

## **The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God: Theological Themes in Mark**

Let us pray.

*Father, as we approach You in this hour, we do so knowing that our Lord Jesus stands at the right hand of You, God the Father almighty in heaven. His ascension to on high gives us hope, not just that He is Lord, for we knew that already. Not just that He is ultimately in control of all things, for He has always been sovereign. Not just that He intercedes in prayer for us, on behalf of His saints, though we are certainly thankful for that. But also we have hope that He will return again and call His people home. For this great, eternal hope, and for the confidence we have in prayer, we are thankful. We are thankful as Your people desiring to serve you in all contexts of our lives. We are thankful as those who desire to follow as true disciples of our Lord. And we desire to be disciples who spread abroad His Gospel, among our neighbors, in this state, in this nation, and even to those who are much further off. Father, make us into a people who are truly disciples—missionary disciples of You, that all we do might be to the glory of our Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

I want to do a few random things at the beginning of this lesson to tie into some comments we have made about the Gospels. Then I want to move into looking at Mark, Luke, and ultimately Acts.

Let me start with this. I promised you a while back that I would bring in the Gospel of Thomas. I mentioned a while ago that the Gospel of Thomas is regarded very highly in some higher critical circles. Thus I would love for you to get a sense of some of the things that are in the Gospel of Thomas.

The Gospel of Thomas is one of the Gnostic scrolls that were found in an Egyptian valley. Gnosticism is an ancient religion that, in the form we are talking about here, assimilated Christianity with an anti-materialistic view of the universe. Gnosticism is anti-materialistic to the point that the material world is in some sense illusory. It is not the true reality. The real nature, Gnosticism says, comes from god himself who is purely spirit, outside of this world. According to this religion, the material world was created by a demi-god. There was an entire series of emanations from god. As they propagated one another they became increasingly removed from the spirit and ultimately became enthralled with the idea of a material creation. Gnosticism says that so far as there is a material aspect to us, we are kept from our true spiritual being. Thus what we need to do is throw off our material substance and focus wholly on the spirit, and in that way return to god.

That is Gnosticism. It has many similarities to New-Age beliefs and even to some of the later Jewish practices—many of these things are very similar to Gnostic ideas. There are many people who are very interested in Gnostic Christianity now, in part because of its connectedness to New-Age thinking (or rather, New Age's connection to it). Strangely, there are several feminist teachers who are very interested in this as well because of their interest in *Sophia*, a wisdom-goddess concept that they (I think wrongly) associate with early Gnosticism.

That is a quick summary of what Gnosticism is. The Gospel of Thomas was found in that kind of context. What was initially very striking to New Testament scholars about the Gospel of Thomas is what it does not have in it, if you will. Let me read the first four or five *logions*, which is how they term what we call verses in the canonical Gospels. The very name they use for verses, *logions*, means “saying,” which could be a clue for us as to what is missing here: “These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down. And he said, ‘Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.’ Jesus said, ‘Let him who seeks continue

seeking until he finds. When he finds he will become troubled, and when he becomes troubled he will be astonished and he will rule over the all.' [...] Jesus said, 'The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same.' Jesus says..."

Do you see what is missing? This is missing any historical context at all. It is just "Jesus says...Jesus says...Jesus says..." There are all these little sayings put together. One of the striking things about this to New Testament scholars was its similarity to what they were expecting Q to look like. Remember our discussion about source theories? We talked about the theory of Mark coming first, Markan priority. And we also talked about the theory of a hypothetical source, Q. Q was hypothetically thought to be a sayings source because the vast majority of common material between Matthew and Luke that is not in Mark all has to do with teachings of Jesus. Therefore scholars postulated a sayings source that would just be a series of sayings of Jesus. But they had not found anything that truly constituted a sayings source. Then the Gospel of Thomas was discovered, and it is a sayings source. It has saying after saying after saying of Jesus. That very fact has made some scholars want to date the Gospel of Thomas quite early. That is one thing you should know about the Gospel of Thomas.

One reason I mention the Gospel of Thomas is because, of the non-canonical Gospels, the Gospels that are not in the canon, this one is probably the earliest that we have fully extant. It is also the one that is most brought into scholarly discussion, in the context of searching for the historical Jesus. Remember the presuppositions of the search for the historical Jesus? One of the presuppositions was the degree to which you could get things to correlate with one another in a variety of sources—the more sources you could get, the more likely it was to be earlier. And a source that did not seem at all like Matthew, Mark, and Luke and yet had some of the same sayings in it would be considered especially likely to be early. Then those sayings could be attributed to the historical Jesus. That is the thinking. Thus the Gospel of Thomas becomes that sayings source that is not canonical, has not been accepted by the Orthodox as canon, and yet has sayings that overlap with the canonical Gospels. Therefore it is used in the historical Jesus research. Basically, if you can find something in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that is also found in the Gospel of Thomas, even the most skeptical of historical Jesus scholars would say that probably goes back to Jesus.

The problem is that the Gospel of Thomas cannot be the Q document. First, it is really wacky. That is the point I want to make in a moment. This is wackier than people are often willing to admit. Second, it does not contain enough of the stories that are common between Matthew and Luke, and when it does it is off from what they have. Thus it cannot be Q.

But let us think like a form critic for a moment. Remember what form criticism is? Form criticism indicates that particular ways of speaking about Jesus will show up in particular historical contexts because the community calls for it. If the earliest expression, in theory, is a sayings source, then sayings sources must have arisen from communities that were fairly early in Christianity. Therefore if you come across a sayings source, the idea is that it must be early. Now, the scroll that the Gospel of Thomas is found on is actually dated the late second century AD. But form critics would say it contains some material that comes from much earlier. That is where scholars are coming from, and that is why they are so excited about the Gospel of Thomas. They would not say this is Q, but it looks like what they want Q to look like, and therefore they argue it must be early. That is their logic.

One of the difficulties with that logic is that the Gospel of Thomas scroll was found in a collection of Gnostic writings that are from about the third century. Therefore it must have been read in the third century. Form criticism assumes that the community would only be attracted to certain kinds of

formulations. Form criticism also says communities were only attracted to sayings formulations early on. So why would communities continue to be reading this collection of sayings 200 years later? Do you see the logic there? I am trying to show that this form critical approach does not make sense. The fact that people in the third century were reading this shows that sayings sources do not *a priori* have to be early. They could potentially be quite late. That is one comment I would make on the Gospel of Thomas.

I have a few more things to say about the Gospel of Thomas. You will note from what we read that there are similarities to the Gospels you have read, the canonical Gospels that we believe to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. But the Gospel of Thomas is still a little off. For example, we hear in Scripture Jesus saying, “For many who are last will be first, and the first will be last.” But the Gospel of Thomas reports Jesus as saying, “For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same.” This seems a little off, does it not? The beginning is the same, but the end is different. We also read from the Gospel of Thomas, “The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live.” That seems to be related to Jesus’ teaching, and specifically his emphasis on the importance of little children. He says, “Let the little children come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” But in none of the canonical Gospels does Jesus go so far as to say, “The oldest among us should go find a seven-day-old infant, ask him or her about the kingdom of God, and expect the infant to say something other than baby talk. Do you see how that is a little odd? It takes something that sounds like Jesus and pushes it in a very weird direction.

Another even odder saying from the selection we read is, “Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds he will become troubled, and when he becomes troubled he will become astonished and he will rule over the all.” At the beginning this sounds like Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” But what is going on in the second line? If you view this as coming from later Gnosticism, then much of this actually makes sense. Gnostic teaching ultimately says that there is this spiritual-material dichotomy. Matter is bad; you need to come into the realm of the spirit. And how do you do so? By learning wisdom and knowledge. That is why this religion is called Gnosticism. The Greek word “*gnosis*” means “knowledge,” or “wisdom.” So to come into the realm of the spirit you need to learn something. By learning something you are separated from your material reality and can partake in the life of the spirit. Thus, when you seek you find, when you find you become troubled, when you become troubled you become astonished, and then you can rule over the all.

There is something almost Eastern-mystical going on in this passage from the Gospel of Thomas. That is the closest association we have to this. And there was actually much of Eastern mysticism in ancient Gnosticism. Looking at the beginning of our selection from the Gospel of Thomas, we can now see the importance of the first *logion*: “Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.” This is not, “And whoever comes to me [namely, Christ] will not experience death.” This is not, “Anyone who understands the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus will not experience death.” Believing in Jesus, trusting in Jesus—none of that is mentioned here. This is all about learning the interpretation of these sayings. It is all about *gnosis*, knowledge. It is saying, “If you understand, you will not experience death.”

Some of the sayings of the Gospel of Thomas are very similar to parables that we are familiar with in the canonical Gospels. Gospel of Thomas logion 9 says, “Jesus said, ‘Now the sower went out, took a handful of seeds and scattered them. Some fell on the road; the birds came and gathered them up. Others fell on rock, did not take root in the soil and did not produce ears. And others fell on thorns; they choked the seeds and worms ate them. And others fell on the good soil and it produced good fruit. It produced 60 per measure and 120 per measure.’”

Well, that is the parable of the sower and the seeds, right? Is there any interpretation offered? No. I do not want to make the Eastern-mysticism connection too strong, but these are almost like little *zen coens*. There are these little drops of wisdom. You are just supposed to ponder them and be mystified by them and be astonished by them—and that very process will lead to not experiencing death. This is because you would understand that the material world and the death that comes with it is not, in a sense, truly real. I am simplifying the theology of Gnosticism a bit, but that is basically the idea. I suggest that you read the Gospel of Thomas, if you can access it. It is rather short, eight or ten pages long. I think you would find yourself greatly encouraged in this respect: when you read something like *The Da Vinci Code* that suggests there are all these fantastic Gospels out there that you are not privy to, that were possibly in the running with the canonical Gospels—especially the Gospels of Thomas, Mary, and Philip, you can find yourself wondering about the validity of the canon until you realize the truth about these other gospels.

Let me say a few things about that. One thing is, these other gospels are invariably to be dated later than our canonical Gospels. Second, these gospels are often very different from anything you would conceive of as a Gospel. The Gospel of Thomas is actually one of the closest to the canonical Gospels. If you read the Gospel of Philip (also called the Gospel of Truth), you will see that it is not even a Gospel *per se*. It does not truly tell the story of Jesus. It has many wacky things in it. That is what I would say about the non-canonical gospels. I think that rather than being scared of them, or specifically of the Gospel of Thomas, you should read them. I am not saying that you should go to it as a major source of edification. But if you do read, I think it will actually increase your confidence that we do have the right Gospels. Instead of simply having the idea that there might be some better Gospels out there, actually go out and look at them. You might be surprised.

Let me read a few of the *logions* from the end of the Gospel of Thomas. Logion 112 says, “Jesus said, ‘Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul; woe to the soul that depends on the flesh.’” Do you get it? It is matter versus spirit. In a way that is often not recognized by contemporary scholars, this is very indicative of middle or even later Gnosticism. Thus, though some people try to date this to the early second century or beginning of the first century, the manuscript does not go back that far. Also, some of the theology that is contained in here is much more like full-blown, second-century Gnosticism, not like an early expression of Gnosticism in first-century Christianity. Logion 113 says, “His disciples said to him, ‘When will the kingdom come?’ Jesus said, ‘It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying, ‘Here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ But the kingdom of the Father is spread out on the earth and men do not see it.’” There are ways this is in continuity with Jesus’ teachings on the kingdom, but do you see how it is a little odd?

I mentioned earlier how many feminists continue to be attracted to Gnosticism. I am very mystified by that. Part of my mystification is because in the closing *logion*—the grand finale—and continuing a theme that has been throughout the Gospel of Thomas, it says: “Simon Peter said to them, ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.’ And Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

Are you edified now?!? This is what I mean when I say the Gospel of Thomas is an expression of later Gnostic teaching where, to spell that out a little, the female was associated with the material world and the male was associated with the spirit. Thus this is very much in keeping with the later Gnostic idea of a kind of androgynous reality where one is seeking to put off the material world and engage fully in the spiritual world where one loses one’s sexuality. There is a little of the Gospel of Thomas for you. If

anyone should ever say, “The Gospel of Thomas should be in your Christian canon,” you can respond because you are familiar with it. Again, if you have the chance to read it through, it is only about 10 pages long.

It has been asked, did the early church read the Gospel of Thomas as part of the Bible? We can say that the early church did not read the Gospel of Thomas alongside what are now the canonical Gospels. But we have to specify what part of the church we are talking about. At one point there were two identifiable groups in the church. There were the Gnostics, and there were the Orthodox who followed the canonical Gospels, the canonical Paul, and the teachings contained therein and thus could truly trace their lineage back to Jesus via the apostles. This is the argument that Irenaeus, a second-century Christian author, makes against the Gnostics. He says: “We have the true Gospels because they are written by the apostles or apostolic followers. We have the true lineage because we can trace our ancestry all the way back through the apostles to Jesus Himself. The Gnostics do not have Gospels that were written early enough to be expressions of the actual apostolic teaching. And they cannot trace their lineage back through the apostles, despite their claims to the contrary.”

The Gospel of Thomas claims to be written by Thomas. But this is a claim no one would vouchsafe, even most liberal scholars. That is how I would describe the Orthodox party of the time. The Gnostic party was assimilating ideas from a variety of religious spheres, including Hellenistic philosophy. Remember, Plato taught that the material world is a mere shadow, and what really matters is the world of ideas. There is already this strand in Hellenistic thought that would allow for this sort of spirit/matter dichotomy. The Gnostic party imbibed deeply of this. There was a sect of the Gnostic party that was very quickly recognized as heretical by the church. Thus there were many second-century and third-century writings against the heretics, against specific Gnostic writers, saying, “You are not of us.” In that regard I think the Orthodox church was correct. Thus there were these two different parties in the early church, the Gnostics and the Orthodox.

Now, to come back to the question, certainly the Gnostic Christians were reading material like the Gospel of Thomas. This became effectively, for them, Scripture. Also, the Orthodox were aware of this literature, and some had read parts of it. Thus Irenaeus is able to provide close critiques of the actual Gnostic teaching. He is able to lay out what the Gnostics were actually teaching in his day, mention some of their written works, and write against them. Thus the Orthodox were reading these works, but they were not reading them for edification. They were reading works like the Gospel of Thomas because they recognized them as heretical and they needed to be aware of them.

In answer to another question, neither the crucifixion nor the resurrection is found in the Gospel of Thomas. There were a variety of Gnostic views of the cross. One of the more common views was that Jesus only seemed to be crucified. Another way the Gnostics dealt with the cross was to divorce Jesus from the Christ. Christ is the spirit within Jesus, and Jesus is the material body that he inhabited. Within this view, the material body (Jesus) was crucified, but of course that did not matter to the spirit (Christ). That is a way later Gnosticism treated the crucifixion of Jesus.

Moving in a very different direction, there is a resource I would like for you to be aware of. Should you have questions about some of the issues I have raised here, and specifically about the historical reliability of the Gospels, there is a book called *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* by Craig Blomberg. This book came out of a study that was done largely in England by a group of people who were members of the fellowship known as the Tyndale House, where I lived for a number of years. Long before I came there this fellowship had written a series of six books on the Gospels, arguing through some of the historical matters of the Gospels. They are very worth reading. This series is called the

*Gospel Perspective Series*. They are now a little out-of-date since they were done back in the 1970s. There has been some other very fine work done by evangelicals since then. What Blomberg tried to do in *The Historical Reliability of the Gospel* was to summarize some of the discussion from the *Gospel Perspective Series*. He also wanted to direct it toward an ordinary person who has some questions about the Gospels but who has not completely entered into all the scholarly discussion. He wanted to provide the ordinary person a way into the discussion and also discuss the reliability of the Gospels through it. This book is published by InterVarsity Press, and I highly recommend it.

The chapter titles will give you a sense of what is covered in this book. Chapters 1 and 2 have to do with methods in Gospel studies. Chapter 2 discusses form criticism, redaction criticism, and some more recent hermeneutical developments. Chapter 3 provides an argument for the credibility of miracles. Again, much of the discussion about the Gospels and many of the doubts about the Gospels and the historical Jesus come back to this one main presupposition: miracles do not happen. If you want my quick take on this, it would be the following: does God exist? Yes. Did God create the universe? Yes. Do I still think He has the power to intervene in the creation He Himself made? Of course. Therefore I believe miracles can happen. That is a very over-simplified argument, I recognize that. But there it is. Miracles happen because God exists. That should be sufficient in itself. There are other questions that come up, such as can we rightly perceive a miracle, given that we human beings naturally infer cause and effect? One could interact further with that. But anyway, he argues through the issues of miracles.

Then chapter 4 is very long and extremely helpful. It is about the contradictions or supposed contradictions between the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There is another whole chapter on John entitled, "Problems in the Gospel of John." Why is John so different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke? He goes through extended issues about that. Then there is a chapter on the Jesus tradition outside the Gospels, where he looks at such things as the Gospel of Thomas. He analyzes the degree to which these extra-biblical traditions can be deemed reliable. That is what he discusses.

This book is about 250 pages long. Some may not want to get weighed down in some of the technicalities of form and redaction criticism and some of the technicalities of the studies of the Gospels, and some may not be interested in the philosophical issues surrounding miracles. But still, just reading the two chapters on supposed contradiction between the synoptic Gospels and the problems in the Gospel of John will be worth it. Those two chapters are worth two or three times the price of the book. This is really good material. And I really appreciate the very sophisticated way he approaches both of those chapters. He does not provide overly easy answers. Rather, he provides carefully considered thought and a variety of approaches to supposed contradictions and the like. Blomberg teaches at Denver Seminary. He is a fine scholar and a wonderful Christian man. I really like his works. He has also written what I think is the best book on interpreting the parables, entitled *Interpreting the Parables*. He is very fine scholar.

Now let us turn our discussion to Josephus. Josephus was a Jewish historian writing at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second. He was a leader in the Jewish war and eventually ended up on the Romans' side. He wrote *The Antiquities*, which is a history of Judaism from creation itself all the way up to the advent of the Jewish War (he wrote a different book on the Jewish War). Toward the end of *Antiquities* he has a paragraph about Jesus. This is known as the "Testimonium Flavianum." Josephus was accepted into the house of the Flavians and thus "Flavianum" is a reference to Josephus himself and "Testimonium" refers to his testimony. This is his testimony to Jesus. The phrase about Jesus, which is rather short, says the following: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the

Messiah. He was the Christ. When Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him for he appeared to them alive again on the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and 10,000 other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of the Christians so named for him is not extinct at this day.”

This is a wonderful passage. But we do have to ask, could a first-century Jewish person have written this? That is fundamentally the question. There are three solutions to that. One is to say, “Yes, sure.” But there are some very striking things in here. There is no other evidence in Josephus’ writings that he ever became a Christian. Would he be inclined to say Jesus was the Messiah? Would he be inclined to say “he appeared to them alive again the third day,” and that he did “10,000 other wonderful things”? Would he be inclined to say “he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure”? That seems very shocking for a first-century Jewish person to say when we have no other reason to think he ever became a Christian. Thus it seems a bit naïve to me to just assume that this passage as it exists is wholly from the lips of Josephus.

Another option is to say this does not come from Josephus at all. The reason this is a possibility is because the manuscripts we have from Josephus are all passed down by Christian monks. They were all copied via Christian circles. Also, Origen, who knew Josephus and generally referred to him, never referred to the *Testimonium Flavianum*. The first mention of the *Testimonium Flavianum* we have in the church fathers comes from Eusebius in the fourth century. And Origen indicates that he did not believe that Josephus believed in Jesus. Whereas, if this passage was in Josephus’ original work and if Origen were reading carefully, he might have come to a different conclusion. Thus it is possible that some Christian monk would say, “Since the surrounding context mentions Pontius Pilate, he forgot to say something about Jesus. What could I insert in here about Jesus?” That is one possibility as well. This is going from one extreme, where we take the whole passage as authentic, to the other extreme, where we accept none of it as authentic.

There is a third possibility. The third possibility is, given that Josephus has just talked about Pilate, and also given that the next story has to do with crucifixion in Egypt, this *Testimonium Flavianum* transitions between talking about Pilate and talking about crucifixion. This means that perhaps aspects of this paragraph are original, they go back to Josephus. But the rest could be deemed an interpolation. That is, material that was actually added later by a monastic. Josephus could originally have said something that was much more derogative about Jesus such as, “Around this time there was a man named Jesus who pretended to be a wise man...” You can see how that could make a monk want to change it from “pretended to be a wise man...” to “Jesus, a wise man...” That is an issue.

Let us go through and highlight the clauses in this paragraph that are potentially problematic from the position of a first-century Jewish person who is not a Christian. We could question whether he would have said “wise man,” though he might have. “If it be lawful to call him a man,” seems a little strong for a first-century Jew who was not a follower of Christ. “For he was a doer of wonderful works...” Again, that is somewhat questionable. But he could be implying, as he does with regard to some other figures, that there were some miraculous deeds that were associated with Jesus. However, it may not have been quite as blatant in the original. “A teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure,” perhaps we would have to remove the phrase “of such men as received the truth with pleasure” as non-original. “He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles.” That is probably a statement of fact. “He was the Christ.” What is interesting there is that Josephus is actually making the claim that Jesus was the Christ. Josephus may have said something more like, “He called himself the Christ,” or “Others called him the Christ.” Then it seems possible that a monk could have changed that to “He was the Christ.” “When Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us had condemned him to the

cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him..." That phrase is not particularly problematic. But it continues, "...for he appeared to them alive again on the third day..." Now, that could be a report of what they claimed happened or it could be wholly an interpolation. "...[A]s the divine prophets had foretold these and 10,000 other wonderful things concerning him." That seems problematic. I do not have trouble with considering the last phrase to be original, "And the tribe of the Christians so named for him is not extinct at this day."

Now, let me step back and admit that what we just did there was critical scholarship working without a safety net. We just looked at the text and said, these are the phrases we are uncomfortable with being in the passage. There is some logic and rationality to it. But you would want there to also be some textual basis for it as well, rather than just saying, "I do not like these clauses. I do not think I first-century Jewish person wrote them, so let us take them out." Here, without going into any of the details, let me refer to what has been deemed an Arabic version of the *Testimonium Flavianum*. This is the title of a work: *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum*. This is by a Jewish author, Shlomo Pines. He has found a Christian author named Agapius, who is only known to us in Arabic. Pines argues that there is a passage in Agapius that appears to be Josephus' work. The striking thing is that nearly all the phrases we thought unlikely to be original in the Arabic version are not there, whereas those phrases that did seem likely to be original are in the Arabic version as well as the Greek version we have been working with. Now we are working with a safety net. If we compare the Greek version with the Arabic we can say we have a textual basis for saying, "There was an original core, but different Christian authors felt the need to interpolate around that core material that was much more spiritually appropriate for Jesus." Now, what do we think of this passage? If we assume some interpolation, we still have external testimony about the existence of Jesus in the first century—likely his crucifixion and perhaps the report of His resurrection—that was circulating. Thus Josephus was a non-Christian testament to the existence of Jesus in the first century. However, may I encourage you not to press that too far into then thinking that everything in the *Testimonium Flavianum* is reliable as coming from Josephus himself. That is my conclusion. This does provide some non-Christian testimony to the existence of Jesus, but I am not sure how much more we should make of it.

One of the reasons I mention that is because the *Testimonium Flavianum* shows up in many Christian apologetic writings about, for example, the existence of Jesus. I would like to say, it is fine for us to use this, but we need to be cautious in how we use it. You should be duly warned about that. I am thinking in particular about a book by Josh McDowell called *He Walked Among Us*. That is a fine work, arguing that Jesus really walked among us, that He really lived. But there are some issues raised that are somewhat complex.

Let us go back to the discussion we began last time, when we started talking about redaction criticism, narrative criticism, and different methods in the study of the Gospels. One of the potential problems I mentioned about redaction criticism is that you become so focused on the distinctives of the Gospels that you lose sight of their commonality. In previous editions of the class, before I had the emphasis on history and the reading of F. F. Bruce, I used to have the class read a couple of different works on the cross of Jesus. We used to focus a little more on the theology of the cross than we have in this particular course, which is fine. One of the books I had people read was *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity*, by John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green. I had them read another work by Leon Morris that is much more harmonistic in its approach to the Gospels. And I also had them read chapters from *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity*, which focuses more on the distinctives between the Gospels via a redaction-critical approach.

Mark is treated first in Carroll and Green's book because they believe in Markan priority. They go through and talk about the theology of the cross according to Mark. They talk about things like the forebodings of the cross and emphasize the passion-prediction passages that foreshadow Jesus going to the cross. There are foreboding plots that lead to Him going to the cross, and there are outright predictions of Him going to the cross. It talks about Jesus as a wonder-worker, Jesus as the Son of Man and the Son of God, and Jesus in the temple. Then they go on to discuss these different aspects and how they tie into the crucifixion. Then there is a chapter on Matthew. There they talk about birth and death narratives. They then leap right into the passion passages in Matthew without talking about Jesus' miracles or any of the things they discuss when looking at Mark. I wanted to highlight that Carroll and Green's book seems to get a distinct theology of the cross from Matthew than from Mark because they do not want to bore us by saying the same thing over again. But the problem is, all the things they talked about from Mark are in Matthew as well and should have been repeated in the chapter on Matthew. That is an indication of the tendency of the historical-critical approach to find distinctives between the Gospels and never look for their areas of commonality. I want to say that is not a good procedure. That is not a responsible procedure even assuming some of the presuppositions of the redaction position. I wanted to highlight that again.

I also want to begin our discussion of Mark and Luke. Let us look at Mark for a second. I want to highlight some of the elements that are emphasized in Mark. I do not mean to say that these elements are not found in Matthew or Luke; in fact, most of these elements are found in Matthew and Luke. But these are the elements that come to the foreground when you only read Mark.

Let us turn to Mark 1. It begins as follows: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Now, that sounds like a good beginning, and we often just continue reading. But I want us to slow down because often an author will show you what he is particularly concerned with in his introduction and in his conclusion. So let us read that again: "The beginning..." There he just seems to be beginning his narrative. "...[O]f the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The word "gospel" there is the Greek word *euangelion*. It means "good news." You may know that, but we often overlook it because "gospel" for us has become this kind of technical term. We read over this. He is saying, "This is the beginning of the good news." If "good news" is too plain for you because you have heard it too many times, think of this as something akin to "the blessed proclamation." That is what this means. It is good in the sense that it is blessed, and it is news in the sense that it is news to be proclaimed by an *angelos*, a messenger. This is the blessed proclamation. Mark is immediately setting it up to say not just that this is some gospel, but this is really wonderful news. This is the news you want to proclaim again and again because it is such good news. Mark says this is the Gospel "of Jesus Christ." Again, we think of that as just a name, "Jesus Christ." But *christos* there is a title; it means "Jesus the Messiah." Mark is already letting us know, before he has even introduced us to Jesus, that this person is the Jewish messiah. And, He is "the Son of God." This is a very heightened messianic title, but as you work your way through Mark, you learn ultimately what it really means for Jesus to be the Son of God. We see evidence of this in Mark's discussion of John the Baptist in 1:2-8 (we will come back to that). We also see evidence of this in Mark's account of Jesus' baptism in 1:9-11. Verse 11 says, "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son...'" Jesus is the Son of God. How do we know? God Himself comes down and testifies, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Then the Spirit immediately compelled Him to go out into the wilderness. He is the Son of God. Do you want to see how important this theme is to Mark? Turn to Mark 15:37, at the crucifixion of Jesus: "And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." The curtain being torn was a major eschatological event. It meant that the veil separating the Holy of Holies was torn in two. Mark goes on, "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" Even though the Jewish leaders did not understand, this

pagan Gentile centurion while executing the Messiah looked up and said, “This was the Son of God.” This account drives home the theme that you find throughout the Gospel of Mark. This theme is not lacking in the other Gospels, but it is emphasized in Mark. He starts by telling you, “This is the Son of God.”

Let us learn a little more about the Son of God by reading through Mark. My goal for this lesson is to get through maybe two chapters. I just want to get you into Mark; we do not have time to go through the whole Gospel. Let us just do a quick bird’s eye view and see how this is developed. In 1:1 we read, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Where is he going next? “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,” let us stop for a minute. Remember that list of distinctive theological emphasis that came out of R. T. France that I gave you in the last lesson? Who is it that speaks of the fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus? Matthew, right? But remember I pointed out that Matthew is not only speaking of the fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus. Here the very first thing Mark does after his introduction is point out the Scripture, the Old Testament. He is emphasizing that we are right here in the middle of the Old Testament context. We find from Mark that John the Baptist is the messenger spoken of by Isaiah, the voice crying in the wilderness and making ready the way of the LORD. He declares (1:8), “I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Think of how great a prophet John the Baptist is. Now the One coming after him will be so great that while John is only able to sprinkle a little water on you and get you a little wet, the Holy Spirit is at this man’s beck-and-call. That is how great this man is. Next there is the proclamation from the Father, “You are my beloved Son.”

Next Jesus preaches in Galilee. Mark 1:14 says, “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” “Believe in the gospel.” That goes right back to Mark 1:1. The first thing Jesus tells you as the reader in the Gospel of Mark is “Repent and believe in the gospel.” That tells you how Mark wants you to respond to this good news that he spoke of in the beginning. By the way, in order to do this he has condensed many things. For example, 1:14 says, “And after John had been taken into custody...” What about that event? Wouldn’t you want to know more about that? You learn more about that event in the other Gospels, but Mark did not think that was worth spending any time on. He just mentions it, and then he keeps speeding along. Mark 1:16-20 says: “Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea [...] and Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ [...] They left their nets and followed him. [...] He saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they [...] followed him.”

Why Simon, Andrew, James and John? Well, just to show you that Mark is using narrative craft here, these are people who will show up as key figures elsewhere. Simon keeps showing up asking stupid questions. Who else asks stupid questions? Right after Jesus tells them He will be crucified, James and John say, “Can we sit on Your right and left hand?” I will use a narrative term here: Mark is introducing us to characters who will show up later. Now, when I say that, I am not buying into the whole narrative idea that we can only call these people characters. These are actual, historical figures. But you see, here he is introducing them. As a quick aside, the material being introduced often has theological importance, but sometimes it simply serves to help you out as a reader of the narrative. I would not make a huge deal out of the calling of Andrew, James, and John except to say that they are characters who show up later. I would make a big deal about what Jesus says to them: “Follow me.” What is the disciple principally supposed to do? Follow Jesus. And then there is a consequence: “And I will make you fishers of men.” But we do not yet know what it means to follow Jesus. We have to read all the way through the Gospel and see what it means.

Next He goes to Capernaum. Mark 1:21-22 says, “And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” Who is the Son of God? He is the One who teaches with authority and not as the scribes. Mark 1:23-24 continues, “And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.’” Is that right? Yes. Does Jesus want that coming from the mouths of demons? No. So He kicks the demons out, as we see in 1:25-28: “But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.” Who is the Son of God now? He teaches with authority, and He can throw out unclean spirits.

Multitudes are healed as we see later in chapter 1. Jesus even heals them on the Sabbath. Then there is this very striking event in chapter 2. I will end with this and then we may talk a little more about it next time. The paralytic is healed in chapter 2, but when Jesus first sees the man, what does He say to him? “My son, your sins are forgiven” (2:5). Wait a second. As the scribes and the Pharisees knew, who can forgive sins except God alone? Thus Jesus, to prove to them that He had the authority to forgive sins, does a miracle. Now, it is crucial to see, then, that the miracles are substantiating other qualities of Jesus, who He is. The response of the crowds in 2:12 is, “...so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” By the way, how many times now have the crowds been amazed? What should your understanding of this Jesus be, then? You should be saying, “Who is this man?” This is what Mark is trying to do in us as we read. He is trying to make us amazed at the power and authority of the Son of God. We find here in verse 10 that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. So who is the Son of Man, who is the Son of God? He has the authority to teach, He has the authority to cast out demons, He has the authority to heal, and He has the authority to forgive sins. That is what Mark is trying to do in us as we read. Those are some of the emphases you see in Mark. Next time we will look at Mark and Luke.