

Reclaiming the

Forgotten

Gospel
of Jesus

By Charlie Stuart

For decades, evangelical protestant churches in America have preached a salvation-centric Gospel of Christ. Today, a majority of protestants believe this is the complete gospel, and their churches have aligned their teachings to “seek and save the lost” only. In doing so, they relegated the life, words, and works of Jesus to secondary, non-gospel status.

But, what if the story of Jesus, passed down to us in the New Testament (especially Mark, Matthew, and Luke), describing His life, actions, death, and resurrection, is true? What if it accurately portrays the *whole* story of Jesus, the Son of God, as He lived among us? What if He still lives with us, showing us how to live out the kingdom of God on earth?

What if Jesus’s life was a living gospel, as He said it was, yet it has been forgotten by the evangelical protestant churches in America? And if this forgotten gospel has been ignored, what should the church do about it?

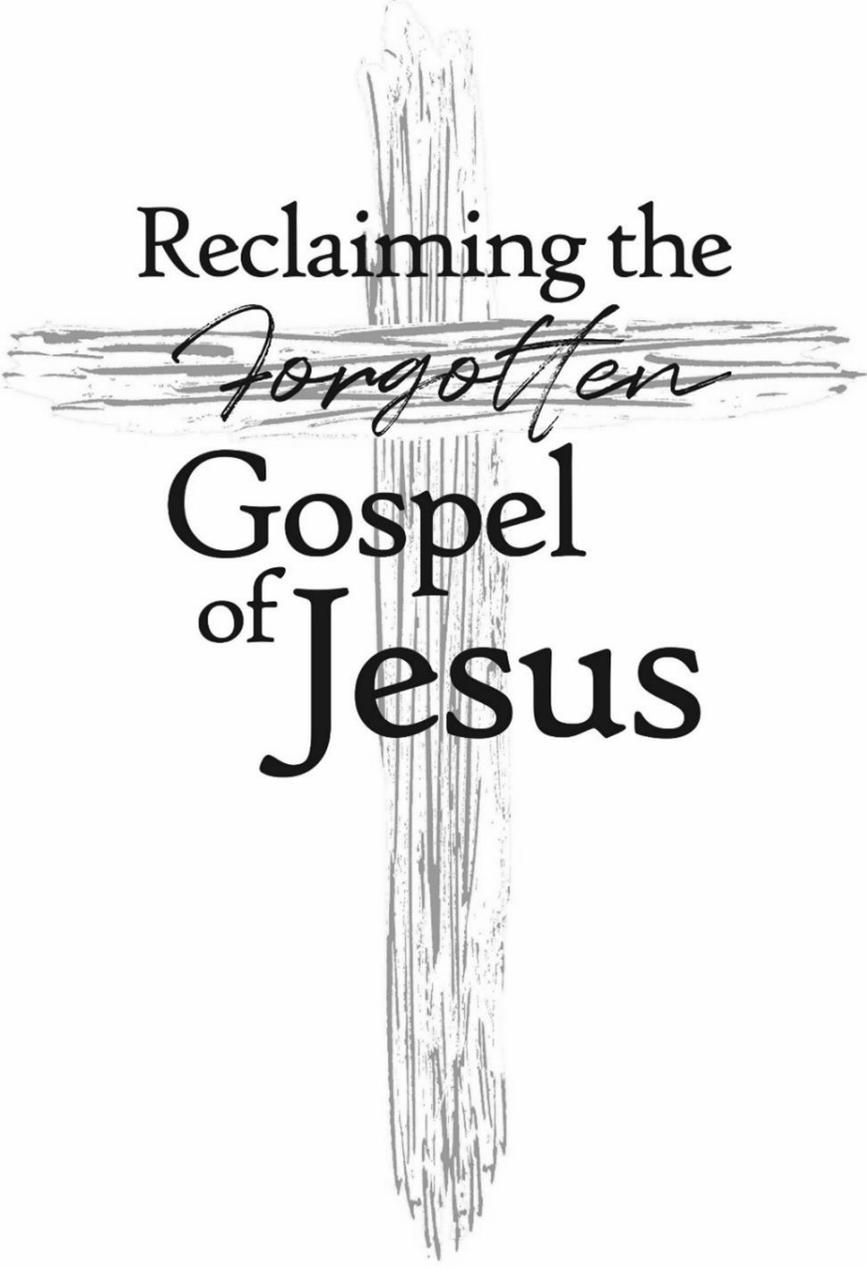
The purpose of this book is to explore how the life, words, and works of Jesus can bring churches, pastors, denominations, and members back to the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ.

www.ReclaimingtheForgottenGospelofJesus.org



Charlie Stuart is founder of Making Faith Matter, a movement to help the local church return to the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ. Charlie believes this is best expressed by Jesus when He taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” In this book Charlie explores how to embrace the life of Jesus as

gospel in order to empower the church to become what Jesus predicted for it, to be the most powerful influence for good in individual lives and communities that the world has ever seen.



Reclaiming the

Forgotten

Gospel
of Jesus

By Charles Stuart

Copyright © 2020 Charles Stuart.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Printed by The Stuart Group, in the United States of America. ISBN:
9798616413406

First printing, 2020.

The Stuart Group

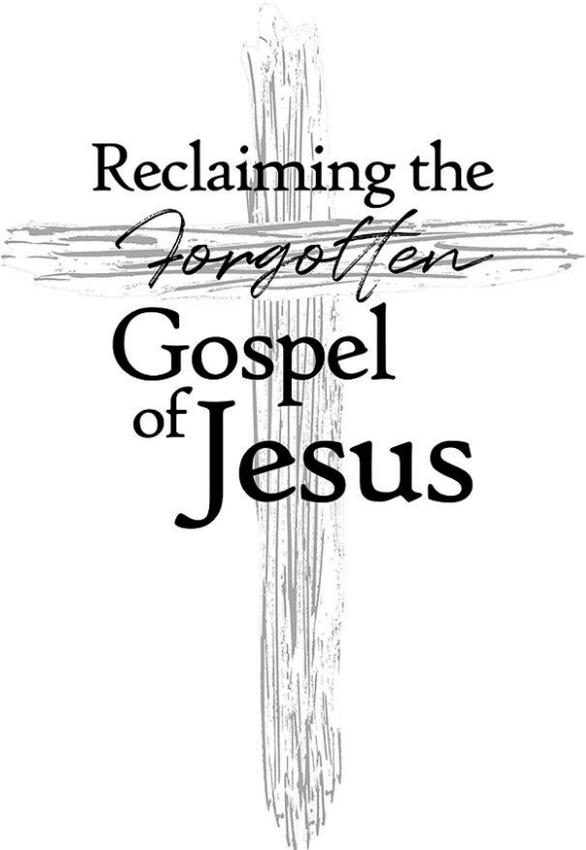
Charles Stuart

Orlando, Florida

Charlie@TheForgottenGospel.org

(407) 230-2125

www.ReclaimingtheForgottenGospelofJesus.org



Reclaiming the
Forgotten
Gospel
of Jesus

Contents

Contents

Part One

Awakenings

Where's Jesus? 1-12

Part Two

The *Forgotten* Way

What happened to the
Forgotten Gospel? 13-44

The church of the *Forgotten*
Gospel is in trouble. 45-62

“Lord, have mercy.”
(Κύριε Ελέησον) 63-76

Part Three

The New Way

Re-orienting the church toward
the *Forgotten* Gospel. 77-174

Rethinking the church of the
Forgotten Gospel. 175-188

Contents

Part Four

The Church Way

Re-structuring the church of the
Forgotten Gospel.

189-204

Part Five

Be the Jesus Way

The Gospel of Jesus needs you.

205-218

Epilogue

July 6th, 2020

219-222

Resources

Glossary of Terms

223-228

Assessment Tools

229-240

Bibliography

241-248

Comparison of Worship Lyrics

249-266

About the Author

267-268

Dedication

To the hundreds who lived the Gospel of Jesus
into me over the decades and who, with
your actions, faith, and love, revealed
the kingdom of God on earth,
as Jesus lived and taught it,
to me in a real and
meaningful way.

Thank you.

Part Two

Reclaiming the

Forgotten

Gospel
of Jesus

The *Forgotten*

Way

Before we continue, let me state this clearly.

Without reservation, I believe in the salvation Gospel of Christ. I believe it for my eternal salvation. I believe Jesus lived. I believe Jesus's death atoned for my sins. I believe the resurrection of Christ sealed the promise of eternal salvation. I believe my soul will spend eternity in the presence of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I believe.

Chalin Stuart

We desperately need to explore how much of our understanding of the gospel is American and how much is biblical.

Dr. David Platt

What Happened to the Forgotten Gospel?

In most evangelical protestant churches in America “the Gospel” only means the path to eternal salvation. In theological terms this is known as the “Gospel of Paul” or Pauline theology.

But this relegates the life, teachings, and acts of Jesus to a non-gospel status; instead, the evangelical protestant churches in America present His life story as a “*nice way to live*” rather than a “*must way to live.*”

What if the kingdom of God on earth Gospel of Jesus was treated as an element of the complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ?

Let Me Tell You a Story

For a brief period after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus there was no New Testament written scripture. Thus, the followers of Jesus struggled with their understanding of who Jesus was, what had happened to Him, what would happen to them, and what were they to do next. Some of this can be found in the first third of The Acts of the Apostles, a book ascribed to the same author of the Gospel of Luke.

In the timing of the written scripture passed on to us as the New Testament, Luke’s gospel and Acts were written sixty-plus

years after the death of Jesus; and the earliest gospel, Mark, was written about forty years after Jesus died.² But the earliest New Testament scripture written is widely accepted to be Paul's letters that were circulating within twenty years of Jesus's death. It would appear that Paul's writings that made it into the New Testament were written two or three decades before the four Gospels made it onto the scene.

What Paul wrote became not only the earliest scripture written, it also laid the groundwork for the beginning of what became the theology for Christianity.

So, What is the 'Gospel?'

For two thousand years theologians have struggled to define the core beliefs revealed by Jesus's life, teachings, death and resurrection. As recently as a few days ago a blog titled "*What does 'Gospel' mean?*" was posted at "Deeper Study." This blog site is part of Zondervan Publishing's TheNIVBible.com platform.

This posting is shared below in its entirety, and contains, what I believe is from the point-of-view of the evangelical protestant church in America, a clear and succinct answer to the question in the title, "What does 'Gospel' mean?"

2 The dates in this paragraph and the one that follows are found in *From Jesus to Christianity*, L. Michael White, © 2004, page 99.

What does “Gospel” mean?

The word gospel reflects the Greek word for “good news” or “momentous news.” The good news is what God has done in Jesus Christ, supremely in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. This God did in fulfillment of all that he had promised to do (Luke 24:44) to reconcile lost and guilty human beings to himself, powerfully transforming them by his Spirit in anticipation of their resurrection existence in the new heaven and the new earth.

When Christians used the word “gospel” in the first century AD, it always referred to this message about Jesus; it did not refer to the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John — books that tell the story about Jesus. At that time, Christians spoke of the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, or the others. Only in the second century and beyond did Christians start talking about these books themselves as Gospels — Matthew’s Gospel (or the Gospel of Matthew), Mark’s Gospel, and so on. In the first century, “gospel” referred to the message, not the book that conveyed it.

Two things follow:

- (1) This way of speaking emphasizes that there is only one gospel, only one message. The individual writers doubtless bear witness to Jesus in somewhat different and complementary ways, but there is only one gospel.
- (2) If Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell about the one gospel, we gain a clearer idea of what this gospel is by observing what these four books have in common. In all four books, we learn that the one gospel, the one message, focuses on Jesus and emphasizes that his coming and mission fulfill what God promised in the past. These books say something about Jesus’ origin, his teaching and preaching, his miracles, and his interactions with very diverse people — and always the story moves inexorably to Jesus’ death and

resurrection. Always there is some explanation of what these stupendous events mean, of what God is doing through Jesus to save his people, to bring in the kingdom, to move history toward its consummation at the end of the age. Without this blend of elements, there is no gospel.

The Message of the Cross

For this reason, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus stand at the center of the Christian gospel message. Thus, the gospel Paul preached was this: “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], and then to the Twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:3 – 5). Paul recognized, of course, that Jesus’ resurrection was critical to the good news of salvation: “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and . . . your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). But since Christ was indeed raised, Paul emphasized the cross as the very center of the gospel message, even equating “the gospel” with “the message of the cross” and “Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:17 – 18, 23). Among the churches he planted, Paul said that he “resolved to know nothing while [he] was with [them] except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

By dying in his people’s place and paying the penalty for their sin, Jesus became a “sacrifice of atonement” for them (Romans 3:25), took upon himself the wrath of God that they deserved (1 Peter 3:18), and thereby qualified them to be welcomed into God’s presence and kingdom (Colossians 1:12 – 13). As a miraculous illustration of this, when Jesus died, the curtain of the temple, which symbolized that God exiled humans from his presence, was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Jesus had not just inaugurated the

kingdom; he had also won forgiveness for the sin that separated people from God.

In each proclamation of the gospel, the message is clear: through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah-King, there is righteousness, forgiveness of sin, and the inheritance of God's kingdom for any sinner who will repent and trust in him.

Yet, I don't believe this answer tells the whole story for a simple reason that is expressed in the closing sentence repeated below.

"In each proclamation of the gospel, the message is clear: through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah-King, there is righteousness, forgiveness of sin, and the inheritance of God's kingdom for any sinner who will repent and trust in him."

And, it states clearly that THIS Gospel definition is separate and distinct from the life and teachings of Jesus before His death as recorded in the four Gospels.

This definition of "Gospel" is a primary reason, I believe, that the church has strayed so far from what Jesus said and did that three years of His life has been relegated to bible stories for children and not treated as Gospel to be believed and followed. As Jesus commanded in Matthew 28: 19–20 (underline added by the author).

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have

commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Let's get started, together, on this journey to reclaim the Forgotten Gospel of Jesus in the church, in our lives and in our communities.

Jesus Lived and Died. Christ Rose from the Dead.

For too long, evangelical protestant churches in America have only emphasized a portion of the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ — the *salvation Gospel of Christ*. By focusing the church's energy on the resurrected Christ while largely ignoring the pre-crucified Jesus, those professing belief in the resurrection have, for the most part, remained believers in Christ, but not *followers* of Jesus.

A new definition of the Gospel is needed. One that is evidenced by Jesus through His words and deeds. Not one that disregards the life and teachings of Jesus, no matter how long ago it was adopted nor how many churches and denominations built their creeds around it. This resurrected Jesus theology stresses eternity while ignoring Jesus's theme of changing the "me before you" dynamic to "you before me."

The Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, is comprised of the Gospel of Jesus, what He taught us in word and deed, and the Gospel of Christ, belief in the resurrected Christ for salvation.

Reclaiming the Forgotten Gospel of Jesus (Forgotten Gospel) in the church is the overarching theme of this book. Embracing it

allows Christians and the churches to stand against oppression, injustice, and ignoring the plight of “the other.”

Gospel of (the Pre-Crucified) Jesus

The synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) clearly talk of Jesus whose appearance proclaims the presence of the kingdom of God on earth. Through His life and acts, Jesus reveals what that kingdom on earth will look like. This is the Gospel of Jesus.

In His first sermon, Jesus shares His purpose:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” . . .
“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

— Luke 4:18 – 19, 21

Gospel of (the Resurrected) Christ

John’s Gospel stresses the divinity of Jesus, from the first verse to the last. Here Jesus becomes “the son of God.” Here Jesus becomes “the Word” (logos), one with God from the beginning. Here Jesus prepares His followers for eternity with Him, through belief in Him as the Son of God.

In John, the Gospel of Christ is clearly spelled out, as in this passage:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands

condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

— John 3:16-18

Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ

The Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, is therefore two-fold. First, as believers we are expected to be followers of Jesus as He showed us through His life, words, and deeds. Second, our eternal salvation is secured by belief in the death and resurrection of Christ, the Son of God.

Too many churches in America, particularly those identified as evangelical protestant, believe that eternal salvation is the endgame for a Christian. But what about the life between the salvation decision and death? How are Christians to live?

We do know what a life following Jesus looks like. It's clearly illustrated in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We also know, through the Epistle of James, that a genuine belief in Jesus for salvation will yield a life worthy of Jesus.

James alerts those who call Jesus Lord, by professing to follow His commandments in life, that they are at spiritual risk if they ignore the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ.

Read here how James states this central theme of faith AND deeds that make a true believer.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the

same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder.

— James 2:14 – 19

You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

— James 2:24

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

— James 2:26

There is a paradox in believing the resurrected Gospel of Christ and ignoring the pre-crucified Gospel of Jesus. To believe that the Gospel of Christ secures salvation requires belief that Jesus was God in human form, was killed in atonement for all sins, and resurrected.

However, by making that statement the person is bound to follow Jesus's words, emulate His deeds, and obey His commandments. Not doing this is a denial, either covertly or overtly, that Jesus was the Son of God, which means that the salvation decision is incomplete, and maybe not valid.

The Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, is complete when both the Gospel of (the pre-crucified) Jesus AND the Gospel of (the resurrected) Christ are evidenced in the life and spirit of a follower of Jesus, the Christ.

My Conclusion

After years of thought, study, prayer, and contemplation, I have come to believe that those who ignore or give little meaning and effort to the Gospel of Jesus do so at their eternal peril.

Don't take my word for it. Read what James wrote in chapter 2, verses 14 – 19, shown on the pages 26-27, and decide for yourself.

And, read what Jesus said, quoted in Matthew chapter 25, verses 31 – 46, featuring this in verse 45: *“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”*

Not too long ago, in a conversation with a pastor friend I've known for decades, about followers living out the Gospel of Jesus, I asked him, “How many of those in the audience in a Sunday morning service believe they have secured eternal salvation?”

This pastor of a sizeable Baptist church replied, “Oh, 95%, at least.” Then, I asked, “How many of those believers do you expect to see in heaven?”

Downcast, he said, “Too few, less than half would not surprise me.” “Why?” I asked, astonished.

“Because they haven't made a real effort to be followers of the life Jesus showed us how to live.”

From “The Way” Forward

It’s 100 CE and “the Way,” as the early movement of the followers of Jesus, the Christ, were known, is taking hold in a few dozen cities and towns spread around the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. The number of Jesus followers is increasing among Jewish and Gentile society by word of mouth among families and friends. The earliest church emulates the way Jesus lived, spoke, and acted. These early followers know that the return of Jesus is imminent — in their lifetimes — and that they should be found living as Jesus had said and shown.

Paul and a few other apostles on journeys in the first few decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus established churches around the Mediterranean Sea in the Roman world. The spread of the Christian faith accelerated after 70 CE when the Romans crushed the first Jewish rebellion and destroyed the Temple. Jews, including the followers of “the Way,” were forced to flee Palestine and settle in cities across the region and empire.

During this period, Paul, when taking the Gospel to non-Jewish, or Gentile, towns in the surrounding regions established an altered message that centered on eternal salvation that focused on the divinity of Jesus, now the Christ. By 100 CE, written records of the life of Jesus and the letters of Paul and other apostles began to lay the foundation of common understanding of the tenets and principles of what began to be called Christianity.

“The Way” continued to form and spread based on a simple Gospel story taught and learned in small groups meeting in

homes. The small groups consisted of people from all ranks and parts of society. What was this simple Gospel?

Followers of “the Way” believed that following Jesus, the Christ, required a change in how you thought and acted as well as a belief in the salvation offered through the risen Christ. Their community grew by the example of their lives, far more than the preaching of their words. By turning the world’s way of living upside down they manifested their transformation.

They valued a person for his or her existence as a creation of God, not for his or her economic, class, gender, or age status. They accepted each other as equals and shared what they had to support those who didn’t have enough. They believed this Gospel unto death.

Will Durant wrote and published, beginning in 1935 and spanning 40 years, *The Story of Civilization*, a masterpiece of research, organization, and extraordinary writing contained in 11 volumes and over 10,000 pages.

On the next page, Durant summarizes the birth and early growth of Christianity with a powerful testimony from a master, secular historian.

“There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned or oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fierce tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won.”

by Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*,
Vol. III, *Caesar and Christ*, 1944, p. 652

A New Understanding

Reclaiming the Forgotten Gospel to where it belongs in the Complete Gospel requires a new understanding of the presence of Jesus, the Christ, in our lives.

From the beginning, the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, included a salvation element (the Gospel of Christ) and a kingdom of God on earth element, the Forgotten Gospel (the Gospel of Jesus).

While the books that make up the New Testament were written in the 20-75 years after the death of Jesus, Dr. Rodney Stark, in *The Triumph of Christianity*, believes some of Jesus’s disciples, following a custom of the time, took notes of what they

heard and witnessed.³ He goes on to write, “. . . the obvious conclusion is that the Gospels are a quite reliable report of the Christ story *as it was believed and told* by the original eyewitnesses . . .”And he added, “Thus, the evidence strongly suggests that the Gospels were the end product of a faith that was set down in writing from the very start.”⁴Written by different authors at different times for different reasons, amazingly they do not engage in reproof or correction of each other.

Because there was no central church nor a single way of interpreting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the earliest church leaders defined Jesus, the Christ, in different ways.

While New Testament biblical historians often differ on the dating of the earliest written documents, they largely agree on the order in which they were first composed or written.

The Epistle of James (Book of James) was likely written in the latter part of the 1st century. If written by James, the brother of Jesus, it was compiled from texts, letters or word-of-mouth by someone who collected James’s thoughts after his death in 62-63 CE. We know that James and Paul met each other. James’s letter might contain some of the oldest insight into Jesus found in the New Testament, even though it didn’t become widely accepted within the church for decades to come.⁵

3 Quotes from *The Triumph of Christianity*, Rodney Stark, © 2011, page 57.

4 Quote from *The Triumph of Christianity*, Rodney Stark, © 2011, page 99.

5 *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, © 1997, Chapter 34, Epistle of James.

KEY EVENT DATES WHEN THE GOSPELS & LETTERS OF PAUL WERE WRITTEN

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Key Events</u>	<u>Written</u>
Before 4 BCE	Birth of Jesus	
ca. 26-29 CE	Death of Jesus	
ca. 50-60 CE		Letters of Paul
ca. 60-64 CE	Deaths of James, Peter & Paul	
64 CE	Great Fire in Rome	
ca. 66-74 CE	1 st Jewish Revolt vs. Rome	
ca. 69-75 CE		Gospel of Mark
ca. 80-90 CE		Gospel of Matthew
ca. 96 CE	Death of John	
ca. 90-110 CE		Gospel of Luke, Acts
ca. 96-? CE		Gospel of John

Source: *From Jesus to Christianity*, L. Michael White, © 2004, page 99

From “The Way” to Constantine

His immediate followers, after His resurrection and ascension to be with His Father, established a movement that was known at the time as “the Way.” This “way,” without benefit of theology, clergy, hierarchy and infrastructure, established gatherings that followed the life and teaching of Jesus. The followers of “the Way” were busy imitating Jesus in small groups inspired by the work of the earliest evangelists who spread their story by word-of-mouth.

As the church took on more formal structure, it began to be noticed by the rulers in cities, provinces, states, and empires — and not always in a positive way.

Because followers of “the Way” seemed to practice their religion in secret, without benefit of temples or need for statues, and because they were trying to stay under the social radar, persecution among the population arose.

This was primarily a rejection based on denouncing “the other,” a concept that has been, and still is, a driving force throughout society. This persecution became more violent until followers of Jesus became scapegoats for the problems in society and suffered anger from political rulers.

The situation changed in the 4th century. Emperor Constantine established Christianity (as he knew it) in 313CE as an official religion of the Roman Empire. Churches began to organize regionally with hierarchal, and often competing, leadership and core beliefs. This caused confusion, so Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea in 325CE, which produced a common creed defining the core elements of Christianity.

The church embraced the recognition and control of Constantine and embarked on a path toward dominance in the secular power structure of Europe for the next 1,000 years.

During this time the church’s emphasis on the Gospel of “the Way” changed from a way to living out the Gospel of Jesus to offering eternal life by faith as expressed through the creeds of the now dominant church in Rome. This church provided the masses with hope for eternity and basic living standards as defined by the monarchs and nobles.

And while the church grew rapidly during this era, the once singular Gospel began to move toward a Gospel of salvation (eternal life with God) and a lesser ministry of caring for the lives of the peasants as dictated by the ruling class.

Faith or Works? or Faith and Works?

A couple of thousand years ago a man named James wrote a letter. This James, generally accepted as the younger half-brother of Jesus, another son of Mary, knew Jesus the man longer and better than any of His disciples. As His younger brother, James watched Jesus grow up. He participated in the “growing up” as younger brothers do — playing games, getting in fights, teasing and testing each other.

By the time Jesus embarked on His ministry at age 30, James had perhaps 20 years of close, day-to-day observation of what Jesus did, who He was, and how He acted. Even with this intimate relationship, James did not believe that his older brother was the Son of God, at least not until Jesus rose and appeared to the disciples, and to him. After that, James became bishop of the rising church in Jerusalem, going to an early martyr’s death.

James’s main theme in his letter is “living faith.” In James 2:17 he wrote, *“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”* While many other New Testament passages can be aligned with James’s strong belief, none make the point as clearly and boldly as James.

Why did James make this point? I believe it is because he was related to Jesus, knew Him well, knew His heart. James knew that Jesus “did what he said” because he (James) saw Him do it. James knew that Jesus’s life and words were consistent. And in

his letter, James — perhaps knowing he only had this one chance to share his understanding of his brother and his God — made sure that the theme was simple, powerful, and without ambiguity.

In James 2:14-24 we find a clear definition that faith in Jesus, the Christ, is what assures eternal salvation, and that faith must involve deeds that reflect the teaching of, and examples from, the life of Jesus to be true and pure.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

— James 2:14-24

James clearly says that true belief in Jesus, the Christ, is not faith without deeds, but faith with deeds.

We can see in James's letter, written and circulated to Jewish followers of "the Way" scattered abroad, that this was an important and debated issue. Paul traveled to Jerusalem a few years after his conversion experience to meet with Peter and James. He must have been familiar with James's thoughts on this subject.

Raymond Brown, in his book *An Introduction to the New Testament* published in 1997, lays out the apparent "dispute" between Paul and James over "faith and works."

Few would contend that Paul shaped his position in reaction to James, and so it would seem that the writer of James is correcting a Pauline formula. Paul was arguing that observance of ritual works prescribed by the Mosaic Law, particularly circumcision, would not justify the Gentiles; faith in what God had done in Christ was required — a faith that involved a commitment of life. The writer of James is thinking of people who are already Christian and intellectually believe in Jesus (even as the devil can believe) but have not translated that belief into life practice; and he is insisting that their works (not ritual works prescribed by the Law but behavior that reflects love) must correspond to their faith — something which Paul would agree, as can be seen from the "imperative" sections of his letters insisting on behavior.

Paul was *not* proclaiming justification through faith that did not involve living as Christ would have His followers live. For that reason, it seems more logical to think that, when James was being written, a Pauline formula had

been repeated out of context and given a misinterpretation that needed to be corrected.⁶

Post-Canonical Theology.

During Paul's life tension emerged between faith and works. Slowly, over the following few centuries, the faith-only belief for salvation took hold and gained dominance.

During this period others began the work of expanding on or explaining what was contained in the Gospels and in Paul's letters.

That effort continues to this day. These interpretations by writers and theologians other than the original authors, while sometimes inspired, were not, are not, *divinely* inspired.

The authors of the New Testament spoke warnings many times about adding to or subtracting from the "Word." If we pause to reflect, all theology that was developed other than the actual words contained in the Old and New Testament fall into the category of "adding to or subtracting from."

By the end of the 5th century CE, over 170 theologians (not including those who authored the New Testament) had added to the understanding and interpretation of Christianity. Another 60 added their thoughts before the Reformation, and after that, the Protestant movement added to and changed the understanding of Christianity, and the church, exponentially.

Today in a large segment of protestant churches across America, the tenets and doctrine of Christianity are preached as if they are "in the Bible" while in actuality the conclusions are drawn on theology developed hundreds, even thousands, of years

6 *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, © 1997, Chapter 34, Epistle of James, page 733.

after the death of the last author of the New Testament. What are we to make of that?

The Gospel Re-Defined.

So while we see that the *kingdom of God on earth Gospel of Jesus* was expected of followers of Jesus, the Christ — the church, especially after the Reformation, stressed the *salvation Gospel of Christ* to the point where the *kingdom of God Gospel of Jesus* became more a cultural aspect of the church than having the same Gospel status and effect as the salvation element.

In the 17th century, America, founded by English pilgrims fleeing religious persecution, developed a freedom of protestant, religious expression that molded the faith toward this same separation of the elements of the Gospel.

The modern era of religion in America, which began after World War II, continued the emphasis on the Gospel of Christ while the de-emphasis of the Gospel of Jesus accelerated until it is difficult to find the *kingdom of God on earth Gospel of Jesus* active, particularly in evangelical protestant churches in America.

The result is what rose to the forefront of belief in evangelical protestant churches in America is the simple understanding that eternal salvation comes through believing that the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Christ is all that's needed to be a Christian.

Coupled with this belief is the corollary that nothing else, particularly "good works," is needed — and that it may even be detrimental to accepting the *salvation Gospel of Christ*.

Jesus Lived. Christ Rose.

Christians agree that Jesus was born of a woman and grew from infancy to adulthood as a human. We also believe that Jesus was the Son of God in human form. Jesus was killed as a human, was dead and buried as a human. And with His death ended His human existence.

When, on the third day, about 40 hours after His death, Jesus rose and became Christ. Still the Son of God, Christ exchanged a human body for a holy one. As Jesus, His death became the sacrificial redemption for the sins of all; and as Christ, His resurrection sealed the new and final covenant of eternity with God for all who believe and accept His gift of salvation.

It seems clear that Jesus and Christ are different, yet they are joined through the mystery and love of God.

It is interesting to note that the letter by James addressed the tension between faith and works because Paul's statement was being misconstrued. Paul did not mean that Jesus's instructions were to be ignored in favor of faith alone. He was referring to the Jewish law, specifically circumcision, as being null. Some Jewish followers of Jesus had reported to James that Paul said they were not bound by Jesus's new law.⁷ James is considered by many to be the brother of Jesus. Even he did not believe Jesus was the Son of God until James saw Jesus after the resurrection. After that James organized and led the early church in Jerusalem until he was killed in 62-63 CE.⁸ If the Son of God

7 *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, © 1997, page 732-734.

8 *From Jesus to Christianity*, Michael White, © 2004, page 277.

looked you in the eye and told you how He wanted you to live your life — and you ignored Him — well, you better hope there's a plan B.

In Contrast

Today's evangelical protestant church in America preaches a cheap grace, one without commitment to ushering in the kingdom of God on earth. Salvation through belief in Christ has been preached and taught for so long, so often, and so loudly that we have forgotten the Gospel that Jesus came to teach and share, and that He expected His disciples to follow.

Before Jesus arrived on the scene, the Jewish people expected a political king, a messiah, to redeem Israel and establish a world ruled by God and the law.

When Jesus began His mission and ministry the power brokers of Jewish society saw Him not as a possible messiah because Jesus eschewed the political power expected of a messiah. He was also a threat to stability under the Roman rule. Peace in the provinces meant *pax romana*, peace for Rome.

The response to Jesus was profound. In just three years the crowds became so large, so loud, and so committed that the Jewish leaders became frightened of what looked to them like a revolt rising that would surely upset the stability that kept them in power and the Romans from being even more harsh in ruling the people. The only plan that made sense to the Jewish political and religious leaders was to remove Jesus by politically sanctioned murder.

When Jesus was killed, even His closest followers believed the story had ended in failure. Their view of Jesus as messiah required Him to conquer the existing ruling structure of the Romans, the Jewish political system, and the Jewish ruling priest establishment. The messiah was expected to return the throne of David back to power and to rule as God's representative. Only when Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to them did they begin to see the "rest of the story."

They realized that there was no political kingdom coming from God. They also began to realize that they, who believed in and followed the now risen Christ, were to bring the kingdom of God into their lives and the lives of those they sought, taught, and ushered into "the Way."

Their mission was nothing short of turning the world upside down. Jesus's life before His death was about fulfilling the long history of God's commandments to His chosen people to care for those at the edges of society. These included the poor, oppressed, stranger, women, and children, what Jesus would later call "the least of these."

Jesus said over and over that the lowest will become the highest, the servant would be raised above the master, the weak will be strong, the last will be first, the poor will be rich. In all cases, God would be on their side.

Jesus came to bring the "good news" (also translated as "gospel") to people and to begin the process of bringing the kingdom of God into and onto the earth.

The Reformation Re-Explained.

500 years ago, Martin Luther pried open the door of change within the Roman Catholic Church resulting in what became known as the Reformation. The established Church of Rome came into conflict with the church and rulers in Germany, and Christianity trembled with the tension.

Along with the Reformation came other seismic shifts in technology, literacy, culture, and society. Together they produced an explosion of alternative theologies in protestant churches that collided with monarchies, which believed that kings and queens were divinely ordained by God through the church in Rome, causing civil and kingdom unrest.

Beginning in 1517 CE, Luther posted his theses calling the Church of Rome to account. One of his key messages was that individuals should decide for themselves what God was saying through the Bible.

New technology in the form of the moveable letter printing press was spurring the beginning of literacy, especially in the native tongues. This was revolutionary, offering an affordable method for distributing new ideas outside the control of the ruling church and state.

When, in 1534 CE, English King Henry VIII split from the Church of Rome and established the Church of England, the stage was set for a whole new theology. One that shifted from knowing God through the Church of Rome to knowing God through direct access to the Bible.

Jesus Lived. Oh, How He Lived.

We know Jesus lived. Biblical historians agree that Jesus lived. Christians know about His life primarily through the first three books of the New Testament and through historical contemporary accounts of His life. We know about the last three years of His life, from the time Jesus was recognized and baptized by John, His cousin, to His death approximately three years later.

While the first three Gospels, as well as the fourth Gospel of John, have differing versions of Jesus's life, they are remarkably consistent in their content.

What we can see clearly is that Jesus's recorded words and deeds stressed serving "the other(s)" through action, sacrifice, and investing in people. He offered to redeem the suffering of those who followed Him and assure eternal life with God.

Jesus served.

"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve."

— *Matthew 20: 28*

Jesus turned the perception of God upside down. He made it clear that His role was to serve others, and His words and deeds reflect that time after time. With this new teaching, Jesus brought the people and the religious leaders back to God's consistent theme for our lives, to serve others, if they would understand and obey.

Jesus acted.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

— *John 13: 34*

The word “love” is not the emotion we feel, but the acts we do, or are willing to do, because we put the well-being of the other person ahead of our own. Jesus loved with His words of comfort, especially when those words cost Him status among those observing the circumstance. Jesus demonstrated His love, and what the kingdom of God on earth should be, by His actions. He met the needs of the people, almost all of them “the least of these.”

Jesus sacrificed.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

— *John 15: 13*

The life of Jesus was one of sacrifice. While He lived, He gave His life for those around Him, both friends and strangers. He sacrificed His stature as God to humble Himself before humans. He sacrificed His family, leaving them and making their lives much harder. He gave Himself over to the authorities without a fight to be accused, abused, and killed. And He suffered unspeakable agony as His Father turned His back on Him, abandoning Him to death.

Jesus invested.

“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”

— Mark 1: 17

The first task Jesus began after His baptism and testing by the Devil was to gather others into His sphere of influence. We call them disciples, students of a respected teacher. We shouldn't confuse our understanding of “teach” with what Jesus did.

His teaching wasn't just intellectual, it was experiential. It was more like an athletic coach or a drill instructor, spending time passing on passion and purpose for a cause, creating teams that work together to accomplish a common mission.

Jesus never commanded others to join Him; He asked them to come along. Twenty or so stayed, many more fell away. Jesus didn't judge or ridicule those who left. Rather He poured more of Himself into those who stayed. Jesus knew that His time was short and that His message of changing lives, and through those changed lives, the world required people who would pass on to others the mission of ushering in the kingdom of God in the lives of all who could be reached.

Jesus redeemed.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

— Matthew 11: 28

Life can be hard. It was when Jesus lived, and it is today. We control very little of what happens to us. But we control 100% of how we respond. Jesus spoke into those He touched the truth that God loves and cares for each person and desires that they love and trust Him for the guidance for living lives that honor and reflect God.

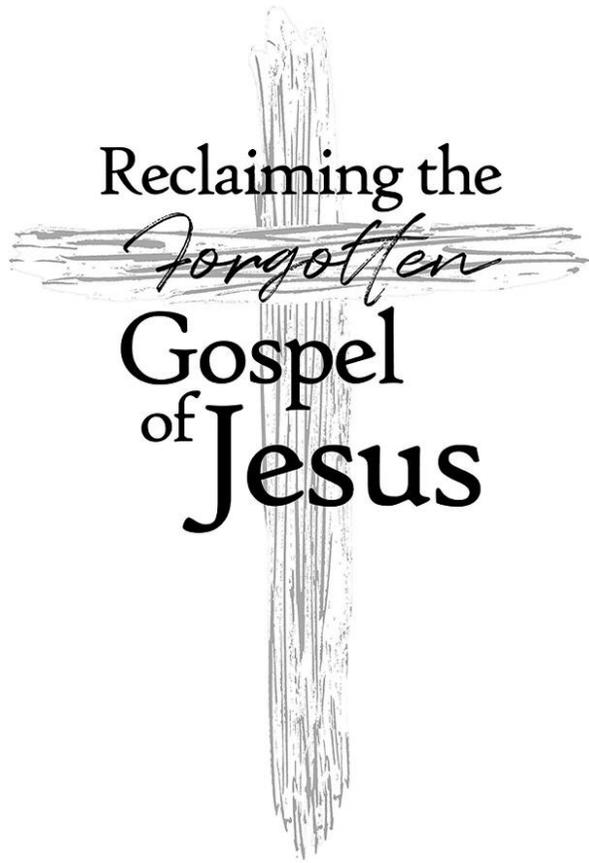
Jesus showed that any person could face life with confidence that transcended their reality, and with hope that promised an eternity spent in the presence of God.

Jesus created the path to an eternity with God that went through Him and expects His followers to embrace a life of following Jesus, the Christ, in word and deed.

Salvation, spending eternity with God, should inspire a person to become a servant for Jesus. Becoming one who seeks to bring the kingdom of God to all who suffer. By improving the lives of those in need we become not only messengers for Christ. We also become *Servants for Jesus*.

When we ask God to move a mountain,
God may give us a shovel.

Shane Claiborne



Reclaiming the

Forgotten

Gospel
of Jesus

Resources

Glossary of Terms

The title, “Reclaiming the Forgotten Gospel of Jesus,” sets forth the book’s premise in just a few words. It may be helpful to share some definitions to give you context for a fuller appreciation of the aspects described.

Jesus

Jesus refers to the human who lived a human life and death, and who was also God incarnate. Still a mystery to many, and to me.

Gospel of Christ

In America, the most popular definition is that Jesus was the Son of God, who died to restore all humanity to righteousness with God, was raised from death by God’s love, and if we believe this, eternal salvation with Jesus is assured. For clarity of meaning in this book, I have called this the *salvation Gospel of Christ*.

For too long the "Gospel of Christ" has been used to deny, demean, and destroy the lives and faith of “the other”* in America. The evangelical church in America is the temple that Jesus would enter, whip in hand, to reclaim His story. I want to join him.

* See author’s definition for “the other” on pages 226-227.

Gospel of Jesus

This refers to the Gospel Jesus spoke of during His life and earthly ministry. His definition of “Gospel” was restoring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. This is also known as the *kingdom of God on earth Gospel of Jesus*.

Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ

When the two definitions above are combined as one it becomes the Gospel that was intended from Jesus’s birth through His resurrection, the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ (Complete Gospel), that includes salvation AND earthly action by followers of Jesus committed to restoring the kingdom of God on earth AND, through their example and words, sharing the eternal salvation guaranteed by Christ.

Forgotten Gospel

The American evangelical protestant church stresses the *salvation Gospel of Christ* to the reduction, and often exclusion, of the Forgotten Gospel, the kingdom of God on earth Gospel of Jesus.

Reclaiming

My emphasis on reclaiming the Forgotten Gospel of Jesus is to return the proper status and role of the Complete Gospel back to the evangelical protestant church in America. Not a change in theology, but a return to the life and story of Jesus, the Christ.

Cross

The cross is used to depict many things to Christians. It symbolizes the death and resurrection of the salvation Gospel of Christ. It also symbolizes to the followers of Jesus the death of self-centered, “me, first,” thinking to be released to seeking to serve the other, or “other, first” thinking.

This key passage by Jesus, found in Luke, is shown with clarifying words in italics that make what He is saying clear.

Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple <follower> must deny themselves <put away self as the priority> and take up their cross <commitment unto death> daily and follow me <do what I have been teaching and showing you to do>. For whoever wants to save their life <keep their self-centered focus> will lose it, but whoever loses their life <dies to self to live for others> for me will save it <receive the pleasure of having Jesus call you friend>.

— Luke 9:23 – 24

“The Other(s)”

Jesus used the phrase “the least of these” in His discourse in Matthew 25:40 referring to those He called “hungry, thirsty, stranger, needed clothes, sick, in prison.” In fact, the Bible contains more than 2,000 verses that clearly address poverty and justice.

While searching for a phrase that would illustrate “the least of these” in a term that is accepted by most in the Gospel of Jesus movement, we discovered “the other(s).”

“The other,” and “the least of these,” will be used interchangeably to describe those marginalized by the economy, culture, politics and biases that suppress and oppress those without the status or power to stand up for themselves.

What’s going on, really, is the deep, dark sin of out-of-control ego allowed by our freedom of will, to choose how we think and act.

For all of humanity we have been cursed with the overwhelming sin of selfishness, greed, superiority and intolerance. It can be summed up in a brief statement: “I am me. You are you. I am better than you.”

Jesus came to turn the world upside down by restating and living out this creed: “I AM me. You are you. You are better than me.”

In other words, the kingdom of God on earth as lived and taught by Jesus says all are to see “the other” as God sees them, of infinite value and worthy of the life and love of Jesus, the Christ.

The real issue for followers is not that “the others” need us, it’s that we need “the others.” That is the true message of the life and teachings of Jesus, Christ.

Evangelical Protestant Churches in America

Pew Research Center¹⁴ has characterized the Protestant tradition for its research purposes in three categories.

Evangelical Protestant Churches in America (EPCA)

include the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, Churches of Christ, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church in America, other evangelical denominations and many non-denominational congregations. This category has an estimated 2019 total membership of 64.7 million.

Mainline Protestant Churches in America (MPCA)

include the United Methodist Church, the American Baptist Churches (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Episcopal Church, among others. This category has an estimated 2019 total membership of 37.4 million.

Historically Black Protestant Churches in America

(HBPCA) include the National Baptist Convention, the Church of God in Christ, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Progressive Baptist Convention and others. This category has an estimated 2019 total membership of 16.5 million.

14 Pew Research Center, Religious Landscape Study 2014, updated to Census population estimates for 2019.

About the Author



Charlie Stuart

Charlie Stuart is founder of Making Faith Matter, a movement to help the local church return to the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ. This is expressed best by Jesus when He taught us to pray, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”*

Charlie's new book “Reclaiming the Forgotten Gospel of Jesus” explores what could happen when churches adopt establishing the “Kingdom of God on earth” as their primary purpose.

Charlie was raised in the church by faithful, loving parents who lived lives of service that Charlie and his five siblings could

see and emulate. He has been active in the local church all his life serving as: Deacon, adult Bible study leader (20+ years), member of a pastor search committee and all the committees in the local church.

He also volunteered for 25+ years with the YMCA as a local board member and on national task forces for the YMCA of the USA.

Charlie and his wife Barbara have three grown children and six grandchildren. They live in Orlando (College Park), Florida.

Charlie can be reached at:

(407) 230-2125 mobile or text

Charlie@TheForgottenGospel.org

www.ReclaimingtheForgottenGospelofJesus.org.