

## Intro to the Gospels: Images of the Incarnation Teacher: Yvon Prehn

### What is the most important thing about the Christian faith? How does it claim to connect you with God, forgive your sins, and give you eternal life?

Hi! I'm Yvon Prehn and welcome to Bible 805! I've been sick the past few weeks with no voice which is why I haven't recorded the podcasts, I'm still a bit scratchy now, but I think we can press ahead....

So back to our question: what is the most important thing about the Christian faith?

Is it knowing all the things you learned about the Old Testament if you've been listening to this podcast the last few months?

Is it holding to certain beliefs like a 6-day Creation theory or 5-point Calvinism?

Or is it what you do like being sure that you don't do cheat on your spouse or taxes?

As we will see in our lesson today it isn't a what or a what you do, that is the most important thing about Christianity, that is at the core of what it takes to connect you with God, it's a WHO

### The Bible is very clear

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

If we want a relationship with God in this life, forgiveness of the sins that have severed our relationship with Him and to live in heaven after we die, Jesus said He is the only way we can achieve that.

He said that because though he was God, he came to earth, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins and by his historically verifiable resurrection from the dead, validated all the claims he made for himself and that He is the only way of salvation.

One of his closest friends, the Apostle John, who wrote one of the gospels we will talk about later, put it this way:

God has given men eternal life and this real life is to be found only in his Son. It follows naturally that any man who has genuine contact with Christ has this life; and if he has not, then he does not possess this life at all. I have written like this to you who already believe in the name of God's Son so that you may be quite sure that, here and now, you

possess eternal life. 1 John 5:11-13, Phillips

The negative John 7

### What doesn't work

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, '*I never knew you.* Away from me, you evildoers!' Matthew 7:22-23

It isn't great works—it is do you *know Jesus*?

To repeat, even in this negative, it shows the core of Christianity, is "Do you KNOW Jesus?"

Our lesson today is an overview of the Gospels—the books in the Bible that specifically tell us about Jesus and his life on earth, so that we can come to know Him and trust Him for our salvation.

### First a clarification and then a very sad story

Many theologians and people who teach about the Christian faith make an important distinction between what are primary and what are secondary issues of our faith

The one primary thing—what we just talked about is what you believe about Jesus

I want to clarify this because it is so easy for us to get distracted with secondary issues and confuse them with the primary one

### About secondary issues....

It is not to say that some of these are not important, but Christians of good faith and character may have very different opinions on them Two examples would be both the beginning and end of our faith

In the beginning, some Christians believe in a literal 6 days of creation; other Christians have a variety of beliefs that reconcile both believing in the literal truth of the Bible while at the same time ....with immense ages of the universe and our earth At the end of time, some Christians believe in a "pre-tribulation rapture where God will take all Christians to heaven before unleashing terrible judgment on the earth and at the end of that time Jesus will come again. Others believe that Jesus second coming could come at any time and that's it Again, as important as these are, they are secondary

### What can happen if you don't make the distinction

Tell story read this past week—the Christian Post is running a series on people who have lost their faith, or turned away from the Christian faith

Here is one story:

*Being a warrior for Christ was, without any hesitation, everything to me. I was homeschooled outside Molalla, Oregon, with a strong emphasis on debate, the written word, and defending the faith. I don't remember asking Jesus into my heart, but my parents say I was about four or five at an Easter Sunday service. What I do remember is that my entire childhood revolved around reinforcing and strengthening that commitment through a social life centered on church and a curriculum centered on Creation science. I was eight when I first heard the earth was 6,000 years old, which quickly became a central theological litmus test for whether one took God at His Word.....*

*Story continues*

He studied the Bible, took seminary classes online, studied to be a lawyer—but this ONE issue remained the focus of his Christian life and faith...then the inevitable (IMHO) happened . . . .*in the interest of being the best Christian apologist I could be, I learned a fair bit about arguments for and against Christianity and took a strong interest in the work of the apologist who influenced me most growing up, Ken Ham. When he debated Bill Nye the Science Guy on the scientific legitimacy of creationism, I was about halfway through law school and organized a debate watch party, ordered pizza, and gathered my evangelical colleagues to root for Ham together. So, imagine how devastating it was to watch my childhood icon be so embarrassingly destroyed before my very eyes. Ken Ham brought faith to an evidence fight, and even my fundamentalist creationist eyes could see it.*

Again, completely focused on this topic, he researched science and decided that since he could not find objective science to support Creationist thinking that the entire Christian faith could not be trusted.

*Could I modify my views of Genesis and keep the Gospel intact? In the end, I couldn't make it fit. Not for a lack of trying, either. I just couldn't separate creationism from the Gospel. My entire frame of reference for Christianity had Genesis as its foundation. If the creation story is unreliable, then why believe in the resurrection? If Noah's Flood didn't happen as described, then why believe Jesus was coming back someday? I say this with no disrespect for those who do reinterpret the creation account in order to let their faith evolve, but for me, I may as well have converted to another religion or to no religion at all because that was no further from my starting point. To bend my rigid faith was*

*to risk shattering it entirely. . . . . So, in the end, I lost my faith.*

He is now executive director and general counsel of the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix, serving as an organizer, advocate, and board member for the Secular Coalition for Arizona.

From:

[https://www.christianpost.com/news/i-lost-my-faith-in-a-chick-fil-a.html?uid=0238cc1b51&utm\\_source=The+Christian+Post+List&utm\\_campaign=3b0c67053f-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_10\\_25\\_04\\_17&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_dce2601630-3b0c67053f-4154193](https://www.christianpost.com/news/i-lost-my-faith-in-a-chick-fil-a.html?uid=0238cc1b51&utm_source=The+Christian+Post+List&utm_campaign=3b0c67053f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_10_25_04_17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_dce2601630-3b0c67053f-4154193)

### **So terribly sad because**

He did not make the distinction between the most important thing in the Christian faith—and that is a trust in Jesus as Savior, and he put his trust in a secondary issue.

I don't want that to happen to any of us because it can happen to any of us.

Maybe our faith is not based on Creationist thinking, but on a certain political stance or a loyalty to a denomination and when that denomination falls or failed so does our faith (Catholic abuse scandal; mainline acceptance of non-biblical values) Our faith must always be in Christ alone

And that is precisely what we are going to focus on as we look at the Gospels—who is Jesus and what can we learn about Him from them

First a little review of what we know of Him so far

### **All the Bible tells us about Jesus**

He is there at Creation

The Messiah was promised (Gen. 3:15) immediately following Adam and Eve's sin.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament pictured how Jesus would be the perfect sacrifice for sins

The prophets told about Him—anywhere from 65 to over 500 prophecies or references (depends on who is counting) in the Old Testament that talk about Him.

Some examples...

### **One of them: Isaiah**

For to us a child is born,

to us a son is given,

and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne

and over his kingdom,

establishing and upholding it

with justice and righteousness

from that time on and forever. Isaiah 9:6-7

### **His ministry described**

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,

because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,<sup>[a]</sup>  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendor. Isaiah 61:1-3

This passage is what Jesus read in his hometown of Nazareth "The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup>He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:18

#### Details of his life

Mic. 5:2—He would be born in Bethlehem  
Zech. 9:9—He would enter Jerusalem while riding on a donkey  
Ps. 22:16—His hands and feet would be pierced

#### End of our Bibles—his eternal reign in glory

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"  
Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:  
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!" Revelation 5:12-13

#### But in the Gospels we see a much more focused picture

We see the Lord of eternity, coming to earth  
Incarnated  
Made flesh and blood  
Tangible and touchable walking around with His creation  
That's what the Gospels are all about  
What Jesus was like in his humanity, while still God

#### The Gospels are not traditional biographies

4 of them: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John  
3 very similar in content: Matthew, Mark, Luke—we call these the Synoptic Gospels  
Call this "because they include many of the same stories, often in the same sequence, and similar wording. ... The **term synoptic** comes from the Greek *syn*, **meaning** "together", and *optic*, **meaning** "seen"

John very different, not so much events as WHO Jesus is  
Each from different viewpoints and for different audiences (will discuss more in a minute)  
Your reading plan is primarily a synoptic approach  
I don't think this is the best way to read them—OK for study, but I think reading each one through on its own you get more of a sense of the audience written to and the uniqueness of each one  
Now let's look at a brief overview of each one

#### Matthew

Written by Jesus disciple Matthew, a former tax collector  
Audience very clearly a Jewish one, doesn't explain Hebrew terms, assumes familiarity with Old Testament  
A bridge between the Old Testament and New Testament  
Constantly talks about how the various things that happened in Jesus life, the things that he did fulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament

#### Some examples:

After talking about the birth of Jesus he summarizes it in this way:  
*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" <sup>[a]</sup> (which means "God with us"). Matthew 1:22-23 (quoting Isaiah 7:14)*  
This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion,  
'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" Matthew 21:4-5z (quoting Zechariah 9:9)  
*Commentary: It also would be important to the Jews to learn that the Messiah was about to initiate his reign, and so Matthew called attention to that kingdom in more than thirty-five passages. He likewise identified Jesus as the promised "son of David" (nine times).*

Matthew's clear goal to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised Messiah  
50 direct quotations from the OT, plus 75 allusions to OT events

Go through and mark these in your Bible

#### Imagine what it was like to be Matthew

He would have been in a very public place, able to hear what Jesus said, watch what he did  
Jesus had been preaching, healing—doing the things that it was prophesied that He would do  
Matthew, an educated man (would have to be for his work) obviously knew the Old Testament well, but had since sold out to the Romans

Some describe tax collectors as the “Small time Mafia of their day” as they had the power to cheat, extort, force their will on others  
But one day.... Jesus stops by his tax booth, call him to follow Him  
He does immediately and never turns back

#### **One more commentator note on Matthew:**

“Even though Matthew’s thrust is decidedly Jewish, he is also aware of the fact that the Gentiles have an appointed place in the kingdom of God. Accordingly, he attempts to condition Hebrew thinking with this concept. He alludes to those who will come from afar to sit with the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:11), and he plainly declares that the Gentiles have hope in the name of Christ (Matt. 12:21). And Matthew’s account of the Great Commission is universal in its scope (Matt. 28:18ff).”

#### **Mark**

The shortest and most agree the earliest Authority for writing it is that he was a disciple and worked closely with Peter, also cousin of Barnabas who traveled with the Apostle Paul Audience—Roman world, perhaps he was there when wrote it  
Perhaps being younger could emphasize more with view of the outsider  
Mark wrote for a Gentile audience, as is brought out by his not including things important to Jewish readers (genealogies, Christ’s controversies with Jewish leaders of His day, frequent references to the Old Testament, etc.). Mark emphasizes Christ as the suffering Servant, the One who came not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)

#### **Commentary**

Whereas Matthew emphasized the words of the Lord, Mark, while recording only one major sermon (Mk. 13:3-37), Mark underscores Christ’s deeds. He characterizes Jesus as a servant who came to do the Father’s will  
Servant-like, he did so with great urgency. Mark uses the servant’s word, euthus (“immediately”), fourteen times in describing the activities of the Savior.  
The events in his gospel considered the core of what Matthew and Luke wrote

#### **Luke**

Luke is the only Gentile author of the New Testament.  
Luke, the very careful historian, but also a doctor.  
*Commentary: Because he specifically wrote for the benefit of Theophilus, apparently a Gentile of some*

*stature, his gospel was composed with a Gentile audience in mind, and his intent is to show that a Christian’s faith is based upon historically reliable and verifiable events. Luke often refers to Christ as the “Son of Man,” emphasizing His humanity, and he shares many details that are not found in the other gospel accounts. . . . The Greeks were preoccupied with a consideration of man. It is not without purpose, therefore, that Luke focuses upon Christ as the **perfect example of humanity**. Obviously interviewed many, including Mary Always tell people don’t embellish—just tell the story...and he did.*

#### **More commentary...**

*Luke provides first-rate testimony for the genuineness of Jesus’ miracles. A scientist by profession, he had thoroughly investigated the claims of Christ’s supernatural works (he mentions twenty of them, six of which are unique to him), and he treats them as historical reality. (and his history and sources good evidence of it..  
Moreover, the evidence for the Lord’s virgin birth must have been overwhelming for a doctor to acknowledge it and argue the case as strongly as Luke did (Lk. 1:26-38)*

#### **John**

Wrote much later than the others  
His brother James was the first disciple martyred; John was the last to die  
John, he was part of the inside circle, a dearly loved disciple.  
He was the only one who did not abandon Jesus at the cross, cared for Jesus’ mother.  
A mystical, thoughtful man. (who would have thought the power-grabbing “son of Thunder” would develop into this!)  
Wrote his gospel much later than others—saw more of the transformation of lives of all people Audience not specific to written to all people for all times

#### **In Exodus, God said to Moses “I am”— In John the description is completed—in the “I am” statements**

“the bread of life” (Jn. 6:35),  
“the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12),  
“the door” (Jn. 10:7),  
“the good shepherd” (Jn. 10:14),  
“the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25),  
“the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6), and  
“the true vine” (Jn. 15:1).

In addition, the use of the absolute “I am” in 8:58, affirms his **timeless existence** prior to the birth of Abraham.

#### **No doubt of who he was—what is important is our**

## response

- Religious leaders determined to kill Him
- But to those who believe in Him...this time in the Message Translation
- This is the testimony in essence: God gave us eternal life; the life is in his Son. So, whoever has the Son, has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life. My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion. I John 5:11-13*

## So much more could be said

- .... there are many other things which Jesus did, and I suppose that if each one were written down in detail, there would not be room in the whole world for all the books that would have to be written. John 21:25, Phillips
- But we do have these 4 Gospels—this good news about Jesus
- So read, reread and pray that the Lord will give your mind and heart insight and understanding so that you might know Him deeply, assuredly and forever.