

THE CORE THEMES IN THE RECORDED MESSAGE OF JESUS

Introduction: The goals of this paper are to summarize the core themes of what is biblically recorded as the words of Jesus and to draw inferences applicable to ministry today. What Jesus did in his ministry years also tells us much about who he was and what he valued, but analysis of his actions is beyond the purview of this paper.

One limitation of which we must be aware is that we do not have recordings of all that Jesus said. The gospel writers were selective in what they included in their accounts [John 20.30; 21.25], and their goals most likely were not the same as mine for this paper [John 20.30-31]. So while we can summarize what is biblically recorded about the words of Jesus, we must remember that this summary might sometimes misrepresent what he actually emphasized in real life, specifically because the gospel writers had to be selective to achieve their narrow objectives. On the other hand, as they received these objectives from God, there is no doubt value in an analysis of Jesus' recorded sayings.

This is not a research paper; rather it is a study of the scriptures. My approach was to read and interpret the scriptures for myself. A few times when I was absolutely clueless about what Jesus meant, I referred to [and footnoted references to] Pentecost's *The Words & Works of Jesus Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981]. In each major section, the first paragraph summarizes what Jesus taught, and the following text fleshes out those teachings with examples.

His own identity: Much of what is recorded in the Bible about Jesus' words has to do with his identity. No doubt this is in part because understanding and believing in his identity is integral to putting faith in Jesus for the purpose of salvation, the facilitation of which was one goal of the gospel writers [John 20.31]. The great emphasis on the identity of Jesus in his own teachings suggests we should place a great emphasis on his identity in our teachings, particularly ensuring people understand his divinity, his humanity, and his fulfillment of those prophetic figures of the Messiah, Son of Man, greater prophet of Moses, and anointed king descended from David. People need to understand the uniqueness of Jesus as both God and man, that only as such could he fulfill the mission given to him by God the Father, and that his appearance was part of the plan God the Father was unfolding from Genesis 3.15 onward throughout the Old Testament.

Son of God: Jesus repeatedly gave evidence that he was the Son of God [or God the Son]. Jesus referred to Yahweh as his father as far back as at age twelve when his earthly parents found him in the temple having a dialogue with the religious teachers [Luke 2.49]. Jesus also referred to God as his father when he cleared the temple the first time [John 2.16], when arguing for the propriety of healing on the Sabbath [John 5.17-23], and after his resurrection when saying he would return to God [John 20.17]. Jesus said God was his father who glorified him [John 8.54-55], had given him all authority [Luke 10.22], had sent him and loved him before creation [John 17.8, 24-25], and would send legions of angels to help him if he desired [Matthew 26.53]. Jesus told parables in which God the Father was represented and he was represented as God's son [Matthew 21.33-44; 22.1-14; Mark 12.1-11; Luke 20.9-18].¹

¹ Other scriptures recording Jesus referring to God as his father include Matthew 20.23; Mark 10.40; John 12.26-27; 15.1, 8-10, 15; 16.25-31.

Jesus said God was his father and if they knew him they knew the Father, because he was in the Father and the Father was in him, in fact it was the Father living in him and doing his work [John 8.19; 14.7-11, 31]. Another time, Jesus referred to himself as God's Son, consecrated and sent by the Father, and said he and the Father were one, the Father in him and he in the Father [John 10.30, 36, 38]. Jesus identified himself with Yahweh before the religious leaders [John 8.58-59], and foretold punishment coming to Jerusalem because the people had not recognized Jesus as God coming to them [Luke 19.43-44].

Jesus affirmed Peter's conclusion that he was the Son of God [Matthew 16.16-17], referred to himself as the Son of God several times [Matthew 24.36; 26.64; Mark 13.32; 14.62; Luke 22.69; John 11.4]. Jesus said he was the Son who could set people free from slavery to sin [John 8.34-36], and he equated himself as Son of God and Son of Man when talking about God being glorified in the Son and thus glorifying the Son [John 13.31-32].

Jesus claimed the right to forgive sins [Matthew 9.2; Mark 2.5; Luke 5.20; 7.48], claimed the power as the Son of God to give life just as God raises people from the dead and gives life [John 5.21, 25-26], and claimed the authority to judge, as entrusted by God the Father, asserting that he deserved honor just as God did, and, in fact, one could honor God the Father only if honoring him [John 5.22-23]. Jesus said if someone believed in him, he was believing in God the Father who had sent him and told him what to say and how to say it [John 12.44-45, 49-50]. Jesus claimed as the Son to be the only one who knew the Father and could reveal him to others [Matthew 11.27; Luke 10.22; John 6.46; 7.28-29].

Jesus claimed the work God had given him testified that he was the Son sent by the Father [John 5.36], and that he had come in his father's name [John 5.43]. Jesus claimed that his teaching came from God the Father, who had sent him [John 7.16-17; 8.38], and that the scriptures from God testified about him as the Son [John 5.37-39]. Jesus said all that was his was God's and all that was God's was his [John 17.10]. Jesus said he was sent by the Father [John 6.57; 7.28-29, 33; 8.16-18, 42; 11.42], that he was not of this world but from above [John 8.23], that he knew the Father and the Father knew and loved him [John 10.15-17].

Son of Man: Jesus equated the Son of God and the Son of Man [Matthew 16.27-28]. Jesus promised some of the disciples they would see Heaven open and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man [John 1.51]. Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man who could reveal God the Father because he had been with him [John 3.13], who could both heal and forgive sins [Matthew 9.6-7; Mark 2.10-11; Luke 5.24], who had the authority to judge as entrusted by God the Father [John 5.22-23, 27], on whom God the Father had placed his seal of approval and who would give believers food that endures to eternal life [John 6.27].

Jesus referred to himself as Son of Man whom the religious leaders would lift up [John 8.28], who would be dead three days [Matthew 12.40], would be raised from the dead [Matthew 17.9; Mark 9.9], would ascend to where he was before [John 6.62], and would return when they did

not expect him [Luke 12.40; 17.24-36], to oversee a renewal of all things while sitting on a glorious throne [Matthew 19.28].²

Messiah: Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah [John 4.26], affirmed Peter's conclusion that he was the Messiah [Matthew 16.16-17, 20; Mark 8.29-30; Luke 9.20-21], referred to himself as the Messiah when discussing his disciples ministering in his name [Mark 9.41], and admitted he was the Son of God, Son of Man, and Messiah at his trial before the high priest [Matthew 26.64; Mark 14.62; Luke 22.69]. Jesus said the miracles he was doing in the Father's name testified to him being the Messiah [John 10.25], and gave evidence to John's disciples of fulfilling prophecies about the Messiah [Matthew 11.4-5; Luke 7.22]. Jesus said the Messiah was the only teacher for his disciples [Matthew 23.10] and that he himself was their Lord and teacher [John 13.13-14].

Jesus said he was the one the prophets and kings had longed to see [Matthew 13.16-17; Luke 10.23-24], and that Abraham had rejoiced at the thought of seeing his day [John 8.56]. Jesus told the synagogue in Nazareth that he was the deliverer in Isaiah 61.1-2 [Luke 4.16-20], and he told the religious leaders that he was the greater prophet of whom Moses wrote [John 5.45-46]. Jesus claimed to be God's anointed who took priority over, and had authority over, the Sabbath, was greater than the temple [Matthew 12.3-8; Mark 2.25-28; Luke 6.3-5], and was greater than Solomon and Jonah [Luke 11.31-32]. Using Psalm 110, Jesus playfully hinted to the Pharisees that the Messiah is both a descendent of David and greater than David [Matthew 22.41-46; Mark 12.35-37; Luke 20.41-44].

King: Jesus referred to himself as the king who would sit on the throne and judge the nations at the end [Matthew 25.34]. Jesus admitted he was king of the Jews [Matthew 27.11; Mark 15.2; Luke 23.3; John 18.36-37], and declared God the Father had given him all authority in Heaven and on Earth [Matthew 28.18]. Jesus said the kingdom was near while he walked the earth [Matthew 4.17; 10.7; 12.28; Mark 1.15; Luke 17.21].

Metaphorical Concepts: Jesus said he was the light of the world who could give the light of life [John 8.12; 9.5; 12.35-36, 46]. He was the gate through which people could enter to be saved and have life [John 10.7-10]. He was the resurrection and the life [John 11.25]. He was the way, the truth, and the life, and no one could come to the Father except through him [John 14.6]. He was the shepherd who knew his sheep, was known by them, and who would die for them [John 10.11-18]. Jesus quoted Psalm 118 in referring to himself as the stone the builders rejected which would become the capstone or cornerstone [Matthew 21.42-44; Mark 12.10; Luke 20.17-18]. Jesus said he was the true vine on which his followers depended [John 15.1].

The Holy Spirit and the Triune Godhead: As mentioned already, Jesus talked a lot about his relationship and identification with God the Father. In other places, he discussed the Holy Spirit and hinted at the triune nature of the Godhead. Jesus made clear that the Holy Spirit was real and a distinct and unique entity within the Godhead. While Jesus did not emphasize the triune

² Other scriptures in which Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man when discussing his death, resurrection, and return include Matthew 20.17-19; 24.27-30; 25.31; 26.2; Mark 10.32-34; 13.24-27; Luke 18.31-33; 21.27-28; John 12.23. Other references to himself as the Son of Man include Matthew 26.64; Mark 14.62; Luke 22.48, 69; John 9.35-37; 13.31-32.

nature of the Godhead, he did introduce the concept by identifying himself with Yahweh and yet being a Son, and by identifying the Spirit of God as being distinct from both himself and God the Father. Jesus also emphasized the Spirit's power and his blessing, as one who would indwell believers to help them with the gospel mission.

Jesus referred to the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration while talking with Nicodemus [John 3.5-8]. Jesus told the apostles that the Spirit would speak through them when on trial [Matthew 10.20]. Jesus implied that he drove out demons by the Spirit of God [Matthew 12.28]. Jesus said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven [Matthew 12.32; Mark 3.29; Luke 12.10]. Jesus told the crowds that anyone who believed in him would get within themselves living water [which John explained was the Holy Spirit; John 7.37-38]. Jesus told his disciples that God the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who asked [Luke 11.13]. Believers are to receive baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Matthew 28.19].

Jesus told his disciples he would ask God the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who was with them and would be in them, and would teach them all things, remind them of what Jesus had said to them, guide them into truth, tell them what was to come, share with them what God the Father and Jesus desired, and testify about Jesus [John 14.16-17, 25-26; 15.26; 16.7, 13-15]. Jesus said he would send the Holy Spirit to give them power from on high so they could witness for him [Luke 24.49; Acts 1.4-5, 8]. The Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment in the days to come [John 16.8-11].

His own purpose and mission on Earth: Jesus talked often of his obedience, ministry purposes, and pending sacrifice. We should take note of how Jesus emphasized the unity of the Godhead and that Jesus always modeled obedience to God the Father. Unity and obedience do not always get the emphasis they require and deserve today. Jesus also emphasized his purpose in calling sinners to salvation through his gospel message, and his empowerment of that gospel and salvation through his sacrifice on the cross. As with emphasizing Jesus' identity, we should also emphasize his crucifixion and resurrection as part of our gospel message.

His obedience: Jesus told John he needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness [Matthew 3.15]. Jesus said that what he taught was the truth from God the Father, who had sent him [John 7.16-18; 8.26-29, 40; 12.49-50; 14.24; 15.15; 17.8, 14], that his food was to do the will of God and finish God's work [John 4.34], that he lived to please God and did nothing on his own [John 5.30; 8.28-29], that he came to do God's will [John 6.38]. Jesus said he lived to honor God the Father [John 8.49-50], and that he did what God commanded because he loved him [John 14.31]. Even in his sorrow, he verbalized his commitment to obeying God's plan [John 18.11].

His ministry purpose: Jesus said he had come to testify to the truth [John 18.37], to preach the good news of the kingdom [Mark 1.38; Luke 4.43], to call sinners to repentance [Matthew 9.13; Mark 2.17; Luke 5.31-32], to gather the lost sheep of Israel [Matthew 15.24-26; Mark 7.27], to seek and save the lost [Luke 19.10]. Jesus said he came this time to save, not judge [John 12.47], but he also admitted that he came to bring judgment, dividing those who would admit their need for him and those who would not [John 9.39-41]. Jesus told his disciples he came to serve others and give his life as a ransom for many [Matthew 20.28; Mark 10.45]. Jesus said he came to

glorify God [John 12.27-28] and make God known to his disciples so that God's love would be in them and he would be in them [John 17.26].

His sacrifice: Jesus foretold his death after clearing the temple for the first time, saying if they destroyed this temple [his body] he would raise it again in three days [John 2.19]. Jesus said he would be taken away from his followers [Matthew 9.15; Mark 2.20; Luke 5.35], that he had to suffer many things and be rejected by his generation [Luke 17.25]. Jesus faced his sacrifice with sorrow [Matthew 26.38-39, 42; Mark 14.34-36; Luke 22.42].

Jesus said he needed to be lifted up as Moses lifted the snake [John 3.14]. Jesus told his disciples he came to serve others and give his life as a ransom for many [Matthew 20.28; Mark 10.45]. Jesus said he would give his flesh and blood for the life of the world [John 6.51-58]. Jesus said he was the shepherd who was voluntarily laying down his life for the sheep and had the authority to rise again, as commanded by God the Father [John 10.11-18]. At the last supper, Jesus predicted his betrayal by one apostle and abandonment by the rest, but also that he would meet the eleven in Galilee after he had risen [Matthew 26.21-25, 31-35; Mark 14.18-21, 27-31; Luke 22.21-23, 31-38; John 13.21-30, 37-38].

Jesus told his disciples that, as indicated in the prophets, he must go to Jerusalem, be betrayed into the hands of men, suffer many things from the religious leaders, be condemned, given to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, spit upon, and crucified, but then raised to life on the third day [Matthew 16.21; 17.22-23; 20.17-19; 26.54-56; Mark 8.31; 9.30-32; 10.32-34; 14.49; Luke 9.22, 44-45; 18.31-33; 24.26, 44-48]. At the last supper, Jesus asked his followers to remember his sacrifice by sharing bread and wine, representing his body and blood [Matthew 26.26-30; Mark 14.22-26; Luke 22.17-20]. Jesus promised that his resurrection would bring joy to his disciples [John 16.16-28].³

The Kingdom and Church: Like the prophets, sometimes when Jesus was foretelling something, it could be hard to know if he was referring to the church, the millennial kingdom, or the eternal kingdom. We can note that Jesus taught on the coming of all three forms of his kingdom, and that they were not limited to Jews but in fact would include many people from many nations.

Jesus predicted that the kingdom would grow into a great shelter for the righteous, despite its humble beginnings, because of the work of the Holy Spirit [Matthew 13.31-34; Mark 4.30-32; Luke 13.18-21]. Jesus said the kingdom is more valuable than anything else on earth [Matthew 13.44-46]. Jesus said the [eternal] kingdom will not contain anything that causes sin or anyone who does evil [Matthew 13.30, 40-41, 47-50]. Jesus said God had prepared places of honor for specific people in his kingdom [Matthew 20.23; Mark 10.40], and that there would be many people from outside Israel in the kingdom [Matthew 8.11; Luke 13.29]. Jesus said in the resurrection [and thus eternal kingdom], people will not marry or die, but be like the angels in heaven [Matthew 22.30; Mark 12.25; Luke 20.34-36]. Jesus was specific in saying Peter would help found the church [Matthew 16.18-19]. Jesus said he had other sheep [Gentiles] not of this

³ Other scriptures in which Jesus mentioned his crucifixion and resurrection, or his leaving the disciples, include Matthew 12.40; 17.9; 26.2; Mark 9.9; John 16.5-7, 10; 17.11, 13.

sheepfold [Israel], but that they would all become one flock following the one shepherd [John 10.16]. Jesus taught that we all enter by grace, so we cannot be prideful and think we deserve more for having joined Jesus earlier than others [Matthew 20.1-16].

Salvation: Overwhelmingly, what Jesus said about salvation was about believing in him or in the gospel about him, but he did discuss a little about other aspects of salvation and even said some things believers might find confusing today. What we can safely conclude is that Jesus is the only way to salvation, and that his gospel includes explaining the need for Jesus, his identity, and the effectiveness of his sacrifice. We also can infer the priority of this gospel message for our ministry, to share the good news of the offer of salvation through Christ.

Faith in Jesus: Jesus told Nicodemus that everyone who believed in the Son of Man would have eternal life [John 3.15]. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he could provide living water that would well up to eternal life [John 4.10, 13]. Jesus said he would give people food that endures to eternal life if they believed in him as the one sent by God [John 6.26-29, 32-33, 35]. Jesus told the religious leaders that those who came to Jesus would receive life [John 5.40]. Jesus told the wayward woman who perfumed his feet that her faith had saved her [Luke 7.50]. Jesus told one of the other fellows on a cross that he would be with him in paradise, after the man expressed faith in him [Luke 23.43]. If people would depend on Jesus and believe in him, God's will was that they would have eternal life and be raised on the last day to life [John 6.39-40].

Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin because it does not believe in Jesus [John 16.9]. Jesus said that many will claim to have known him and even claim to have given prophecy and driven out demons and performed miracles in his name and yet not get to Heaven because Jesus did not know them, and thus they were not doing the will of God [Matthew 7.21-23; Luke 13.24-27]. Jesus told the religious leaders that if they did not believe he was who he claimed to be, then they would die in their sins [John 8.24]. Jesus warned the religious leaders in a parable that those who did not receive him as an invitation to Heaven would not receive a second chance [Luke 14.16-23]. In parables, Jesus said that the religious leaders would lose access to the kingdom because they had rejected God's Son and did not revere God [Matthew 21.33-44; 22.1-14; Mk 12.1-11; Luke 20.9-18]. Jesus said he was the light [in context of what led to salvation; John 12.35-36, 46], and anyone who did not accept him and his words would be condemned [John 12.48].

Jesus taught that the one who has Jesus as his foundation will persevere, the one who does not will not [Matthew 7.24-27; Luke 6.49-49], and the one who stands firm in faith until the end, despite persecution, will be saved [Matthew 10.22; 24.13; Mark 13.13]. Jesus said only those who acknowledged him before others would be acknowledged by him to God [Matthew 10.32-33; Mark 8.38; Luke 9.26; 12.8-9].

Jesus said whoever followed him would have the light of life [John 8.12], those who believed Jesus was the one sent from God would have everlasting life [John 6.47-50], those who accepted the merits of Jesus' sacrifice would have eternal life [John 6.53-58], and those who admitted their need and turned to Jesus would not be guilty of sin, while those who did not would remain in guilt [John 9.39-41]. Jesus said he was the gate through which people could enter to be saved and have life [John 10.7-10]. Jesus said he was the resurrection and the life, that all who

believed in him would live eternally [John 11.25-26]. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and thus no one can come to the Father except through him [John 14.6]. Jesus prepares a place in Heaven for followers [John 14.2] and brings peace with God [John 14.27]. The disciples were to go share the truth about Jesus and his offer of repentance and forgiveness [Matthew 28.19; Luke 24.47].

Belief in the gospel: Jesus proclaimed that the world had no excuse now that he had come [John 15.22-24], and people needed to “repent and believe the good news that the kingdom of God/Heaven was near” [Matthew 4.17; Mark 1.15]. Jesus told the religious leaders that if someone heard his message and believed God who sent him, then he would have eternal life [John 5.24-25]. Jesus said blessed were those who did not see the resurrected Christ but believed [John 20.29]. Believers are sanctified [separated out] by God’s word which is truth [John 17.17]. Jesus said his gospel gave life [John 6.63], that anyone who kept Jesus’ word would never see death [John 8.51], and that anyone who did not accept Jesus and his words would be condemned [John 12.48].

Jesus told a parable about how some would respond to the gospel, but others would not believe at all, would not believe enough to persevere, or would choose earthly gain instead [Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23; Mark 4.1-9, 13-20; Luke 8.4-8, 11-15]. Jesus explained that the disciples accepted Jesus’ words from God the Father, and so believed in him [John 17.8], and he told the apostles that those who received them and their message were receiving Jesus himself [Matthew 10.40-41]. The disciples were to go share the truth about Jesus and his offer of repentance and forgiveness [Matthew 28.19; Luke 24.47], because people would believe in him through the apostolic message [John 17.20]. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world and then the end will come [Matthew 24.14; Mark 13.10; Luke 21.18-19].

Grace and New birth: Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born again to see the kingdom [John 3.3, 7], and that this birth was of water and the Spirit, meaning through faith [John’s baptism of repentance] and regeneration [John 3.5-6].⁴ Jesus said the Spirit gives life [John 6.63]. Jesus taught that the one who humbly seeks God the Father’s mercy is the one who is justified before God [Luke 18.9-14]. Jesus said God the Father’s command leads to eternal life [John 12.50], and that he would give his sheep eternal life [John 10.28-29]. Those God the Father chooses will come to Jesus, and nobody can come to Jesus unless God chooses him [John 6.37, 44-45, 65; 17.6, 9]. The religious leaders did not believe in Jesus despite his miracles, because they were not his sheep [John 10.25-26].

Narrow Road and Small Gate: Jesus said the road that leads to life is the narrow one, with the small gate, which only a few find [Matthew 7.13-14].

Righteousness: Jesus said one had to be more righteous than the Pharisees and teachers of the Law to get into the kingdom [Matthew 5.20]; even a small violation would be grounds for condemnation [Matthew 5.22, 29-30]. Jesus said by our words we will be acquitted or

⁴ Pentecost, 125.

condemned [Matthew 12.37]. Jesus said there was a need to repent or perish [Luke 13.2-5],⁵ and that the religious leaders would not enter the kingdom because they were unrepentant [Matthew 21.28-32]. Jesus affirmed that if someone loved God with all of himself and loved others like himself, then he would live [Luke 10.25-37].⁶ Jesus told a man to obey the commandments to enter life; when the man said he had, Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor so he would have treasure in Heaven, and then come follow Jesus [Matthew 19.16-21; Mark 10.17-21; Luke 18.18-22].⁷ Jesus said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, though the latter is possible for God to accomplish [Matthew 19.23-26; Mark 10.23-27; Luke 18.24-27].

John the Baptist and the Apostles: We can see from Jesus' words that the apostles were a big part of his plan to establish the church, as they most authoritatively represented him after his ascension. We can trust their teachings and should observe their methods of ministry, as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit and authorized by Christ. We also see that John was a true prophet of God who testified about Christ.

Jesus said John was a light and testified to the truth about Jesus [John 5.33-35]. Jesus said John was a prophet, the one mentioned in Malachi 3.1, and the "Elijah" mentioned in Malachi 4.5, who was preparing the way for the Messiah [Matthew 11.9-14; 17.11-13; Mark 9.12-13; Luke 7.26-27]. Jesus said there was nobody born of a woman who was greater than John [Matthew 11.11; Luke 7.28].

Those who accepted the apostles were accepting Jesus, while those who rejected them were rejecting him [Luke 10.16; John 13.20]. Jesus was sending the apostles into the world as God the Father had sent him into the world [John 17.18; 20.21]. Jesus had chosen them to bear fruit [John 15.16]; they were to testify about him [John 15.26]. Jesus said God the Father loved them because they loved Jesus and believed he came from God [John 16.27]. Jesus gave them authority to heal and drive out demons [Luke 10.1-24]. Jesus would give them authority to forgive sins [John 20.23] and judge on church matters [Matthew 16.19; 18.18-19]. They would ask in his name and receive from God the Father [John 16.23-24]. In the kingdom, the Apostles will sit on thrones and judge Israel [Matthew 19.28; Luke 22.28-30].

Reverence for God and his Word: Jesus taught about reverence for God and obedience to his Word, including the Law. This is one topic about which I presume Jesus spoke a lot more than was recorded, perhaps because the gospel writers were focused on inspiring faith for evangelistic purposes or were stressing topics not already stressed clearly in the Old Testament scriptures they already had. Jesus' comments about the Law can be confusing, as he lived by the Law and taught adherence to the Law, yet seemed to prophecy that the Law was not adequate for the kingdom. Apparently this is a dispensational issue, but still it is something we might have expected Jesus [or the gospel writers] would make clearer.

⁵ As I have discussed elsewhere, I think all talk of repentance in the gospels in connection with salvation refers to repenting of lack of faith in the deliverance of Jesus as the Messiah.

⁶ Pentecost, 300, said the point of this statement was it was impossible.

⁷ Pentecost, 360, said this was to demonstrate that the man was not perfectly righteous by the commandments.

God: Jesus angrily challenged those who had brought the marketplace into the Temple, in part because they were being irreverent [John 2.16]. Jesus told Satan it is not right to put God to the test [Matthew 4.7; Luke 4.12], and he taught that believers must choose to submit to God and stay focused on God, not material things [Matthew 6.19-24; Luke 16.13], that believers need to stay focused on what is good, not evil [Luke 11.33-36].

Jesus said believers should trust that God will meet all of their needs: that God would meet their needs if they would seek first his kingdom and righteousness [Matthew 6.25-34; Luke 12.22-31; John 14.1]. Jesus taught that God is merciful and loving enough that he rejoices when someone wayward comes to him [Luke 15.1-32], and that the greatest commandment is to Love God with all of yourself [Matthew 22.37-38; Mark 12.29-30].

God's Word: Jesus told Satan that man must depend on God's Word [Matthew 4.4]. Jesus taught that believers must keep their focus on the things of God instead of the things of this world, for we will become obsessed with that on which we focus [Matthew 6.19-24; Luke 12.33-34]. Jesus said believers are sanctified by God's word, which is truth [John 17.17]. Jesus told a woman to leave her life of sin [John 8.11], and said people are blessed who hear the word of God and obey it [Luke 11.28]. Jesus told a paralytic he had healed that sin could lead to worse things than paralysis [John 5.14], and he taught that leading people into sin would bring punishment [Matthew 18.6-7; Mark 9.42; Luke 17.1-3].

The Law: Jesus commanded a man he had healed of leprosy to offer the sacrifices Moses commanded in the Law [Matthew 8.4; Mark 1.44; Luke 5.14]. Jesus said all that the Law and the prophets taught hung on two commandments: to love God with all of yourself and to love others like yourself [Matthew 22.34-40; Mark 12.28-31]. Jesus used examples to show it was not just legalistic physical adherence to the Law which God required, but correct thoughts and attitudes [Matthew 5.21-30]. Jesus said he came to fulfill the Law, yet he called on his followers to follow and teach the commands of the Law [Matthew 5.17-20]. On the one hand, Jesus taught that it would be easier for Heaven and earth to disappear than for anything to be dropped from the Law [Luke 16.17]; on the other he said that the old ways were not adequate for the kingdom he was ushering in [Matthew 9.16-17; Mark 2.21-22; Luke 5.36-39].⁸

Following Jesus: From what Jesus said about his relationship with believers, we can conclude that faith, dependence, obedience, reverence, and focus are attitudes Jesus requires.

Jesus commanded several people to follow him, including Philip [John 1.43], Peter and Andrew [Matthew 4.19; Mark 1.17], John and James [Matthew 4.21; Mark 1.20], Matthew [Matthew 9.9; Mark 2.13; Luke 5.27], and another disciple [Matthew 8.21; Luke 9.59]. Jesus called twelve of his disciples to be apostles, to accompany him all the time and to be sent out to preach and deliver people from demons [Mark 3.13-19; Luke 6.12-16]. Jesus called the crowds to come to and follow him, so he would teach them and give them rest [Matthew 11.28-30].

Jesus said a woman's faith in him healed her; he told two people that because of their faith their daughters would be delivered of a demon; he told two blind men that according to their faith

⁸ Pentecost, 157.

would they be healed; he told another blind man and someone with leprosy that their faith had healed them [Matthew 9.22, 28-29; 15.28; Mark 5.34, 36; 7.29; 10.52; Luke 8.48, 50; 17.19; 18.42]. Jesus told the crowds that anyone who believed in him would get the Spirit within [John 7.37-38]. Jesus said everything is possible for the one who believed in him and God the Father [Matthew 21.21-22; Mark 9.23; 11.22-25; Luke 17.6]. If believers would ask in his name [implying doing something for his glory and aligning with his purpose], then he would do it for God's glory by their fruitfulness [John 14.13-14; 15.7-8, 16]. Jesus told his disciples that in the world they would have trouble, but assured them that he had overcome the world [John 16.33].

Jesus said those who did the will of God with him were his relatives [Matthew 12.46-50; Mark 3.31-35; Luke 8.19-21]. If a person obeys Jesus' teaching then he is Jesus' disciple, and he will know the truth that will set him free [Matthew 28.20; John 8.32]. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin, but if Jesus as the Son sets someone free then he will be free indeed [John 8.36]. Jesus' flock trust, listen, and follow him [John 10.1-21, 27; 14.1]. If someone has faith in Jesus then he will do what Jesus did [John 14.12], if someone loves Jesus then he will obey Jesus' commands [John 14.15, 21, 23-24; 15.14]. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Jesus [John 18.37]. As God loved Jesus, he loved the disciples, and if the disciples would obey, they would remain in his love, just as Jesus had obeyed and remained in the Father's love, and this would bring them joy [John 15.9-11].

Only those willing to lose their lives for Jesus – loving Jesus more than anyone else and being willing to sacrifice and suffer – would find true life [Matthew 10.37-39; 16.24-5; Mark 8.34-35; Luke 9.23-24; 14.26; John 12.24-25]. Those who sacrificed for Jesus would receive reward in this age [albeit along with persecutions] and eternal life [Matthew 19.29; Mark 10.29-30; Luke 18.29-30]. To follow Jesus meant to put his mission first in life [Matthew 8.22; Luke 9.60-62]. Jesus said those who wanted to be his followers must deny themselves, take up their crosses, be willing to give up everything and even to lose their lives for the gospel [Matthew 16.24-25; Mark 8.34-35; Luke 9.23-24; 14.27-33]. Being with Jesus takes priority over doing work [Luke 10.41], but believers should honor Jesus while he is away by being diligent workers [Matthew 24.45-51; 25.1-30]. Jesus said his followers should be ever ready to serve his cause and welcome his return, that while not having worry, they should keep working, for from those who have been given much, much will be demanded [Luke 12.35-48].

If two or more gather in Jesus' name, he is with them [Matthew 18.20]. Believers must depend on Jesus to successfully bear fruit [John 15.4-5]. God the father will honor the one who serves Jesus [John 12.26]. Believers are in Jesus and he is in them [John 14.20]. If God is a person's father, he will hear what God says and thus love Jesus [John 8.42, 47]. Jesus said those who received him received God the Father [Matthew 10.40]; those who rejected him rejected God [Luke 10.16]. Those who hate Jesus hate God [John 15.23]. Jesus claimed one could honor God only if honoring Jesus [John 5.22-23]. Leading people astray from Jesus would bring punishment [Matthew 18.6-7; Mark 9.42].

Worship and Prayer: This is another area in which one might expect Jesus would have elaborated more. Perhaps he taught worship and prayer mostly by example.

Jesus told Satan that man must worship and serve God alone [Matthew 4.10; Luke 4.8]. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God seeks worshipers who will worship him in spirit and truth [John 4.23-24]. Jesus taught that God seeks to bless those who persistently seek his provision, particularly to bless them with the Holy Spirit [Matthew 7.7-11; Luke 11.5-13; 18.1-8]. Jesus said some things can only be accomplished by prayer [Matthew 17.20; Mark 9.29]. Jesus taught his disciples not to pray or fast to seem righteous, but to pray and fast in secret [Matthew 6.5-6, 16-18]. Jesus also taught them not to babble on endlessly in prayer, but to trust that God knew their hearts [Matthew 6.7-8]. In his demonstration of prayer, Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God the Father, honoring him, seeking his kingdom to come, seeking his will on earth, seeking sustenance from him, seeking forgiveness and pledging forgiveness of others, and seeking help with temptation and deliverance from Satan [Matthew 6.9-13; Luke 11.1-4].⁹

The work of evangelism and mentoring: Here again one might assume that Jesus taught much more by example than with words. Still, he made clear that the believer is part of the gospel mission, to raise up true multiplying disciples by evangelizing them until they believe and are baptized and by teaching them until they are mature enough to obey and replicate the process themselves. This mission remains the focus for believers today.

Emphasizing God's control over salvation, Jesus told a parable in which a farmer sows seed, and without his help it sprouts and grows, and then he harvests [Mark 4.26-29]. Jesus told his disciples that often some sow and others reap, but they could celebrate together, and that right then they should be reaping where the crops were ripe for harvest [John 4.35-38]. Jesus told his disciples to pray that God would send more workers to harvest [Matthew 9.37-38; Luke 10.2].

Jesus told some of his disciples that he would make them fishers of men [Matthew 4.19; Mark 1.17; Luke 5.10]. Jesus said believers were the salt and light who would draw people to him [Matthew 5.13-16; Mark 4.21-25; 9.50; Luke 8.16-18], and so his Apostles should speak boldly despite persecution and not fear any repercussions, because they were valuable and in God's control [Matthew 10.26-31; Luke 12.4-7]. Even so, Jesus taught them that they were not to dwell on sharing the good news repeatedly with those who were opposed to it [Matthew 7.6].¹⁰

As he was preparing to leave the ministry in their hands, Jesus commanded his disciples to go make disciples of all peoples, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all Jesus had commanded them [Matthew 28.19-20]. Jesus instructed them to be his witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit [Acts 1.8], to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem, to the fulfillment of prophecy [Luke 24.47].

The need to love: If we truly could love God with all of ourselves and love others like ourselves, then we would be living the way God desires. Jesus made clear that God wants believers characterized by authenticity, peace, forgiveness, generosity, and love.

⁹ Other scriptures in which Jesus told his disciples to pray for help with temptation include Matthew 26.41; Mark 14.38; Luke 22.40, 46.

¹⁰ Pentecost, 186.

Jesus quoted Hosea 6.6, saying God desired not merely sacrifices [i.e. following the forms of the religion], but genuine mercy [Matthew 9.13; 12.7], and so it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath [Matthew 12.11-12; Mark 3.4; Luke 6.9; 13.16]. Jesus said one should seek peace with others before making offerings [Matthew 5.23-24]. Believers are to be at peace with each other [Mark 9.50] and to love even their enemies [who will not make peace] and pray for their persecutors, to truly reflect God's character [Matthew 5.43-48; Luke 6.27-28, 32-36].

Believers should forgive and forgive again, for they have been forgiven much more by God than they ever will forgive of others [Matthew 18.22-35; Luke 17.3-4]. If believers do not forgive, God will not forgive them [Matthew 6.14-15; 18.35; Mark 11.25]; as they judge others God will judge them [Matthew 7.1-2; Luke 6.37]; they need to make themselves righteous before they go about trying to constructively criticize others [Matthew 7.3-5; Luke 6.41-42].

Jesus told his followers to sell their possessions and give to the poor, to build treasure in heaven instead of on earth [Luke 12.32-34]. Believers should give to those who ask [Matthew 5.42; Luke 6.30]. Serving others will bring reward [Matthew 10.42]; serving children is like serving Jesus [Matthew 18.5; Mark 9.37; Luke 9.48], as is serving his disciples [Mark 9.41].

The disciples were to love each other as Jesus loved them, thus being willing to die for each other [John 15.12-13, 17]. Jesus said his followers should love one another as he loved them, so that people would know they were his followers [John 13.34-35]. Jesus told his followers to do to others what they would have others do to them, which sums up the Law and prophets [Matthew 7.12; Luke 6.31]; the Law and prophets hang on two commandments: Love God with all of yourself and love others like yourself [Matthew 22.34-40; Mark 12.28-31].

Character Issues: Followers of Jesus should be characterized by humility, repentance, chastity, perseverance, self discipline, sacrifice, honesty, stewardship, and unity.

Jesus said blessed were the poor in spirit, those who mourn, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and persecuted because of righteousness or association with Jesus, for they will be rewarded in the kingdom [Matthew 5.3-12; Luke 6.20-23]. Jesus said there would be woe for those who were the opposite of these traits, those who were rich, well fed, laughing, and enjoying the praise of men [Luke 6.24-26]. Only those who seek the kingdom of God like a child will enter [Matthew 19.13-15; Mark 10.13-16; Luke 18.15-17]. Jesus said repentant sinners would enter the kingdom but the religious leaders would not enter the kingdom because they were unrepentant [Matthew 21.28-32]. Believers characterized by serving those in need will inherit the kingdom, unbelievers characterized by not serving those in need will face condemnation [Matthew 25.34-46].

Those who want to be first must be humble enough to place themselves last and serve others [Matthew 18.2-4; Mark 9.35; Luke 9.48; 22.25-27]. Believers are to do righteousness and give to the needy without seeking honor, to do it secretly even [Matthew 6.1-4]. Believers are not to have titles among each other, they are to be servant leaders [Matthew 23.8-12]. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted [Matthew 23.12; Luke 14.7-11; 18.14]. Believers need to serve others and not exalt themselves, for kingdom leadership is about service [Matthew 20.26; Mark 10.43-44; Luke 22.25-27; John 13.12-17].

Believers should never look down on children, whose angels are in God the Father's presence and who are valued by God [Matthew 18.10-14]. No matter how much believers do for God, they should stay humble, thinking they did their duty and do not deserve reward [Luke 17.7-10].

Jesus commanded his followers to not even be angry with their brother [Matthew 5.22], and to seek peace with others [Matthew 5.23-26], even with those who were against them [Matthew 5.38-41]. Believers are not to call anyone derogatory names [Matthew 5.22], for it is not what goes in the mouth that makes a person unclean, but what comes out [Matthew 15.11, 17-20; Mark 7.15, 18-23]. There is a way to handle confrontation: if a brother in faith sins against you, privately explain his fault to him; if he will not listen, take one or two others along as witnesses; if he still refuses to listen, share with the church; if he refuses to listen to church, treat him as a pagan [Matthew 18.15-17].

Believers are not look at someone with lust [Matthew 5.27-28]. They are not to divorce except as provided in Deuteronomy, nor are they to marry a divorced person, both of which cases are adultery; what God has brought together, man should not separate [Matthew 5.31-32; 19.1-12; Mark 10.1-12; Luke 16.18]. Believers should remember that what is of high value to men is detestable to God [Luke 16.15]. Believers are to guard against all kinds of greed and remember life is not about possessions [Luke 12.15]. Believers should not even hoard for security, but trust in God's provision [Luke 12.22-26]. Believers should give to those who cannot repay them, for then they will be repaid at their resurrection [Luke 14.12-14]. Believers are to give to the government what belongs to it and give to God what belongs to him [Matthew 22.21; Mark 12.17; Luke 20.25]. Those who give sacrificially are giving more than those who give much out of their wealth [Mark 12.41-44; Luke 21.1-4].

Jesus taught that from what is in the heart come the actions and words of a person; the fruit of a person's life reveals his tree or character [Matthew 7.15-20; 12.33-35; Luke 6.43-45]. Thus Jesus taught believers were not to make oaths, but simply let their word be their bond [Matthew 5.33-37]. Jesus taught believers should be trustworthy with what God had given them, for then God might give them more to oversee, especially in the kingdom [Luke 16.10-12; 19.11-28]. Jesus wanted unity in believers, unity with him and with each other, so the world would know God the Father had sent him [John 17.11, 21-23].

Persecution, Sacrifice, Suffering: Jesus taught that sometimes suffering is so that a work of God might be displayed in our lives [John 9.3]. Jesus said people would be divided over belief in him [Matthew 10.34-36; Luke 12.51-53]. Jesus said that the unsaved world hates and persecutes those who are consecrated for him [John 15.19-21; 16.1-4], because they are different than the world [John 17.14]. Jesus promised that those who sacrifice for him would receive rewards, but also persecution [Mark 10.30]. Jesus told his apostles they had to be shrewd yet innocent, for they would be among wolves who would persecute and prosecute them; but in those situations, they should trust the Spirit would speak through them [Matthew 10.16-23]. Jesus assured his disciples that in the world they would have trouble, but he had overcome the world and was in control [John 16.33].

Satan: Jesus said he had seen Satan fall like lightning from heaven [Luke 10.18]. Jesus affirmed that Satan is a murderer, a liar, and the father of lies [John 8.44]. Jesus acknowledged

that Satan presently is the prince of this world, but declared he had no hold on Jesus [John 14.30], and now stands condemned [John 16.11].

Hardness of people's hearts: Jesus pointed out that Israel often had failed to believe its own prophets [Luke 4.23-27]. Jesus complained that people in his day would never believe unless they saw miraculous signs and wonders [John 4.48], and declared they were a wicked and adulterous generation for asking for signs and not repenting [Matthew 12.38-42; 16.2-4; Mark 8.12, 38; Luke 11.29-32]. Jesus said the people were seeking ways to not believe in John and Jesus [Matthew 11.16-18; Luke 7.31-35].

Jesus warned that many in Israel would not be in the kingdom [Matthew 8.12]. Jesus pronounced woe on those cities which had witnessed his miracles but not believed [Matthew 11.20-24; Luke 10.13-15]. Jesus said they could not interpret their own time [Luke 12.56], and that their hearts were calloused [quoting Isaiah 6.9-10], and so he was speaking to them in parables [Matthew 13.10-15; Mark 4.10-12; Luke 8.9-10]. Jesus told a parable in which he said if someone would not listen to Moses and the prophets, he would not be convinced even if someone were to rise from the dead [Luke 16.31].

The religious leaders: Jesus made clear that the religious leaders of his day were not true believers. We can learn from their attitudes, which Jesus criticized, and seek to be better about teaching scripture accurately, avoiding legalism, helping and not hindering people in their relationships with God, and authentically living out what we teach.

Jesus told his disciples to be careful about the teaching of the religious leaders [Matthew 16.6, 12; Mark 8.15; Luke 12.1]. Jesus said the religious leaders had misinterpreted or distrusted what Moses wrote [John 5.45-47], did not understand the Law – as evidenced by the fact that they would circumcise on a Sabbath but objected to healing on the Sabbath [John 7.21.24] – in fact, they did not understand the scriptures or the power of God [Matthew 22.29; Mark 12.24]. Jesus said they were the blind leading the blind, and their disciples would be tainted by their training [Matthew 15.13-14; Luke 6.39-40]. They made many rules, but didn't help people live with them, with the result that they hindered people from gaining knowledge of God and his ways [Matthew 23.4, 13-15; Luke 11.46-52].

Jesus said it was a barrier to belief for the religious leaders that they did not have the love of God in their hearts and that they sought praise from one another but did not seek it from God [John 5.42, 44]. Jesus called them hypocrites and said Isaiah 29.13 was about them, that they honored God with their lips but not with their hearts and that they taught man-made rules instead of the commands of God [Matthew 15.3-9; Mark 7.6-9]. They sought to look good on the outside, observing the religious forms and getting honored by men, but they were greedy, self indulgent, and wicked inside, neglecting justice, mercy, faithfulness, and love for God [Matthew 23.5-7, 23-28; Mark 12.38-40; Luke 11.39-43; 20.45-47]. They were not practicing what they preached [Matthew 23.3], and were ready to kill him because they had no room for his word [John 8.37].

Jesus called them a brood of vipers and said they were evil [Matthew 12.34]. Jesus said they were doing the things of their father, Satan [John 8.38-47]. Jesus foretold that they would persecute and kill the prophets, wise men, and teachers Jesus would send [Matthew 23.34]. They

did not know him or God the Father and would die in their sin [John 8.19-24, 55]. They were unable to hear what he said [John 8.43], and did not believe despite his miracles, because they were not his sheep [John 10.25-26]. They would not enter the kingdom, because they were not repentant, they were not revering God, and they had rejected God's Son [Matthew 21.28-44; 22.1-14; Mark 12.1-11; Luke 20.9-18]. Jesus said they would be uprooted by God [Matthew 15.13], punished severely, and condemned [Matthew 23.33; Mark 12.40; Luke 20.47].

The coming judgment: Like the prophets, when Jesus foretold about the coming judgment, it sometimes was confusing whether he was referring to the judgment soon coming upon Jerusalem, the judgment at the end of time, or some combination. It is clear, in any case, that Jesus will return, resurrect all the dead, and judge them.

Jesus said there was a judgment on the world implicit in his crucifixion and resurrection [John 12.31-32]. On his way to the cross, Jesus warned some women of a coming disaster [Luke 23.29-30]. Jesus mentioned a coming judgment on his generation in Israel [Matthew 10.23; Luke 11.30-32; 50-51].¹¹ Jesus foretold punishment of Jerusalem, of enemies would encircling and building an embankment against her, and killing many, toppling the stones, because they had not recognized Jesus as God coming to them [Luke 19.43-44]. Jesus said his generation in Israel would be judged for the killing of all the prophets [Matthew 23.36], and foretold the destruction by Gentiles as judgment on Jerusalem and Israel [Matthew 24.2; Mark 13.2; Luke 21.6, 20-26]. Jesus warned his disciples would be persecuted and killed, many would turn away from Jesus and betray others, many would fall prey to deceptions from false prophets, and generally people's love would grow cold [Matthew 24.9-12; Mark 13.9, 12-13; Luke 21.12-13, 16-17].

Jesus warned that before he returned, there would be many false messiahs [Matthew 24.4-5; Mark 13.5-6; Luke 21.8] and many wars and natural disasters [Matthew 24.6-8; Mark 13.7-8; Luke 21.9-11]. Jesus said that when people saw the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong, they should know it would be time to flee and be prepared for awful times; that then false messiahs and false prophets would appear to mislead others, even performing signs and miracles [Matthew 24.15-26; Mark 13.14-23; Luke 21.20-26]. Jesus said the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to the whole world and then the end would come [Matthew 24.14; Mark 13.10; Luke 21.18-19], but nobody knows when the end will be except God, who set the date [Matthew 24.36; Mark 13.32; Acts 1.7].

When Jesus returns it will be as a lightning flash, lighting up the sky from one end to the other, and he will come on the clouds in power and glory, with his angels he will gather the elect while others are left [Matthew 24.27-31; Mark 13.24-27; Luke 17.24, 34-35; 21.27-28]. Jesus will return in glory with God's angels to reward people for what they have done [Matthew 16.27; Mark 8.38; Luke 8.26]. Jesus' return will be sudden and unexpected, so believers should be ready [Matthew 24.37-44; Mark 13.33-37; Luke 21.34-36].

Jesus said a time was coming when all the dead would hear his voice and be resurrected, those who have done good to life and those who have done evil to condemnation [John 5.28-29]. Jesus will return with his angels, sit on his throne, and gather all the nations for judgment [Matthew

¹¹ Pentecost, 195.

25.31-33]. Believers characterized by serving those in need will inherit the kingdom, unbelievers characterized by not serving those in need will face condemnation [Matthew 25.34-46]. Jesus said that at the end of the age, only the righteous would enter the kingdom, but the angels will throw all who do evil into the fiery furnace [Matthew 13.30, 40-43, 47-50], and that he would judge based on people acting in faith [Matthew 24.45-51; 25.1-30]. Jesus told his apostles that those who rejected the good news they were bringing would face a harsher judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah [Matthew 10.15]; he said similar things about the cities which had rejected him despite miracles [Matthew 11.20-24]. Jesus said that people will have to give account for every careless word they have spoken [Matthew 12.36-37].

Jesus said he would bring fire on the earth [Luke 12.49], but then there will be a renewal of all things [Matthew 19.28].

Conclusion: While sharing his salvific gospel with many, Jesus focused his ministry on developing multiplying disciples. His final instructions to them were to replicate the process and develop more multiplying disciples. This involved sharing with seekers the gospel that emphasized that Jesus was who he said he was – both God and man, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, the unique savior – and that Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection what he said he would – forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, salvation from death and Hell – so that seekers would become believers and receive baptism into the body of Christ. This also involved teaching new believers all about the Christian life of obedience, sacrifice, discipline, love, humility, unity, and service, such that the new believers would become mature in faith, experiencing transformation into Christ-likeness as the Holy Spirit interacted with the Word of God in them, and then they too would be ready to replicate the process and multiply. Looking at the words of Jesus recorded in scripture, we can see this pattern, these emphases, and we can infer their continued importance and need for emphasis today, as well as learn many other details of what Jesus taught.