



THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Reading: Gospel of Mark

The following notes are a brief summary of the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' ministry covered a period of about three and a half years; to gain an overview of his life it is necessary to read the gospel records. In this summary Matthew has been used to set out the order of events that took place. The Gospel of John is more of a thematic study, concentrating on selected events rather than following his life in detail.

Some of the Main Features of Jesus' Life are as Follows:

The Baptism of Jesus

We have little detail of the period of Jesus' life from his birth through to his baptism at 30 years of age. His baptism introduces us also to the work of John the Baptist (see Lesson 19, Matthew 3).

The Temptation of Jesus

After his baptism Jesus was led by "*the spirit*" into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1). Note that it was not "Satan" that led him into the wilderness but "*the spirit*".

The subject of Satan and the Devil will be fully covered in Lesson 24 where the words "satan" and "devil" are explained. However, the following will help in understanding the incident before us.

The word "satan" means "adversary". It can be used of people who oppose the way of God. Jesus used it in this way of the apostle Peter when he said to him: "*Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*" (Matthew 16:23).

The word can also be used of the very thoughts which oppose or are adverse to God's way, and it is used this way by the apostle Peter when Ananias and Sapphira decided to steal money for themselves. Here we read that Peter said to Ananias, "*Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit*", which he explains in the following verse, "*Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?*" (Acts 5:3-4).

So we see that the word "satan" is used either of a person or group of people which express ideas opposed to God's way, or of the deceitful thoughts of our own hearts which can turn us away from His way.

From the way the temptation of Jesus is described in Matthew, Mark and Luke we can draw no conclusive evidence as to the identity of "the satan". We can be categorical, however, about what it is not. The popular concept of a supernatural immortal 'evil angel' with power to thwart God's will has no support anywhere in the Bible. What we have learned so far of the nature and character of the living God makes it inconceivable that such a creature could exist or be tolerated by God (see Isaiah 45:5,7).

The "satan" who came to Jesus might have been an actual person or group of people who sought out Jesus in the wilderness after his baptism. They had heard about the voice from heaven and they wanted to challenge the idea that he was the "*Son of God*", demanding a sign. This remained the burning issue all through his ministry. The High Priest himself, at the infamous trial of Jesus, demanded with an oath that he confess "*whether thou be the Son of God*" (Matthew 26:63). Certainly from the time of his baptism until his death, many in Israel **opposed** Jesus—they were "adversaries" or "satans". These people could never accept that Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-66). In particular, the religious leaders showed that they were a "satan" (Psalm 109:6; Luke 22:3-5), or "devil" (John 8:43-44), not only opposing the Son of God, but finally putting him to death.

The fact remains, however, that Jesus had to grapple with the temptation in his own mind and resolve to answer it with the words of God. The apostle James says that "*every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust [or, natural desire] and enticed*" (James 1:14) and Jesus was a man. He partook of the same nature as ourselves in order to vanquish the power of sin (Hebrews 2:14). Having just been given the Holy Spirit without measure at his baptism, Jesus now had to grapple with the added temptation of misusing it. He now had power which might



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have been used to satisfy his hunger, or to gain control of the kingdoms of men there and then, rather than accepting the way of the cross. Then there was the pressure to perform some kind of spectacular act, such as is used today by those wishing to draw attention to themselves and their message. All these were pressing him into selfish action, which had to be resisted.

As we have noted, Jesus had the same human nature as all mankind. Because of this he could identify with the weakness, the trials and feelings which are common to us all (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15; 5:8). However the positive lesson we learn from his temptation is that he overcame the suggestion to sin by turning to the word of God. He prefaced each answer with the words, *“It is written”* (Matthew 4:4,7,10). It was the word of God fixed in his heart which gave him the key to overcome every suggestion. So the apostle could say of Jesus that he was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). By constantly referring to the word of God, he upheld the very teaching of John the Baptist, from Isaiah 40:6-8.

We learn this salient lesson from the temptation of the Lord. The final victory over temptation was achieved in the mind of Jesus. The same is true for every one of us—the battle against temptation is fought and either won or lost in our mind. We must strive to bring “every thought” into obedience to the will of God (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The Preaching of Jesus Commences

The open and public preaching of Jesus fully commenced **after** John was put in prison (Matthew 4:12). This was many months after Jesus’ baptism.

The main theme of his preaching is summarised in his discourse on the Mount (Matthew 5-8). On reading through these chapters we see the wonder of his teaching as he shows his disciples how to live a Godly life. God is the model and Christ himself the example. It is in this discourse that Jesus introduces the aspect of God as a *“Father”* to his disciples (cp Matthew 5:43-48; 5:8-9; 6:31-33; 7:7-11).

Jesus also gives “The Lord’s Prayer” in this discourse as a pattern to teach his disciples how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13).

In his teaching he presents the deeper spiritual significance of the Law of Moses. He is not, as some think, contradicting the Law given by God to Moses, but identifying the principles inherent in each command or prohibition. The Law had said, *“Thou shalt not kill”* (Exodus 20:13), but Jesus shows that the angry thought is wrong to begin with. If we love our neighbour we will not even be angry with him (Matthew 5:21-22). Similarly the Law had said, *“Thou shalt not commit adultery”* (Exodus 20:14), but Jesus shows that the very contemplation of lustful thoughts is unacceptable to God, being contrary to the spirit of that law (Matthew 5:27-28). He summarises the spirit of the law and the prophets in these words: *“Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them”* (Matthew 7:12).

The Gospel which Jesus Preached (Mark 1:14-15)

The main theme of Jesus’ message is termed “the gospel”. The word means “good news” or “glad tidings”. There are two main elements to this gospel message, as summarised in Acts 8:12:

- 1 **The Kingdom of God.** Jesus spoke of the Kingdom which God had promised (Luke 8:1; cp Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15). He told his disciples to pray for it because it will usher in his reign of righteousness and peace (Matthew 6:10). He also outlined the essential characteristics of this Kingdom in many of his parables (Luke 19:11-27; Matthew 25:31-34).
- 2 **Salvation from Sin and Death through the Name of Jesus Christ.** This is the second and equally important element of the gospel. It affects the individual very personally, for it relates to the way in which he can be saved through Jesus Christ.

Belief in these two aspects of the gospel leads a man to the first act of obedience, which is baptism (Mark 16:15-16; Romans 5:21; 6:23).



The Disciples and the Apostles

The word “disciple” comes from a Greek word indicating “one who learns from a teacher”. Jesus had many disciples. We can equally be his disciples today, by carefully reading and absorbing the story of his life and striving to put into practice his teaching and example.

The word “apostle” means “one who is sent” with a message. Jesus selected from his **disciples** twelve men whom he called **apostles** for he **sent them** out for the specific work of preaching the gospel. Their names and how they were selected are recorded in Luke 6:13-16 and Matthew 10:1-7. The Greek word “apostello” is used when Jesus “sent forth” the twelve (Matthew 10:5).

“The Kingdom of God” and “The Kingdom of Heaven”

In the gospel records both these terms occur. However, by comparing the records we note that the expressions both relate to the Kingdom that will be set up on the earth when Christ returns.

For example, compare Matthew 8:11 with Luke 13:28-29. In Luke we read that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be in “*the kingdom of God*” and in Matthew, in “*the kingdom of heaven*”. It is the same kingdom referred to in the Lord’s Prayer, where Jesus prayed, “*Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:10). The Kingdom to be set up on earth is a heavenly Kingdom for it is God’s Kingdom. When “*the meek shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:5) they will do so in company with such people as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 13:14-17; see notes on the promises to Abraham, Lesson 8). Jesus Christ will soon return to set up this Kingdom (Revelation 11:15; Daniel 2:44), and reign from Jerusalem as King (Matthew 5:35; Jeremiah 3:17).

The Miracles of Healing which Jesus Performed

These miracles of healing of sickness and even raising the dead had a twofold lesson. They were

- **A sign that God was working through him.** The remarkable miracles he performed testified that God had sent him and were a witness that he was the “Messiah” (that is, “Christ”) foretold in the prophets—the Hebrew word “Messiah” and Greek word “Christ” mean “anointed”. Jesus was anointed at his baptism by the Holy Spirit that he might perform these miracles while preaching the Gospel (Isaiah 61:1; cp Matthew 11:4-6; Luke 4:16-21; also Isaiah 42:1-3,7; cp Matthew 12:17-21). These works were a sign that he was sent by God (John 5:36; 10:25; Acts 2:22).
- **A sign that sin and death can be removed through him.** Sickness, disease and death have come upon mankind because of the sin of Adam and Eve. All men eventually die and return to the dust. The lesson of the miracles of Jesus is beautifully summarised in Matthew 8:16-17, which is quoted from Isaiah 53:4. **Jesus had compassion** on those who were suffering, for he also was “*touched with the feeling of our infirmities*” (Hebrews 4:15). His healing of sickness and death by the power of God was a sign that he was sent to deliver man from the root cause of his problem, which is sin. Consider the miracle of healing the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8; Psalm 103:3).

Because of Jesus’ sinless life and perfect obedience to God, even unto death (1 Peter 2:22-24; Philippians 2:8), God raised him to life again to be the Saviour of all mankind (2 Timothy 1:9-10; Romans 5:10). Through him we too have the hope of resurrection from the grave and can be delivered from mortality and corruption (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 50-58). The miracles of healing taught this wonderful lesson.

The Parables of Jesus

Often Jesus spoke in parables. Why did he do this? The reason is given in his explanation of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:10-16).

A parable is a story, usually of everyday things, but with a deeper spiritual meaning that is to be drawn from the simple details. Jesus spoke in parables to separate between the genuine disciples and those who were attracted to him purely because of the miracles he performed. The prophets actually foretold that Jesus would use this method of teaching (Isaiah 6:9-10; cp Matthew 13:10-17; Psalm 78:2; cp Matthew 13:34-35).



The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23)

The story is simple and clear, but the spiritual lesson is very important. The seed sown was the “word of God” (v19).

Individuals fall into four categories:

- 1 The hard wayside
- 2 The stony ground
- 3 The thorny ground
- 4 The good ground

These four kinds of ground represent the four different kinds of responses from people who hear the gospel. The lesson of this parable is powerful and pointed. How true it is that as thorns and thistles choke the growing seed, so riches and the worries of life can choke any interest one might have in the word of God. Only the good ground responds and produces fruit. We need to seriously approach the reading of the word of God (the “seed” of the parable) and let it grow in the good soil of our minds, that our lives may be enriched and we may bring forth fruit to God’s glory.

The Nobleman Going into a Far Country (Luke 19:11- 27)

Again the story is simple on the surface, but the lesson is very important. Jesus told this parable because the disciples were expecting the Kingdom to be set up right then. They did not understand that Jesus must first be crucified and then be raised and go to his Father in heaven for quite a long period before returning to set up the Kingdom on earth. This parable was given so that his disciples might come to appreciate this.

The lesson for us from this parable is that the Lord Jesus Christ will soon return to the earth, but while he is absent we need to toil diligently in his service like the faithful servants. If we follow this example then we too will receive his words of approval: “*Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities*” (v17).

As we read the parables of Jesus we need to look for their spiritual lessons, and pay careful attention to what he is teaching that we may be counted among his true disciples.

Summary Points

- 1 Jesus’ public ministry covered a period of three and a half years from his baptism by John through to his crucifixion.
- 2 The temptation of Jesus highlighted that he was tempted just like all other men, with this remarkable difference, that he did not sin (**Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22**). He overcame every temptation by a “*thus it is written*” (**Matthew 4:4,7,10**), showing us by his example that the way to overcome when we are tempted is to follow the precepts of the word of God.
- 3 The message which Jesus taught is termed “**the Gospel**”, a term meaning “good news” or “glad tidings”. This good news comprises two main elements, as expressed in **Acts 8:12**
 - i. **The things concerning the Kingdom of God** that will be established when Jesus Christ returns to the earth.
 - ii. **The things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ** which reveal that God has provided **salvation** from death and the forgiveness of sins **through the name of Jesus Christ**.
- 4 The miracles that Jesus performed were a sign that he was sent of God (**John 5:36; 10:25**).
- 5 The parables that Jesus used in his teaching were designed to cause people to reflect deeply on his message and to apply the lessons in their own lives (**Matthew 13:10-17**). Many of the parables were related to the coming Kingdom of God; eg “The parable of the Nobleman going into a far country” (**Luke 19:11-27**).



Lesson 20 - Questions

1. How was Jesus able to identify with the temptations and feelings common to us all?
2. What does the word “Gospel” mean?
3. What are the two main elements of the Gospel?
4. What does the word “disciple” mean?
5. What was Jesus anointed with and why?
6. What do we learn from the fact that Jesus had the power to heal sickness and raise the dead?
7. What lessons do we learn from the Parable of the Nobleman going into a far country?