



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.



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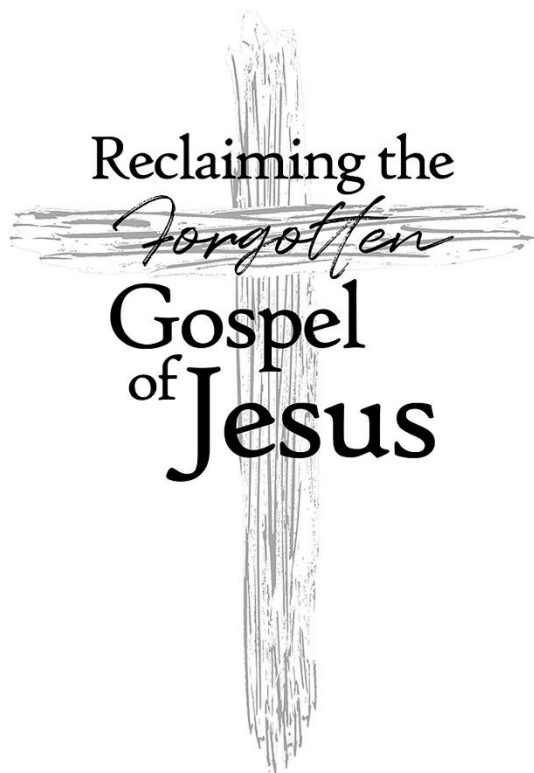
Charlie Stuart

Orlando, Florida

Charlie@TheForgottenGospel.org

(407) 230-2125

www.ReclaimingtheForgottenGospelofJesus.org



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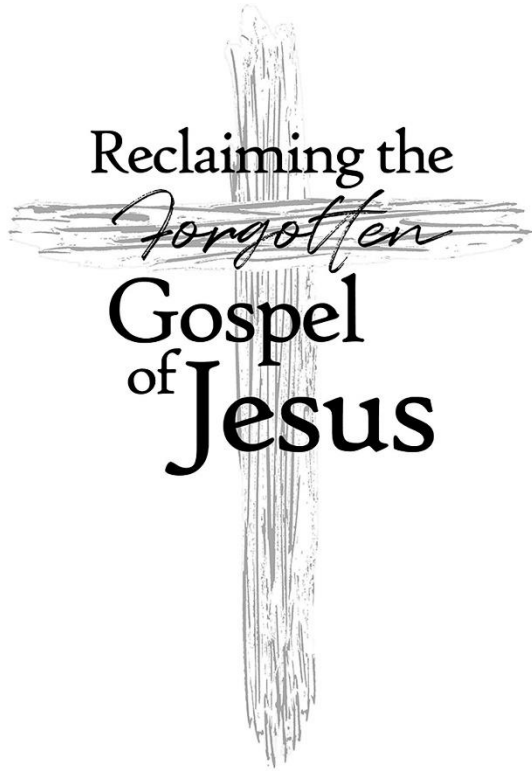
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Dedication

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 One



Reclaiming the *Forgotten* Gospel of Jesus

Awakenings

Where's Jesus?

WHEN MY NOW-GROWN CHILDREN WERE YOUNG, one of their favorite bedtime books was *Where's Waldo?* Truth be told, it was one of mine as well. Now, our six grandchildren are following in their parents' footsteps, and PaPa C, my granddad name, gets to read *Where's Waldo?* bedtime books once again.

If you're familiar with the Waldo series, you know it's based on a really simple concept — Find Waldo on a page that is chock-full of other like-sized and visually similar characters and objects in a story tableau. Waldo is dressed each time in a bold red and white striped shirt, a red and white striped hat, blue pants and big, round, black glasses, carrying a stack of books. You might think he'd be easy to find, but trust me and thousands of parents and kids, he is NOT easy to find!

By now you may be wondering what the search for Waldo has to do with the Gospel of Jesus?

Simply put, churches have been forgetting important aspects of Gospel for so long that finding the complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, in the church can seem a lot like looking for Waldo.

How Could I Have Missed It?

RAISED IN A LARGE SOUTHERN BAPTIST FAMILY IN THE 1950s, I grew up hearing and believing that there was one Gospel, the Gospel of salvation.

This “salvation Gospel” secured a believer an eternity with God and secondarily offered the Holy Spirit as an indwelling presence to guide the believers’ decisions toward the path of righteousness.

It was from our parents, not the church, that my five siblings and I learned that showing compassion for others and stepping into the needs faced by those whom Jesus called “the least of these” was expected of us whatever our age or situation. We learned about serving others by watching how our parents lived. We watched them “do unto others” with no expectation of return. We watched them sacrifice time and money for the poor. We watched them stand up for the oppressed during the civil rights movement in the turbulent 50s and 60s — not an easy thing to do in Central Florida for a white man and his wife, especially a prominent business owner and community and church leader. They did it despite threats to our safety, the business, and their reputation.

It wasn’t until much later that it dawned on me that the church was almost exclusively focused on the “salvation Gospel” while spending very little energy and resources on what one might call “the forgotten Gospel.”

This realization answered a question that, for me, had existential significance — “Why don’t regular attenders of

evangelical protestant churches in America engage in a meaningful way in ushering in the kingdom of God on earth?"

The answer isn't that the regular attenders are not Christian. Rather the churches have primarily taught that the Gospel of Christ only secures eternal salvation; and they taught this while not emphasizing the other Gospel, "the forgotten Gospel of Jesus."

By emphasizing the "salvation Gospel," the evangelical protestant churches in America offered free, no-stress membership along with convenient, family-friendly locations. At the same time these churches stressed the inerrant interpretation of the Bible as interpreted by its pastors.

By the mid-1970s evangelical protestant seminaries in America were producing pastors to meet the growth, positioning graduates in the *salvation-centric* Gospel for generations of pastors to come.

Growth, in number of churches and in the rising membership in churches, created its own challenges that needed continuing growth to meet. As the "salvation Gospel" messaging needed more and more resources, something had to give, and so began the declining emphasis on forgetting the Gospel of Jesus.

Slowly, over the next few decades, the only Gospel proclaimed was the "salvation Gospel" and "the forgotten Gospel of Jesus" became truly forgotten as it faded into the background.

This book, “Reclaiming the Forgotten Gospel of Jesus,” explores what Jesus said, what Jesus did, and what He expects His followers to do.

In the book we will be covering why the Gospel of Jesus was forgotten. What it is and how Jesus defined it. What we can do to bring it to the foreground. And how the local church will benefit.

I hope you will join me in exploring how, together, we can revitalize the church to advance the kingdom of God on earth, releasing the love of the Gospel of Jesus into the world.

The Lord Shall Be Your Rear Guard

DURING A SERMON ONE SUNDAY A FEW YEARS AGO, I opened my Bible to the middle, hoping to find Psalms. I knew from hours of “Sword Drill” practiced on Sunday evenings while growing up in a Southern Baptist Church that it would be in the middle, but when the pages fell open, I had turned to Isaiah, chapter 58. I was close, but before I could flip the pages my eyes fell on these words in verse eight: “the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.”

God has my back? Really? MY rear guard!

“Rear guard” is a military term for watching your back to protect against a surprise attack from the back. Maybe the greatest “rear guard” action in history was the Crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites during their flight from Egypt. God parted the waters for the people to cross then closed the

waters on the pursuing Egyptians. A true “rear guard” protection by God.

What a thought. The glory of the Lord shall be my rear guard. But how? What was God saying through Isaiah? What was God saying to me?

I’m sure I had read that chapter before. After all, I had won a pin for reading the Bible through years earlier — but why didn’t this phrase sound familiar, why didn’t this promise register with me?

I read on.

The chapter recounts God calling the people to account for false fasting. In this context, “fasting” referred to a type of offering the people thought (or pretended to think) would please God. They offered pious words that were not reflected in their deeds. God scolded them in verses 1 – 5 for *saying* one thing but *doing* another. Then, in verses 3 – 5 He says:

In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed, you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness.

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Isaiah 58:3 – 5

But then God lets them know what kind of fast or offering He does expect. He seeks from us lives of service and justice toward others as described in verses 6–7.

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter —when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Isaiah 58:6–7

But not just “any others” — later Jesus would call these others “the least of these” — those who are oppressed, hungry, naked, forgotten. And God doesn’t stop there. He promises to honor that kind of life of service.

In this paraphrase by the author of these promises in verses 8 & 9, listen for the joy of the Lord in those who serve the most vulnerable in society.

By fasting with your lives as I said, you will please me.

And when I am pleased, my smile of pleasure will warm your face.

And when I am pleased, my joy will heal the broken places in your soul.

And when I am pleased, I will have your back in any alley, valley, or cave.

And when I am pleased, I will answer your calls for help - you will know that “I am near.”

So why did Isaiah 58 impact me so? I think it hit me that this type of caring for “the other(s)”* wasn’t something that Christians did when they got around to it, or that we did on Sunday mornings when the missionary told a story of need and we made a love offering contribution.

No, what hit me was that serving “the other,” or as Jesus referred to them, “the least of these,” was not *just one of* the expectations God has for our lives, it is *the main thing* He wants His kingdom here on earth (me, you, us) to do.

Yet, the local church, my home church, did not make this the main thing. Not from the pulpit. Not from the Bible studies. Not in the budget. Not during worship services. Not through community outreach.

Since that Sunday I have been on a path to include the kingdom of God on earth Gospel shown by the life and teachings Jesus, especially “the least of these,” as one of God’s “main things” that local churches do, teach, train, expect, and exhibit.

Jesus spoke of God’s “main thing” in His first recorded public statement. In His hometown synagogue He proclaimed His purpose to fulfill God’s promise. Luke 4:16 – 21 reads:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was

* See author’s definition for “the other” in the Glossary of Terms section on page 223-224.

handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“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 prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4: 16 – 21

Again, Jesus speaks of these two “main things” in Matthew 22:36 – 40 when asked to name the greatest commandment:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22: 36 – 40

In 2005, *Christianity Today* published an article about Rick Warren and his awakening to the plight of the world’s poor following a trip to Rwanda. The article stated:

Around this time, Warren says he was driven to reexamine Scripture with “new eyes.” What he found humbled him. “I found those 2,000 verses on the poor. How did I miss that? I went to Bible college, two seminaries, and I got a doctorate. How did I miss God’s compassion for the poor? I was not seeing all the purposes of God.

“The church is the body of Christ. The hands and feet have been amputated and we’re just a big mouth, known more for what we’re against.” Warren found himself praying, “God, would you use me to reattach the hands and the feet to the body of Christ, so that the whole church cares about the whole gospel in a whole new way - through the local church?”

“How did I miss God’s compassion for the poor?” A remarkable statement coming from Rick Warren one of the most recognized religious leaders in the world. It was remarkable not just for his revelation, but also for his courage to make such a statement.

“Shoot Them!”

IN 2006 AND 2008, I WAS A CANDIDATE FOR THE UNITED States House of Representatives for the district covering Orlando, Florida — the place I was born, reared, and spent all my adult life.

During the campaign one night at a “meet & greet” at a friend’s home, I answered questions from the twenty or so people attending. Most of them were part of a Christian church and professed belief in the Gospel of Christ.

One of the questions was from a man who, along with his wife, shared a high profile in the community and their church. His question was, “Charlie, what will you do about illegal immigration on the southern border?”

This wasn’t a new question, yet it is one that has no simple, easy answer that can be implemented. At the time a popular response from many was “build a wall” or “deport them.”

I replied, “What do you think we should do?” He answered, “Build a wall.”

I asked, “How high would this wall be?” He said, “30 feet” to which I replied, “What do we do if they use 40-foot ladders to climb over?”

Without pausing he said, “Shoot them!” And I could tell he was in earnest. I said, “On that answer we part company as Americans and as Christians.”

I didn’t get his vote and went on to lose both races — thank goodness.

Several weeks after the last campaign, while thinking back on this episode, a question came to mind. How did someone with my same background in the community and the church come to believe that a valid Christian position on immigration was to shoot the strangers for trying to get into our country?

His belief was, unfortunately not an isolated incident. It was one of many times where I noticed a lack of Christian love and compassion in people professing Christ as Lord.

These compassion-less beliefs covered a wide range of issues. Like caring for “the other(s)” – strangers, outcasts, the homeless, the sick, and children. Or by embracing the hatred of war, racism, Islamophobia, nationalism, sexism, and abuse. All of these are addressed by God and Jesus throughout the Bible.

Followers of Jesus, the Christ, should not only have a sensitive heart for these issues, they are commanded to stand up and fight against them wherever they occur — in their life, their family, their community, and their government. And failing to be engaged with these “least of these” comes at great peril to eternal salvation.

Yet, these are good people, well respected in family, community, and church. What happened to them?

Knowing the power and promises of Jesus to affect the lives of those who follow Him, I concluded that it had to be that they weren’t taught, or taught well, why Jesus took on human form — to bring the kingdom of God to earth in the lives of those who would follow His example. In His closing charge to His followers, He said,

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.

— Matthew 28:19 – 20

When read and understood as it is recorded, and when taken in the context of Jesus’s recorded life, words, and works, this clearly means to do what He did and said. This is not a suggestion. It is a command.*

How could it be that seemingly dedicated Christians didn’t follow Jesus in this way, unless the church didn’t stress the teachings and acts of Jesus as being a critical, equal part of the Gospel to the salvation assured by belief in the risen Christ?

With that conclusion I became what my 30-something kids call “woke” to the fact that evangelical protestant churches in America were not stressing the life, words, and works of Jesus as being necessary for a believer to belong. And with that, I embarked on a mission to discover how the evangelical protestant churches in America had forgotten the Gospel of Jesus.

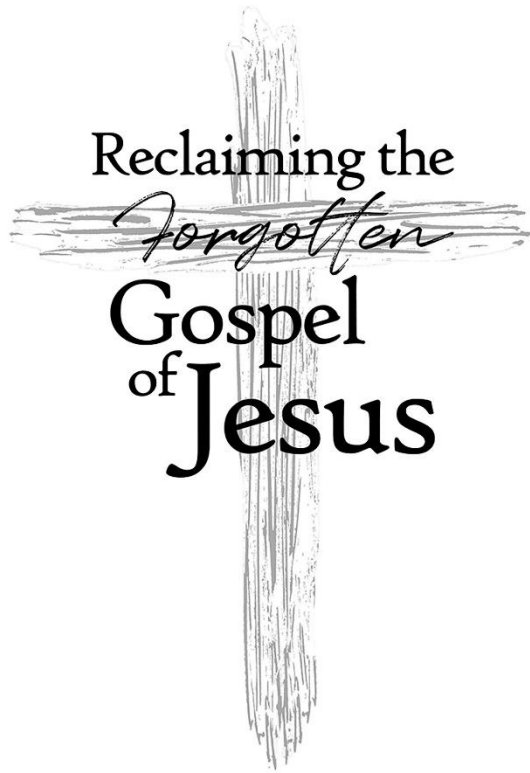
Yes — I was now fully woke to a problem facing the evangelical protestant church in America. I decided to explore how and why the church had let that happen, and what could be done to bring the Gospel of Jesus back to its powerful and proper position as a primary part of the complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ.

* This is further explored in *The Great Commission* study on pages 148-153.

This is My Prayer

God, please use me to encourage church leaders to embrace the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, reminding them that it is the unique role of the church to usher in the kingdom of God on earth by our actions, with our resources, through our love and lives of compassion, until the whole church cares about the whole Gospel in a whole new way, through the local church.

Amen.



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 223-224.

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 nondenominational 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:

(407) 230-2125 mobile or text

Charlie@TheForgottenGospel.org

www.ReclaimingtheForgottenGospelofJesus.org.