM the resurrection and life, I AM the way the truth and the life, I AM the true vine, you are the branches. Over and over again, He is showing the incredible pictures of who God is in the flesh.

John highlights the Incarnation from the very beginning. *"In the beginning was the Word, the Word was God."* John uses seven different signs, seven signs to demonstrate the deity of Christ. All these miracles that are listed here are intentionally designed by John to show the deity of Christ.

Pay close attention also to John's depiction of the humanity of Christ. We see Jesus tired in John. We see Him thirsting in John with the woman at the well. We see Him weeping in John 11:35, the most memorized verse in the book of John. That is the book of John.

Acts

Primary Information for Starters...

Now on to Acts. We have the Gospels. We have one more picture of Historical Narrative, and it gives us a transition from the story of Christ to the story of the Church. Luke wrote it. Written by Luke, it is kind of "Part Two" of his Gospel. You might put a note in Acts 16:10. He uses that first person pronoun "we." He kind of brings himself in and makes sure that we know that it is him that is writing this. I love this picture. In the Gospel of Luke, it starts off by saying what Jesus began to do. Look at Acts 1. This is a great picture. He says Acts 1:1, you might even circle this word, *"In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen."* So, that is what he began to do, so, obviously, the next thing that he is talking about is what Jesus continued to do. The only problem is after verse 11, Jesus checks out of the picture. He ascended into heaven. How was Luke only the beginning of what Jesus did? The beauty of the book of Luke is that it is still Jesus operating. He is doing it through His Spirit in the Church. Jesus is active throughout this book. This is what He continued to do based on the Gospel of Luke where He began his work.

The primary theme is The Gospel spreads universally through the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the key words, not only universally is it going to all nations, but through the Church. What we are going to see in the first seven chapters of Luke is basically the Jewish rejection of Jesus. It is finalized in the picture of Stephen being stoned because of what he proclaimed about Christ to the Sanhedrin. It is finalized in that kind of picture, and, now, the Word begins to scatter to Judea, Samaria and eventually to the ends of the earth. The key verse is Acts 1:8 which is basically an outline for the whole book. Also, chapter 2:42-47 is a very pivotal passage for the Church.

Practical advice for study...

See how the overall structure leads geographically away from Jerusalem. Now, remember the Gospel of Luke headed us toward Jerusalem. Now, the book of Acts is headed away from Jerusalem. It all centers together in Jerusalem. Death, resurrection, the Holy Spirit comes down, and, now the gospel goes out from Jerusalem. So, you basically have kind of a triangle effect going on between Luke and the book of Acts. So, see that structure. In Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, we see the gospel in the last part of Luke going to Asia, Europe, Rome. It is going everywhere.

Again, make notes of every time you see prayer and the Holy Spirit mentioned.

Notice the repetition of two important things. First of all, salvation is emphasized over and over and over again. The salvation that Jesus brings through the Holy Spirit. Then, notice the "progress reports" regarding the advancement of the gospel. Over and over again, you see Luke making it very clear that the gospel had made it to Jerusalem. The gospel had made it to Judea and Samaria. It had made it to Syria, Asia Minor, Europe and Rome. It had made it to all those different places, and he paused each time to say, "Now, the gospel is there and it was moving on. The gospel is there and it is moving on."

Also, see in the different speeches of Acts, how the Gospel contextualized in different settings to reach different people. This is one of the great things when you are studying the book of Acts. Look at the first Christian servant, Peter, and how he addressed his audience.

Then, look at how he addresses his audience in Acts 3 and 4 when they were beginning to experience persecution. Then, you get to Stephen. Look at the way he addresses his audience and what he says about the gospel. Then, you get to Paul, for example, in Acts 17, speaking to the pagan Areopagus. All of them speaking the same gospel, but it is spoken in different ways. It is a beautiful picture of the mission of the Church to realize that we have the same gospel in countries among believers all around the world, but the way we speak that gospel, the way we share that gospel, is different all around the world. People do things differently around the world when communicating the gospel. We were joking around about that today at lunch when Johnny and I were talking. He said, "You know", there was somebody at the restaurant we were eating at who came up and said, "Hey, Pastor, how are you?" A member of the church here, and Johnny said, "You know where I am from, you don't say 'Hello' to the Pastor in public because you like the Pastor, and the last thing the Pastor wants you doing is coming up to him in a restaurant and saying, 'Hey Pastor, tell us about the meeting tonight. We can't wait to get together.'" "No, shhh, not the Pastor." So, you do things different. It is contextualized. Ministry is contextualized in different places. It is okay to call me 'Pastor'. Don't call Johnny 'Pastor'.

So, we see that in the different speeches in the book of Luke. Okay, that is the story of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. Sixty percent of the New Testament right there.

THE LETTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT...

Now we have the letters that help us understand that story. The letters of the New Testament.

22 of the 27 books in the New Testament are letters, which is pretty much 40% of the New Testament, close to 40%. Why are they written? Why are the letters so important? Why do we have the New Testament full of letters? Well, I think for two main reasons. Number one: the church is reproducing. It is growing. It is spreading like wild fire in the book of Acts, and they need ways to communicate in order to train up new believers. They need ways to get information about Christ for new believers to spread the Church. The Church is reproducing, so they need to Word. Ladies and gentlemen please see a word right there. We need to study the Word because we want to be a part of a reproducing church. We want to be a part of the gospel spreading from us to others to others and others. The Word is not intended to be stagnant in the Church. It is intended to be reproduced. That is why we have these letters being written to all these different people. The church is also relational. There is an intimacy that is there. It is why Paul, and this is a great picture, is talking in Corinthians about "living letters," and he says, "Our lives are living letters." You realize that our lives are intended to be a letter, just like the New Testament letters. They are a picture of who Christ is. The church is relational.

Now, there are two groups of letters in the New Testament. The Pauline Epistles which are Romans all the way to Philemon, and, then, General Epistles which are Hebrews to Jude. You, also, have Hebrews in there that can go either way.

THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF PAUL...

We will start with him. Paul wrote 13 New Testament letters. Now, if you are thinking Paul wrote Hebrews, it is not including that. Paul wrote 13 New Testament letters, and they are ordered from the longest to the shortest. Nine of them are written to churches. Four of them are to individuals.

Now, before we dive into his letters, I want us to think about his life. Paul the person was originally named Saul of Taurus. He had a pretty diverse background. Think about his background, who Paul is, then think of this person in three different ways. First of all, he had a Hebrew heritage. A Hebrew heritage. Philippians 3 makes that pretty clear. It is his resume, a Hebrew resume. He is a Hebrew of Hebrews. Then, he had a Greek education. Very well educated, yet, he was a Roman citizen. You put all that together, and you have a pretty powerful dude in the apostle, in Saul at that point, and the beauty of what we see in the New Testament is how God takes the Church's enemy and turns him into the greatest proclaimer of the Church in the New Testament. You realize that the one who persecuted the Church from house to house, the one who was right there overseeing the stoning of Stephen, ended up in about a third of the New Testament. He writes only next to Luke. He, obviously, writes the most books, but as far as amount of material, only Luke is ahead of him. The whole last part of the book of Acts is all about Paul. God's grace takes us from where we are to a place where we never could imagine. Paul never could have pictured that. And praise God for His grace in our lives and where He takes us to from where we are. I pray that we will ask and pray for His grace to take us places we never could imagine in the future. All of this is in the picture of this guy named Paul. God takes our background and even those things that Satan intends for evil and uses them for good. Isn't this a great picture? All right. He was converted to Christ around 31 or 33 A.D. Around 31 or 33 A.D. is when he came to faith in Christ.

I want us to think about Paul the missionary. It is not until about 15 years later that he actually starts going out. We almost have this picture of Paul—that he came to Christ, and all of a sudden he is preaching the gospel everywhere. Well, he starts getting together with believers, and—let's not blame the early church at this point, you would be a little nervous if Paul was in here right now. He is the guy who was in your house last week, and this week, he is claiming to be a follower of Christ. So, there is about a 15-year window where Paul is now gaining some credibility, and he is growing in his faith in Christ and is seeing the Old Testament and how it relates to Christ. You can only imagine, we don't know much about that 15 years, but you can only imagine what a journey it was for fifteen years for this guy to see all of his Hebrew background opened up to the beauty of Jesus Christ. What an incredible picture!

Then, once that 15 years had passed, he goes out on his First Missionary Journey. Now you have some maps on page 13-14 that show these different journeys. I want us to kind of walk through these missionary journeys real quickly. Real quickly walk through them. After he had been a Christian for 15 years, he is in the city of Antioch. Antioch is over there on the left. Antioch is where Paul's home base was, so to speak. Antioch was the church that was supporting him and encouraging him, building him up, and he was building them up. Acts 11 gives us the picture of the church at Antioch. When you get to Acts 13:1-4, the church at Antioch laid their hands on Saul and Barnabas and sent them out, and they began the First Missionary Journey. This journey was approximately 1,400 miles. The first place they went was Cyprus, which was actually Barnabas' hometown. So, Paul and Barnabas go out there, and they are going to places that are familiar to them, places they know. They start in Cyprus and go north into some regions that they are familiar with. They are

following the trade routes. They are going to mainly major cities. They are not going out into the country much. They are going to mainly cities. I would definitely not say, as a precedent that we shouldn't go into the country, into rural areas, but I do believe that there is a deep need for us to see what Paul did in the city when we think about the urban cities of the United States of America and around the world. We need to take the gospel to the city. In a day where churches hibernate from the city, we need to embrace the city and the needs of Christ in the city. It is not easy. Ask Paul. It is not easy to go into the urban centers of the world, but that is where we need to take the gospel. So, that is the picture up there. Approximately 1,400 miles. What he would do was basically this pattern, and it changed from place to place. However, he would go into the city, find the synagogue, and go preach in the synagogue. He would get kicked out of the synagogue, most of the time, and, then, once he was out of the synagogue, he would keep preaching, and, once everybody got mad at him there, they would make him leave or throw things at him, or they would sneak him out late at night. That was his pattern, and he just went from city to city preaching, getting kicked out and getting thrown out of the city. That was kind of the life of the Apostle Paul on the First Missionary Journey. In that time, he probably wrote the book of Galatians. He probably wrote the book of Galatians somewhere in there.

The reason being, well, you will notice that he comes back to Antioch, but around this time, somewhere in here, was that many Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ, and Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. So, what is happening is there begins to be a big division between, well, mainly in the Jewish churches. Now, Gentiles are coming to faith in Christ, and they start to debate on how a Gentile can come to be a part of the people of God. They start to make some rules and regulations. If you are going to become a part of the people of God, you need to do this and that, namely circumcision. So, that leads to the Jerusalem Conference around 49 A.D. You might put a note out to the side that Acts 15 is when the Jerusalem Conference happens. They had been sent out on their First Missionary Journey Acts 13, they come back after the end of Acts 14 and then in Acts 15, you have this Jerusalem Conference where they discuss Jewish/Gentile conflict between them.

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