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For Brian

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INTRODUCTION

REVISITING THE RED LETTERS

Let me say a little something about Jesus. When I was a little boy, outside of my family, Jesus was the first relationship I ever had. Ever since, even though I tend to be a solitary sort, I've always felt that Jesus was with me.

I grew up in a Lutheran church, started attending a Baptist school in sixth grade where we had Bible classes every day and chapel services twice a week, and I started going to a Baptist church when I was fifteen. I got really involved in my youth group, Christian concerts, and Jesus festivals, and my relationship with Christianity deepened to the point that in my early twenties the bumper sticker on my car read "Real Men Love Jesus". And to this day, despite all of the deconstruction I've done on my relationship with the religion created in his name, I still believe in Jesus.

However, I don't believe everything that was added to the story about him in the two millennia since his ministry... or even the following few decades. Nevertheless, I remember my first Bible being decorated on the outside with artwork of Jesus among the trees, talking to children, and inside, every word he spoke was printed in red. Beyond all of the stories and the beliefs that surrounded them, those words have always stood out to me.

The first red letter edition of the Bible was published in 1901 as a King James Version. It was inspired by the night before his crucifixion mentioned in Matthew, Mark, and Luke when Jesus called the wine he shared with his disciples his blood. Since then, there have been several red letter editions of the Bible, each of them coloring the quotes of Christ with deep red ink.

There is even a movement within Christianity where

members refer to themselves as “red letter Christians”. These are folks who think it is more important to focus on the message of Jesus and emulate him than merely clinging to the traditions of Christianity that have led people away from acting like Christ and connecting with the kingdom of God within them. I would consider myself a red letter Christian, but it's been quite a while since I've considered myself a Christian.

There are many beliefs Christianity requires that I just can't sign off on. Ultimately, my two main issues with Christianity are the abject lack of faith in God and the foundation in idolatry. Basically, you have to believe God is inept and forced to send everyone to hell while also believing the Bible is inerrant and should be lifted above God.

After ultimately leaving Christianity a few decades ago and embarking on my own spiritual pilgrimage through a variety of other religious and spiritual traditions, I still always felt as if Jesus was alongside me for the journey. While I still don't have much desire to be part of the most popular religion of all time, I do still have a compulsion to follow Christ.

What we generally consider Christianity now is what I refer to as Roman American Christianity. The Roman Empire set up the doctrines and the hierarchy, American exceptionalism set the dogma and hypocrisy, and Saint Augustine set up the shortsightedness of Christianity.

THE RISE OF ROMAN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

In the years following the death of Jesus, there was a young bully from Tarsus by the name of Saul who liked to antagonize and persecute Jesus's followers. Like many other young Jewish men of the time, bearing the brunt of his people's history of slavery, decades of nomadic desert living, serial genocide, and then back to slavery and domination by the Roman Empire, although he was a Roman citizen with more rights than

most of Jesus's actual followers, young Saul was not necessarily emotionally healthy. So for these followers of Jesus to come around with their message of love and forgiveness, a lot of these men got really riled up about it and quickly resorted to violence.

One of these followers of Christ was named Stephen, and the Bible said he had a "face like an angel", as many with a name like that do. One time, Stephen basically said that just because the religious folk had a temple didn't mean they owned God, and they didn't take too kindly to that. So they took him outside and beat him to death with large rocks while Saul watched their coats so as to not get any blood on them as they savagely bludgeoned an innocent man to death.

Not only did Saul approve of Stephen's murder, he became even more of a bully and started terrorizing people who were following what Jesus had referred to as the Way. So one day, according to Saul, he was heading to Damascus when he was struck blind. He said he heard the voice of Jesus asking him why he was persecuting him, and, apparently, the experience inspired Saul to rethink a few things.

Saul was struck with such an enormous amount of guilt and shame over his former behavior that he changed the first letter of his name to P for some reason, and as extreme as he got in terrorizing followers of Jesus as Saul, he got just as extreme about preaching his version of the gospel as Paul. And although he'd never actually heard Jesus's gospel, Paul started edging out the disciples as he administered how he thought churches should be created and operated.

The great challenge to the disciples Jesus actually chose was the zeal this new Paul character had, so convicted by his extreme behavior of punishing the ministry of Jesus that he went so far beyond the gospel *of* Jesus Christ that he established the gospel *about* Jesus Christ. Although Jesus's message always inspired action and good works, bringing God and humankind into harmony, Paul was so grateful for his second lease on life that he gave all credit to Christ and took a quite mystical journey that

many still don't fully comprehend.

Paul is often considered to be the first Christian, as in, he was the first person to start following Jesus who didn't actually meet him face to face. As such, Paul is usually quoted by Christians more than Jesus, and I have to admit I get a little jealous on behalf of Jesus. As much as I appreciate Paul's insights from his incredibly unique perspective, even if he was the first Christian, if he was anything like every other Christian I've ever met, I feel inclined to put more weight into the words of Jesus and do not feel compelled to accept Paul's words in the same regard.

One thing I am completely sure Jesus did not do was hold up the letters of Paul and say, "If you like following me, you're going to love following this guy. Treat every letter he writes as if I wrote it myself." Although Jesus threw out a few prophecies many people are still waiting for, he never prophesied that Paul would take Peter's place as the leader of the church, nor did they ever even meet. Yet more words in the Bible are attributed to Paul than to Jesus, even though a number of scholars do think that nearly half of them are forgeries

Although Paul was a big part of expanding Christianity from Jews to Gentiles, the Romans of the day still acted like Saul as they liked to bully and terrorize Christians, famously allowing them to be mauled by lions for entertainment. Eventually there came an emperor by the name of Constantine that empathized with the message of the Christians, and having a dream about conquering in the name of Christ with a cross on his banner, in 313, he issued the Edict of Milan, banning the persecution of Christians and setting humanity on the course toward greater understanding of one another. He would eventually merge all of the regional religions into one glorious, universal religion, heretofore known as Catholic, blending the Jewish and pagan religions in with the up and coming Christianity in order to unify the Empire.

In 325, Constantine called in bishops throughout the Empire, gathering roughly three hundred of them in Nicea for

three to four months in the late spring to come up with a more cohesive belief system. Seventeen hundred years later, the Nicene Creed still forms the basis for the vast majority of Roman Christian theology today, be it Catholicism, Anglicanism, or one of the several thousand Protestant denominations that sprouted from it.

Although the Nicene Creed offers up some beautiful language, it doesn't really include many of Jesus's teachings. I appreciate the four months that Constantine and his bishops put into focusing the vision of the Roman Empire 1,701 years ago by articulating the theological boundaries of the religious monopoly they were developing through the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, since the Roman Empire has been dead for 1,500 years, I don't feel compelled to allow a fallen empire to have authority over my relationship with God.

Of utmost importance to the Council of Nicea were the ideas of the Holy Trinity, virgin birth, resurrection, the eventual return of Christ, and that there is "one, holy, apostolic, Catholic Church". Since then, this way of understanding has largely been known as Christianity, and after seven different crusades and six centuries of various inquisitions, possibly bringing more pain, torture, and violence than had been previously known to humanity, it has become the most popular religion in human history. There are roughly 340,000 different Roman American Christian churches in the United States alone. The majority of them still hold these ideas as sacrosanct, yet many have also expanded their belief statements to include the idolatry of the Bible.

As scientific methodologies were incorporated in the young United States, feeling that Christianity was losing its foothold, many churches started leaning into the idea of the inerrancy of the Bible and the absolute requirement that it be the foundation of our relationships with the world, although few felt compelled to actually read it all the way through. Since the Catholic biblical canon wasn't finalized until 1545, for centuries

before and after there was contention from various sects, and a number of books were heralded as scripture while others were seen as heretical. The oldest Bible is the Ethiopian Bible, which has either 81 or 88 books depending on the version, the Orthodox Bible has 76 to 79 books depending on the version, the Catholic Bible has 73 books, and a thousand years later, the Protestant Reformation trimmed that down to a neat 66 books that prevail throughout Roman American Christianity today.

For centuries, the Bible has been used as a source of inspiration around the world, and as the world's first mass produced book in the 1450s, with nearly a thousand different versions in English alone, the Bible has been instrumental in developing the faith of millions. Around the world today, many Christian churches revere the Bible and use it as a source of comfort and inspiration while also recognizing its historical context and limitations. However, for many churches that got their start in the United States, the Bible is much more than that. For many of these churches, their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is greater than their belief in God, making their faith much shakier than they often realize.

Whenever I've considered attending a church, I go to their statement of beliefs. Most of the time, the first thing they mention is the inerrancy, infallibility, and perfection of the Bible, the second thing is God, and the third thing is Jesus. If a Christian church doesn't have Jesus Christ as the first tenet of their faith, that church is not following Christ; it's following Roman American Christianity, and I really don't want to be a part of that.

I recall speaking with an old friend of mine who was a very strong Christian. He told me that the two things he believed most, the two things he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, were that the Bible was 100% inerrant, infallible, and perfect, and that the Devil was real. I've always thought it peculiar that the first things he believed in weren't God and Jesus, but rather some religiously adjacent notions leading toward the highway of perplexity, but that's Roman American Christianity for you.

THE ROAD TO THE ROMANS ROAD

Since Christ came to Earth, his story has blossomed. Paul added his perspective and Rome took it in an all new direction, but there was also a Holy Grail added to the story, statues that cried blood, Jesus started showing up in toast, and according to *The DaVinci Code*, Jesus even had kids.

It's safe to say that the story of Jesus has largely transmogrified since he first shared his message. Several decades after the council of Nicea, St. Augustine would twist the messages of Jesus and Paul into his theory of "original sin". Consecrating this notion into the Church with the Council of Carthage in 418, from that point on, it was the accepted doctrine that every human being was afflicted with a darkness that separated them from God, even though Paul had written that nothing could separate us from the love of God.

As Augustine wrote in *To Simplician*, "The whole human race was a condemned lump (*massa damnata*); for he who first sinned was punished with the relevant penalty, and had all his stock... subjected to the same punishment."

The story goes that God made the earth in six days and took a day off, before which he told Adam and Eve, the first set of *homo sapiens*, God's most beloved species, that they were not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Unfortunately, they went ahead and ate it, and when God returned to the garden, he was so surprised and disappointed he had to kick them out of paradise and go create an all-new place called hell for every *homo sapiens* that would follow. Now that *homo sapiens* had chosen the knowledge of good and evil, they were filled with sin, and God just wasn't able to be in their presence.

Of course, the Bible doesn't really say this, and as you will see, Jesus didn't really teach this either. But this is how Roman

American Christianity evolved due to the influences of people like St Augustine. Initially, Augustine was very opposed to Catholic Christianity and spent nine years as a Manichean, a Persian religion that believed the world was a battlefield for the equal forces of good and evil, a sentiment he would carry with him and struggle with when he left the sect and found his place in the Roman Church.

Augustine believed that the sin committed by Adam and Eve was so great that every human to be created after them was deserving of eternal punishment following their few decades of life, regardless of their behavior here.

As he wrote in *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, "Everything which is born of the flesh is flesh... and therefore, every one who is born is under the condemnation of sin, and is a child of wrath, even if he has no sins of his own, but only the original sin."

He even believed that infants go to hell when they die as he stated in *Enchiridion*, "Even the infant is exposed to the danger of the second death... and if it should die without the grace of Christ, it will be in the number of those who are damned."

So unfortunately, Christianity became consumed with the idea that its purpose was to save people from hell whereas Jesus's message, as you'll see in the coming pages, was much more about embracing the kingdom of heaven.

To be fair to Augustine, he did sort of prophesy about people like me in *The City of God* when he wrote, "It is in vain, then, that some—indeed very many—yield to merely human feelings and deplore the notion of the eternal punishment of the damned... they do not believe that it will be so, not because of the authority of divine Scripture, but because of their own feelings." Now, I don't believe what I believe completely based on my feelings, but from what I gather through my study of scripture and my personal experience of and relationship with what I consider God.

I can completely believe that the Creator of all that we

know could come to Earth in the form of a man, and I believe he could die and be resurrected as an example of what we are capable of overcoming when we connect with our Creator. However, I can't believe that this is something God had to do because of some sort of oversight in Eden whereby God had to sanction murder to appease whatever bloodlust arose when he lost control of humanity and was forced to send them to hell. I can't believe God is as short-sighted, narrow-minded, and fallible as the story makes him out to be.

I can't believe God didn't see Adam's choice coming. I can't believe God is so limited that he can't be in communion with his favorite creation because they are as sinful as he created them to be. I can't believe God ever had a blood lust and required human beings to slaughter animals for his benefit.

I can't believe God was forced to create hell so he'd have a place to stash all of the worthless, sinful human souls, or that he would staff that hell with demons devoted to perpetuating endless torture. I can't believe that two thirds of humanity has to be sent to this terrible place because they were born in the wrong place with the wrong cultural background. I can't believe all of the wonderful Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and other amazing people I've met, who shine with the light of Christ, have to spend eternity being tortured because Jesus wasn't part of their story.

If it was really Jesus's goal to save humanity through his sacrifice, and only one third of humanity considers themselves "Christian" (most of whom have merely culturally appropriated it and have never even read the Bible, much less made Christ their "Lord and Savior"), that makes Jesus an epic failure. Even if he'd managed to double that and had sixty percent of the population declare themselves as Christian, that's still a failing grade. I don't think I can spend eternity pretending to worship that.

So I have to consider the possibility that this story may be a bit of a misinterpretation of what Jesus was actually here to do. My goal for this book is to reconsider the words he had to share, based upon what we've historically accepted, and see if there's a

possibility of reframing this narrative and finding a deeper truth.

In the early 20th century, Americans produced the Romans Road, five cherry-picked verses from Paul's letters to the church in Rome that made it easier to share this warped perspective of Christianity to children, and due to its simplicity, although it's not very loving to God or our neighbors, it has become the crux of what I call the Roman American Christian belief system. The basic gist is that humans are all sinners and deserve to be punished for all of eternity, but God became Jesus, had himself killed as a sacrifice to appease his own acquired need for blood, and then rose again, and if you believe all that, you get to go to heaven, but if not, you still gotta go to hell.

That wasn't really the message of Paul, who never even used the word "hell", and it certainly was not the message of Jesus Christ, but it has become the foundation for Roman American Christianity.

MAKING THE RED LETTERS BOLD

Although I don't believe that the Bible is inerrant, infallible, or perfect, I still have an incredible affinity for Jesus, and although many would consider me somewhere between an apostate and a heretic, I still have faith in God. While I cannot embrace the edicts of doctrine and dogma that comprise Roman American Christianity, I still really dig Jesus and what he had to say, as well as the relationship we share.

A while ago, I had a vision of getting one of those "God Bless The USA" Bibles that they print in China and ripping out the American documents that had been wrongfully sewn in with it. Then I thought about what else I should take out of it. Since I am not Jewish, although I appreciate the historical context and have read it all before, I imagined myself tearing out the entire Old Testament. Then, since I don't think Jesus would have considered Paul's correspondences as scripture, I imagined tearing out the

letters of Paul, as well as the apostles Jesus actually chose, as much as I have appreciated being able to have a glimpse into their communiqué.

That left me with only the four gospels. Since I think the message of Christ has been largely co-opted by the religion of Roman American Christianity, which demands that I revere the words of Judaism and Paul as equal to the words of Jesus, I felt compelled to zone in even closer into the red letters representing what Jesus is supposed to have said by the authors of these four books. I do find a lot of truth in those red letters, and rather than attempting to cancel Christianity and throw it on the dung heap of history as many deconstructing evangelicals are prone to do, I would rather revisit those words in the hopes of discovering a closer walk with the Source of my being.

Historians believe Mark was written first around the year 70, with Matthew being written around 80, Luke around 90, and John closer to 110. Considering it took nearly four decades before any of them wrote anything about Jesus, and when they did it was in a language his disciples did not speak, it's safe to say these weren't actually written by the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that traveled with and learned from Jesus.

Considering how many libraries, books, and sacred writings were burned as the Roman Empire took control of Christianity, any writings by actual witnesses to the messages and miracles of Jesus are nothing more than cindered ashes on the winds of time. So the four gospels included in the Roman American Bible are what we have to work with, unless we count the Nag Hammadi library and the gnostic gospels of Judas, Thomas, Mary Magdalene, and all of the other books that were hidden away so as to not be destroyed by the Roman Empire's grasp for religious power. But for the time being, we're just going to focus on these four.

I'll be using the New International Version and putting his message in bold font rather than red in order to highlight the importance of his words more so than his death as the red letter

edition was designed to do... and to save on printing costs.

I believe Jesus walked the earth, and I believe that for his time and people and place, he had a truly revelatory and revolutionary message that empowered an incredible ministry, not only performing miracles, but also teaching others how to do the same, although those lessons seem to have been lessened as the years have gone by. He had a profound grasp of love and forgiveness, which are essential ingredients for making miracles. Because he had such god-like qualities and was teaching others how to access those qualities in themselves in order to open up to eternal life and the kingdom of heaven within each of them, and each of us, the fear of irrelevance caused the political and religious leaders of the day to have him killed. After he was gone, his message got hijacked.

Many deconstructing Christians are using the fallibility of Roman doctrine and American dogma to leave Christianity altogether, especially those denominations who cling most tightly to and enforce those manufactured fundamentals. Many are driving directly into atheism. Yet there are others out there like myself who don't feel inclined to perpetuate Roman theology, but we still connect with the Creator of our existence because of our relationship with Jesus Christ, and we would like to celebrate the lives we've been given and build community with people who have similar and different perspectives of the Source of All That Is. I hope that this book helps that process.

At this stage of my journey, Jesus is sufficient for me. I do not require the approval of the Nation of Israel, the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church it transmogrified into, or any of the Protestant subsidiaries that were developed in its wake. I claim my sovereignty in Spirit and move boldly forward to celebrate the words of my most esteemed teacher in the hopes of saving them from further crucifixion. So... lemme say a little something about the stuff Jesus said...

MAINLY MARK

After Paul's letters to the various churches of the area had circulated his theories about Jesus's purpose, Paul's limited understanding of Christ helped inform the writing of what would be called the gospel of Mark around the year 70 AD and several other gospel narratives over the next few decades and centuries as the legends of Jesus expanded.

Considering that the actual scribe of Mark's gospel was probably not one of Jesus's disciples three and a half decades earlier, it's hard to tell how accurate the account is, but the gospel of Mark would also inform the gospels of Matthew and Luke a decade or two later, and to a lesser extent, the gospel of John over thirty years later. There were most likely other accounts of the life and ministry of the man who would come to be known as Jesus Christ. Some were destroyed by the Romans, and some have been recovered since, but suffice it to say that these four were among the most popular.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are considered the "synoptic" gospels as they each offer similar synopses of Jesus's ministry with many shared messages and stories. John's gospel is about ninety percent original material, and is written in a very different style. Let's get started with Mark...

THE TIME HAS COME

The first time Jesus speaks in the book of Mark is in the fifteenth verse of the first chapter when he says, "**The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**" In the book of Matthew, in chapter 4, verse 17, it says that, "from that time Jesus began to proclaim, '**Repent, for**

the kingdom of heaven has come near." The gospel of John never uses the word "**repent**", but does mention the "**kingdom of God**" twice, and Jesus refers to his kingdom on one other occasion. Similarly, the gospel of Luke also uses the phrase "**kingdom of God**" rather than "**kingdom of heaven**", as found in the gospel of Matthew.

The first time Jesus mentions the kingdom of God in Luke is in chapter 4, verse 43 when he says, "**I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.**" He says something similar later in the first chapter of Mark: "**Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.**"

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus knew that he was sent by God to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God and had come to preach. He wasn't concerned with being a human sacrifice or even in performing miracles (although he performs two in the first chapter of Mark alone). He first realized his role as a teacher, here to share what he'd come to understand about the kingdom of heaven and the relationship with God we're actually capable of.

After years of preparation about which very little was written, a time in which it has been theorized that Jesus studied in India and learned from other gurus, Jesus was ready to start his ministry, his first words being, "**The time has come.**" He follows this up with, "**The kingdom of God has come near.**" He doesn't say it has arrived, but that it has "**come near**", offering an impetus and invitation to inquire more for those who have ears to hear.

Then he says, "**Repent and believe the good news!**", and yes, according to the Bible, Jesus said it with an exclamation point. At this point, Jesus's mission is to simply help people change their minds and open to a purer relationship with God, and he's pretty excited about it. By changing our minds, we change our behavior, and that is good news indeed!

The word "pent" refers to something being enclosed, but it's also about control. In the world Jesus lived in, and even more

so in the world we inhabit, it can be very easy to lose control of ourselves, emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

The word "**repent**" is about regaining control of yourself, first your emotions, then your mind, then your behavior. To repent is not to merely change your "sinful ways", but to change that which is keeping you from the kingdom you are being offered.

I'm just playing. That's not the actual etymology of "repent", but I like words, and I don't think my interpretation is too far off. The Greek word used in the gospels is *metanoia*, which basically means change directions. Basically, if you're facing the darkness, turn to face the light.

Repentance often does mean letting go of unhealthy addictions or "sinful behavior", but it is more than just that. It is opening to a new way of being. Jesus's initial mission was to empower people by helping them turn from their misguided understanding and to align with the Holy Spirit of Life, just as he still has the power to do today.

COME, FOLLOW ME

In two of the gospels, Mark and Matthew, chapters 1 and 4 respectively, Jesus comes across Simon and Andrew fishing along the shores of the Sea of Galilee and says to them, "**Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.**" In some translations, he says "**I will make you fishers of men.**"

When I was young, I never really resonated with those words. From what I knew of Jesus, I was glad to follow him. He loved people, he was forgiveness in action, and he opened me up to consider the kingdom of heaven beyond the existence I was experiencing. But growing up in the Baptist church, I never felt the compulsion of fishing for men through evangelism. I did it because saving souls is sort of a coming-of-age event for young evangelical Christians, but in hindsight, I think I felt uncomfortable because I could only lead people to Jesus through the perspective of Paul.

But 2,000 years later, these words have become the building blocks for what would become the most popular religion of all time. It's rather fascinating that Jesus called his followers to be fishers of men during what astrologers refer to as the age of Pisces, symbolized by the fish.

Astrological ages refer to the 2,160 year cycle represented by the twelve symbols of the zodiac. Just as the various stages are recognized throughout the year as the stars change placement in the sky, so do the placements of the celestial bodies offer patterns through the millennia. For instance, the age of Taurus, representing material abundance and earthly fertility, saw the flourishing of early civilizations from 4300 BC through 2150 BC. The age of Aries, ruled by Mars, the God of War, saw a lot of what happened as the Israelites moved into Canaan and killed everyone as they ushered in the early Iron Age. Around this time, they were also slaughtering lots of rams, the symbol of Aries, as well as lambs, cows, and other critters as a sacrifice to satiate Jehovah's need for the blood of innocent animals through senseless violence.

For the last 2,000 years or so, the age of Pisces has been about hierarchy, authority, and control, as we have seen through the rise of monotheism and the spread of the Roman Catholic Church and its subsidiaries. Nevertheless, there is also a theme of empathy and self-sacrifice during this age, made apparent by the story of Christ, who called for this fishing expedition in the first place.

Fishing, whether with a hook or a net, is a rather violent activity, and fish pulled out of their waters seem to be the living embodiment of fear as they struggle to breathe. Reaching the end of this age, it seems that many are spiritually struggling to breathe, and we are ready to return to the water in which we were meant to live.

The age of Aquarius we are moving into is represented by the water bearer. As we can already see by the transformative technology being developed around us, this age becoming has the

capacity to move us from the authoritative hierarchies we see grasping for power as they lose their grip on it to an age of horizontal networks of collaboration and innovation, cultivating an economy of flowing currency rather than the stagnation of hoarding wealth.

Unfortunately for some, following Roman American Christianity these days makes them feel like they are caught in a net, and the lurking menace of Christian nationalism being championed by the leaders of capitalism make many feel that they've been hooked by a much larger predator. But beyond all of the false prophets that Jesus would eventually warn us about, the essence of Christ is what Shane Claiborne calls the *irresistible revolution*, which he says, "isn't just about going to heaven when you die but bringing heaven down as you live... It's about healing our broken hearts, healing our broken streets, and healing our broken world."

There are quite a number of people who follow Christ, but don't necessarily follow Roman American Christianity, and that number seems to be growing. It seems like a very slow growth sometimes as the relationships are usually cultivated in isolation since so many churches still have dogmatic requirements for membership and antiquated doctrines. While this can hinder a purer connection with the Divine, there is a growing surge of people reconnecting with Christ beyond Roman American Christianity as faith moves on beyond belief.

So if you're one of those people who resonates with Jesus, but doesn't feel inclined to incorporate Iron Age theology into your daily spiritual practice, to quote my greatest teacher, "**Come, follow me**", and I will share more about the stuff Jesus said.

BE QUIET

As unbelievable as it seems, all four gospels share accounts of Jesus casting out demons. In the first chapter of Mark

and the fourth chapter of Luke, Jesus goes to Capernaum and teaches in the synagogue. Both accounts say that people were amazed because he spoke with such authority, “not as the teachers of the law,” adds Mark.

Mark said he was dealing with “a man with an impure spirit,” while Luke says, “There was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon.” Either way, it starts hassling Jesus and calls him out as the Holy One of God, inspiring the next thing Jesus said that merited being written down.

Jesus says, “**Be quiet! Come out of him!**” after which the impure spirit is said to have shaken the man violently before departing with a shriek. In Luke, there is no shriek. Again, people are amazed.

I think it's rather ironic how much Roman American Christianity has demanded people to lift up Jesus's name when one of the first things he does is to quiet that noise. If it were important to Jesus to be lifted up as the Son of God and hailed as Lord, he sure wasn't very gung ho about it. In one of his very first recorded interactions with someone who wants to proclaim his greatness and reveal him as the Holy One of God, he shuts them right up.

Granted, these days, we don't have many demons speaking audibly through people. However, we do have impure and unclean spirits that do much to disrupt people's lives and to take the lives of others. We have emotional traumas, mental illnesses, chemical addictions, and all sorts of various personality, neurological, and other disorders that wreak havoc in the lives of all sorts of people. There are many who face down their demons in the name of Jesus, and some of them actually feel a reprieve from their suffering. But most of our demons these days are not cast out, they're just drugged up.

Fortunately, these days, it's rather uncommon for someone with impure spirits to barge into a church or synagogue and start making a fuss, unless you count mass shooters. But I suppose there were a lot more impure spirits back then, or at least

their impure spirits were more dramatic than the impure spirits of today. Nevertheless, with just a few words, Jesus was quick to demonstrate that he had authority over such things. It would be great if he could stop the mass shooters too.

I AM WILLING

Before we even reach the end of Mark's first chapter, Jesus performs one more miracle and has one more thing to say. After a leper approaches him and says, "If you are willing, you can make me clean," Jesus says, "**I am willing. Be clean!**" After the man's leprosy leaves him, Jesus says to him, "**See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.**"

The same story is told in Matthew 8 and Luke 5, but the gospel of John makes no mention of Jesus healing lepers at all. Nevertheless, when he does it in the synoptic gospels, he tells them not to tell anyone, so maybe John was just following instructions. Either way, in each of these instances, with some of the first things Jesus is quoted as saying, he is not drawing attention to himself, but empowering others.

First, he gives credit to his heavenly Father, then he empowers his disciples, and then he commands demons and disease, asking for thanks to be given in the temple instead of to himself. Whether he was talking to his parents, his followers, or evil spirits, Jesus always spoke or remained silent with the authority he knew he had, and he didn't need the praise of others. But he was willing to serve in whatever manner life asked him to serve.

If you are looking for Christ today, start by looking in the kingdom of heaven inside you. If you are plagued by demons or disease, know that he has given you the power to silence those voices and remove them from you. Lastly, ask yourself what it

meant to "fish for people" in Jesus's ministry and how it would be different than the poaching that has been going on since.

In Roman American Christianity, the hook is eternal life paid for by the blood of Christ, but that wasn't the message Jesus was preaching in his ministry. Jesus's message about the kingdom of heaven, and the power he exuded, went beyond the mere fire insurance policy that is sold in so many churches today. To discover Jesus's message, we must meet him in his Father's house, and that is not built with brick and mortar.

Ultimately, if you want to feel God moving in your life, like Jesus, you must be willing.

YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

According to Mark, the next thing Jesus said was after some dudes lowered their paralyzed friend through a hole in the roof at the place Jesus was preaching to a packed crowd. Mark says that when Jesus saw their faith, he spoke to the paralyzed man. Now, I happen to think that Jesus was a pretty perceptive guy, and he noticed a few things about this particular fella. First, he had enough faith in the outcome of this stunt to risk his life for it, because if you are already paralyzed and a few of your knucklehead buddies accidentally drop you off of a roof, it's not going to end well. But Jesus saw that not only did this guy believe in Jesus and his friends, but his friends believed enough, or I should say had enough faith, to carry off this ridiculous stunt.

So Jesus says to the man, "**Your sins are forgiven.**"

The Greek word used for "sin" is *hamartia*, which was originally an archery term that meant to miss the mark. The word for "forgiven" is *aphiemi*, which means to let go or release. Basically, when Jesus told people that their sins were forgiven, knowing full well that God never created a hell for eternal torment but that humans punish themselves based on their perception of limitation from the shadows of shame and guilt, he was basically

saying, "Sure, you screwed up, but don't sweat it. It's all good. Start living again."

Versions of this story are told in the second chapter of Mark, the ninth chapter of Matthew, and the fifth chapter of Luke, as well as a somewhat similar story in John. In Luke, the knucklehead buddies also lower the paralytic through the roof, but in Matthew, they're just carrying him around, apparently hoping to stumble upon a miracle worker. In John, Jesus approaches a guy hoping to win the race to an intermittently magic fountain where every now and then an angel flies down and touches the fountain and the first person that touches the water gets healed.

The guy in John had been sick for thirty-eight years, hoping to make it to the water before everybody else every time that demented angel made his little fly by. Jesus didn't say, "**Your sins are forgiven**" to him. He just said, "**Do you want to get well?**" and "**Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.**"

But in the synoptic gospels, Jesus says, "**Your sins are forgiven,**" and that sends lawmakers, scribes, and Pharisees into a tizzy, questioning how Jesus could claim such authority, for only their understanding of God was capable of such things, and they weren't actually doing any healing or performing miracles. These days, they would be likened to fundamentalists, Bible thumpers, and the religious right who can't stand it whenever anyone tries to have a relationship with the Divine outside of their Roman orthodoxy. Since they only have faith in their limited understanding and haven't yet realized a deeper faith in God, Jesus can feel their discomfort and decides to try and blow their tiny little minds.

In Mark and Luke, Jesus asked the men, "**Why do you raise such questions in your heart?**", but in Matthew, he says, "**Why do you think evil in your hearts?**" because Matthew didn't play. Then, just like in John, Jesus says, "**Stand up, take up your bed, and go home.**"

In Matthew, he first speaks directly to the religious folk

who want to limit the power of God to their limited understanding first. He says, "**Which is easier to say** (knowing that this type of person always takes the easy route), **'Your sins are forgiven' or 'rise up and walk'?** **But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,**" he says to the paralyzed man, "**Stand up, take up your bed, and go home.**" If he had a mic, I'm sure he would have dropped it.

In the synoptic gospels, everybody was amazed and said, "We've never seen anything like it," and "We've seen strange things today." But John speaks of the religious folk getting even more uptight, and of course the only two healing miracles in John's gospel occur on the Sabbath.

The Jewish leaders told this guy who has crawled to a pool for thirty-eight years and who can finally walk that it's the Sabbath day and the law forbids him from carrying his mat. The guy didn't really know who Jesus was, and had no faith in Jesus per se, but when he tried to tell the zealots about the guy who healed him, telling him to take up his mat and walk, he couldn't point them to who they needed to punish for not going through them to get to God.

But later, Jesus finds the guy at the temple, and since he forgot to mention that his sins were forgiven like he does in the synoptic gospels, Jesus says to him, "**See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.**" John is a bit of an extremist, because that is just downright gangster. This guy has been dragging himself to a fountain administered by a sociopathic celestial being, continually failing at achieving his one singular goal for thirty-eight years, and Jesus says that he needs to straighten up or it will get worse.

This probably rubbed the guy the wrong way a bit because then he went to the Jewish leaders and told them who Jesus was.

In the most recent of the thousand or so English language versions of the Bible, the Mirror Bible (a work in progress), it translates what Jesus said as, "**Do not continue in your old**

distorted mindset; then, nothing worse can happen to you.”

As spiritual development has progressed since Christianity was violently enforced upon the world through seven crusades and six centuries of inquisitions, many are opening to the messages that have been hidden in plain sight for all of these years, overwhelmed by the dogma and doctrine manufactured by the Roman Empire through Paul's gospel about Jesus Christ. The more recent understandings of Jesus, divorced from the rhetoric of Paul, lead many to think Jesus could tell people they were forgiven of their sins because it is a universal truth for all of us. All we need to do is embrace the mindset to realize it.

This is also the first of roughly eighty times that Jesus refers to the Son of Man. He does not credit this experience to being the Son of God (nor does he ever), but as the Son of Man, recognizing that all of us other sons of men could do the same thing.

**I HAVE NOT COME TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS,
BUT SINNERS**

In Mark 2 and Luke 5, Jesus meets a tax collector by the name of Levi, and says, “**Follow me.**” In Matthew 9, the tax collector's name is Matthew. Both Levi and Matthew not only follow Jesus, but also throw him a banquet with a bunch of tax collectors and other colorful sinners.

Some Pharisees asked Jesus's disciples why Jesus kept such bad company, and when Jesus heard about it, according to Mark and Luke, Jesus said, “**It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**” In Matthew, he also adds, “**but go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice,**” between those sentences.

The sentence Matthew adds is a reference to Hosea 6, a chapter devoted to verbally eviscerating Israel for being such terrible sinners, as the Old Testament prophets regularly did. The

complete verse is, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”

The Mirror Bible translates Jesus’s response in Luke as, “**I didn’t come to re-define the self-righteous but those who realize they couldn’t get it right by themselves. I came to awaken ‘sinners’ to recognize their authentic identity mirrored in a complete re-aligned mind.**”

The Mirror Bible says “**self-righteous**”, and there are other versions that use the phrase “**those who think they are righteous,**” but Jesus does acknowledge that righteousness is a thing and some people have it because you can’t really have sinners if you don’t have righteous folk to compare them to. If no one were righteous, there would be no one to distinguish the sinners. To me, this is Jesus identifying his mission to minister to a particular group of people and that not everyone needed his healing from their emotional, mental, physical, or spiritual traumas.

Granted, Jesus could have been ripping the Pharisees for thinking their religiosity was righteous, when in fact, judgmental stances and arrogance were quite sinful, just as we see in many religious folk today. But Jesus didn’t come for them because they didn’t know they needed to be healed, and God can only do so much with an unwilling participant. Every person Jesus healed, and every person whose life has been somehow changed in the name of Jesus since, wanted to be healed. They wanted to be released from whatever traumas they had endured in the past that caused them to develop unhealthy habits in thought, word, and deed, and they wanted to move in a new direction.

Religious folk don’t often want to be moved in a new direction. They want to follow their traditions and cling to their limited understanding of God due to their proclivity to adhere to dogmas and doctrines that have been developed as part of their culture. Their normalcy in ritual and repetition works for them, but as Jesus said Hosea said God said, God doesn’t want sacrifices and burnt offerings, but mercy and acknowledgment of God.

Of course, the idea that righteous people exist in the world contradicts the tenets of Christianity inspired by a verse in Paul's letter to the church in Rome and followed up on the idea mentioned in Psalms and Ecclesiastes that "no one is righteous, no, not one." For those committed to complete Judeo-Christian theology, that's part of the package. Christians believe that Jesus was the only truly righteous person to ever exist, and Judaism seems to just have accepted the flaw and moved on.

However, Psalm 92 says, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree..." and I know there's more than one palm tree.

BRIDEGROOMS AND WINESKINS

In Mark 2, Matthew 9, and Luke 5, the question arose around why Jesus's disciples didn't fast like John's disciples and the Pharisees. Jesus provided a multipart answer.

First, he says, **"How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast."**

Obviously, Jesus is the metaphorical bridegroom in this particular parable, and the fact that he is actually in his disciples' presence, teaching them directly about the kingdom of heaven, is an event worth celebrating. He also knows that his time is short so they better get it while the getting is good.

Matthew's version says, **"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?"** For anyone who has ever fasted, it is a pretty mournful activity. To be able to see food when you are hungry and not be able to eat it due to some traditional ritual is not a celebratory experience. Neither is the joy of Christ in antiquated rituals and dogmas that no longer serve the revolution of Spirit.

Then Jesus said, **"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the**

garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. So, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

At the time, Jesus was probably blowing his disciples' minds with all sorts of things they'd never heard in the synagogue before. According to the gospels, whenever he was teaching, he was amazing people with his insights and understanding. As he was communicating with them about the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, demonstrating what their religion was pointing toward, Jesus was bringing new wine to old wineskins.

These days, as followers of Christ are drawn into a deeper relationship with Spirit than the Roman Empire allowed, there is an entire movement of deconstructionism as people discard the old wineskins of religious dogma and antiquated doctrines in order to experience a refreshed living faith beyond traditional beliefs. While many are taking the route of deconstruction directly into all-out atheism, there are many still who are seeking and experiencing a new spiritual adventure and a closer walk with Christ.

In the two exhaustive volumes he wrote called *The Second Coming Of Christ*, Paramahansa Yogananda offers some indelible insights into how the mind of a yogi interprets the messages and ministry of Jesus. He paraphrases Jesus as saying, “It would be foolish for my disciples to bottle up their divine wisdom of new revelations of truth in an old atmosphere of mechanical rules of popular superstitions and dogmatic codes of conduct. As new wine should be kept in new bottles, so my disciples have been given a new consciousness, a new atmosphere of spiritual living, within which to preserve their new realizations. In their God-intoxication, they are already experiencing that for which rules were made.”

Jesus was teaching his disciples about true freedom, something that religion knows little about. Although religion often offers freedom, the Latin etymology of *religare* means “to bind

again”, so although religion may offer you a sense of freedom in being part of something bigger than yourself, it is quick to bind you to doctrines and dogmas that often stunt your spiritual growth and leave you enslaved to man-made mores and traditions. While some enjoy the stability and security of their slavery, that is not what Jesus came to teach.

Luke added one more sentence to this scenario when Jesus followed up his point by saying, **“And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, ‘The old is better.’”**

Although the Spirit of Christ has still allowed the understanding of the Divine to open in people's awareness since the Council of Nicea wrote the Nicene Creed 1,701 years ago, many are more comfortable accepting those limitations of understanding rather than opening up to the actual kingdom of heaven. In the same way, many Christians today are much more comfortable sipping on the old wine of dogma and biblical inerrancy than the new wine of listening for the still small voice of Spirit in the silence of meditation.

I believe that the Spirit of Christ is still calling people toward greater understanding and that there is much new wine to be offered, but a great many Christian is drinking from old wine skins. I don't think people will have the capacity to know the many dimensions of God if they are still fully convinced that the Council of Nicea was as far as theology can go. I don't think people will be likely to hear the true Word of God if they are spending their energy trying to prove that the Bible is it.

LORD OF THE SABBATH

In Mark 2, Matthew 12, and Luke 6, there is a story about Jesus and his disciples walking through a grain field on the Sabbath. Since they were hungry, they grabbed some grain, rubbed it in their hands, and ate it. I didn't even know you could do that, but apparently the religious Pharisees were obsessing

over other people's behavior, as religious folk so often do, and they called them out for working on the Sabbath. Nobody likes a stickler, not even Jesus.

So he reminds them of this story about David found in First Samuel 21 when he was on a secret mission for the king and he asks the priest in Nob for some bread for his men. Mark says the high priest was Abiathar at the time, but Samuel says the lower priest who helped them was named Ahimelek. Anyway, all the priest has is consecrated bread, but since the men haven't had sex in a while, they are allowed to eat it.

In each of the synoptic accounts, Jesus says, **“Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?”**

Luke adds, **“Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”**

Mark says Jesus added, **“The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.”**

All three close with, **“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”**

The Ten Commandments were delivered to the people of Israel for good reason. They were kind of a wreck. They were Egyptian slaves for about four hundred years, then they got lost in the desert for forty years, and when they finally escaped, they needed a little help sorting their lives out. Eventually, they realized that they needed a lot more laws (over six hundred of them) to reconcile all of their disturbing behavior, but at the time, they had ten to get them on the right track.

After four centuries of slavery, they didn't realize they

were even entitled to a day off. Slaves don't get vacations or overtime pay either, but rest is good for people, and after all that they'd gone through, the Israelites were due for a little self-care. The Sabbath gave them the opportunity to not be forced to work and to take some time for rest and recuperation.

As is often the case with humans, we replicate what we see, and we often treat other people the way we have been treated, even when that treatment is abusive. After four centuries of being forced to work by the Egyptians, the Pharisees later took on that authoritative role and ironically, forced people not to work, at least not on the Sabbath. Just as the Egyptians were all up in their business, the Pharisees tended to get all up in everybody else's business.

In the realm of Christianity, the Roman Church spent six hundred years spreading fear, pain, torture, and death through various inquisitions, and now we see the ramifications of those abuses in the Pharisees of today. Just as the Pharisees of Jesus's day gave lip service to their religious practices yet still treated people terribly, so do we have religious folk today who claim to believe in Jesus, but treat people with utter disdain. Some is due to generational trauma, and some is due to not fully understanding the implications of their own religion.

Instead of recognizing the Sabbath as the gift from God it was intended to be, the Pharisees saw it as an opportunity to attack and abuse others, just as their people had historically been attacked and abused. While they could have fully embraced the gift that is life, and taken a day off from giving people a hard time, they decided to miss the point completely, as obsessive people often do. Obsessively religious people are still doing the same thing today.

For instance, Christians have a perfectly good Bible that some use as a means of understanding God better and opening up to a more loving way of living in the world, but many see it as an opportunity to attack and abuse, just as the Pharisees did with their limited knowledge of the Sabbath. Similarly, we might say

that the Bible was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Bible. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Bible, and the Bible should not be Lord of anyone.

The Bible can be a great tool for spiritual growth, and it can be considered a wonderful gift when used for that intention. Unfortunately, too often it is used as a weapon of misunderstanding of both God and other people. At least the Pharisees only hassled other Jewish people, whereas many Christians today attack people that don't even belong to their religion.

This is the second time Matthew says Jesus reminded the Pharisees of the prophet Hosea, pointing out that the hardness of either their hearts and/or their heads won't allow them to understand that God desires mercy over sacrifice. Just as he told them something was greater than the temple, so is the manifestation of love through us greater than the manifestation of religion through us. May we all open to God's true gifts.

STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND

Immediately after Jesus schools the Pharisees about the Sabbath, Mark 3 starts with Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath, and they harass him again. Then they started plotting to kill him. Religious people can be just impossible to deal with sometimes.

Now there are some variances in this story about what Jesus did and didn't say, but they all agree that on one particular Sabbath, Jesus walked into the synagogue and there was a man with a withered hand. Luke says it was his right one. John also has a variation to the story we'll get to later.

According to the synoptic gospels, the Pharisees were really hating Jesus at this time for pointing out how limiting and ridiculous all of their religiosity was, and they were wanting to catch him in the act of doing something good on the Sabbath so they'd have something else to bitch, wine, moan, and complain

about. In Mark and Luke, they just watched like the busybodies they were, but in Matthew, they actually asked him if it is lawful to cure on the Sabbath.

In Mark, Jesus says, **“Come forward”** to the guy with the withered hand. Luke points out that he knew the Pharisees were just waiting to have a hissy fit over something out of their control, but he tells the guy to stand by him anyway.

This particular story happens in Luke's 6th chapter but in the 17th chapter, Jesus says, after the Pharisees ask him about healing on the Sabbath, **“If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?”** How big were these wells that they had oxen falling into them? Matthew's account changes things up for a sheep falling into a pit, which seems a little more plausible, and he says, **“How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”**

In Luke, he doesn't tell them that. Instead, since they didn't ask him, he says, **“I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”** And in all three synoptic gospels, he says to the man, **“Stretch out your hand,”** and his hand was completely restored.

Moses said that God said people should work six days and then take a day to rest because that's how many days it took God to make the entire planet before he took a whole day to rest. But it also says in Second Peter that to God, a day is like a thousand years. I'm not saying that God was stretching the truth, but when you are creating the entirety of existence, you can be pretty malleable with it.

Paramahansa Yogananda called the days of creation *aeonic cycles* and that, “The creation of the earth, as also its galactic neighborhood, took untold measures of time to make it habitable for man.” He agreed that observance of the Sabbath was “time for restorative calmness, introspection, and creative thinking to adopt the best actions for an all-around existence during the coming week.” He felt that the lack of nurturing

spiritual ideals and practices was one reason the modern generation is so restless.

Yet although Yogananda encouraged his students to honor the Sabbath, he did not enforce it as a rule like the Pharisees did. As a man who valued the experience of his spirituality more than the knowledge (or lack thereof) of religiosity, he understood that, "A rule consists of a system of mandated actions initiated to produce certain physical or mental results. For the most part, they are conditioned by time and the social and evolutionary state of man. Hence they are variable in accordance with man's environmental changes. Physical, hygienic, social, mental, and spiritual disciplines were temporarily or permanently engendered to suit the development of man and civilization. With due regard to the impeccable essence of Truth in God's universal laws of righteousness that rules are formulated to uphold, dictum may have to be modified and diversely applied according to the changing needs of man with changing times and cultures."

For instance, as the Israelites were coming out of their time in the desert, the Ten Commandments were very helpful in getting them moving in a positive direction after four hundred and forty years of miserable living, but they're not really going to serve the needs of the present culture by posting them in the courtrooms or classrooms.

Just one more point... in each of the synoptic gospels, Jesus tells the man to stretch out his withered hand in order for it to be healed. Jesus never healed unsuspecting bystanders. In most every story about Jesus healing someone, whether on the Sabbath or not, the person either asked him or exhibited some behavior of initiative, even if Jesus had to prompt them to do it. So it is as we are healed from our anger, ignorance, judgment, and fear. While God will provide the majority of the work in manifesting whatever miracle we may be opening to, as the Creator has already provided us with hearts, minds, bodies, strength, and every little particular of this existence we are experiencing, we've got to put in a little initiative in opening to love, understanding, forgiveness, and

peace, and live out how we want God to show up in our lives.

HOW CAN SATAN DRIVE OUT SATAN?

According to Mark 3, after Jesus has a naming ceremony for his top twelve disciples, he goes to a house and it's so filled with people, they don't even have time or space to eat. Then, his family shows up, giving him all kinds of grief by telling people that he's crazy. There's just nothing quite like family, is there?

Then, the teachers of the law from Jerusalem, thinking they're all that, they say that he's possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, also affectionately known as "lord of the flies" and the "dung god". Beelzebub was a god the Philistines blamed for everything, and this was absolutely not a compliment.

Any god you can blame for something going wrong in your life, especially the bad choices you make, is an adversarial spirit popularly known as *satan*, since the root word means 'adversary'. As Christian mythology evolved, an actual character by this name was introduced into the narrative, and morphed into a number of other characters, like Lucifer and the Devil, God's supposed nemesis, but here, Mark says Jesus refers to Satan as a character in a parable, not an actual person.

Imagine the Source of all creation as pure Light. As matter emanates into form, a shadow is created from whence darkness is born, all that is farthest from the Light. This is the essence of the adversary, as Satan draws us into lower vibration where our shadows overpower our light.

Although they said he was possessed by Beelzebub, Jesus answers with a question, **"How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the**

strong man's house. Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

Jesus was a pretty good-natured kind of guy, and he shows here that he can certainly take a joke, or even an insult, even though most of his followers don't seem to be able to. Jesus knew his time on earth was temporary and people accepting him wasn't as important as people accepting the Holy Spirit, which flows through all space and time.

In Matthew's version, it goes a little differently.

After the bit about Satan, Jesus says, "If I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by who do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Then he goes into his bit about robbing the strong man, and expands on the power of the Holy Spirit.

He says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Jesus doesn't seem too concerned with proving his lordship over anybody, and since he usually refers to himself as the Son of Man, as a living example of all the good, the true, and the beautiful that can be born from man, he doesn't seem very intent on having people call his name, and even goes so far as to say that you can say whatever you want about him. I don't want to spoil the ending of the story for you, but he even allows himself to be beaten, spit upon, and nailed to a cross without complaining at all, yet he still wasn't going to stand for people bad-mouthing the Spirit of Life that allowed him the power to perform miracles and

infuse the world with the life we are experiencing in this eternal now.

I also find it interesting that Jesus says, “**either in this age or in the age to come,**” and I wonder if he was referring to the astrological ages. Matthew is the only gospel to mention the Magi who came to visit Jesus when he was a child, and I wonder if these stargazers influenced his knowledge of the age of Pisces he was beginning and the age of Aquarius we are now shifting into. I find it comforting to know that Jesus wasn't as obsessed about what people thought about him as a lot of his followers have been because I think there are a lot of people in the world that don't want to be Christian because they don't want to be around Christians, but they love to connect with the Spirit of God.

As we move into this new age of Aquarius, as people have expanded their understanding of God beyond the limitations of Roman theology, the Spirit is opening up to people in all sorts of ways as they are connecting with the kingdom of heaven within that Jesus taught about in his gospel. Of course, there are several religious folks saying that all the divine goodness people are allowing to flow into and through their lives is all deception crafted by Satan. Even since Jesus's times, religious folks have often been completely obsessed with drawing out the powers of darkness as their faith withers in the shadow of their man-made doctrines and dogmas.

YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUIT

Then Matthew says Jesus said, “**Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell**

you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

In the Bibles I read, ‘**day of judgment**’ is NOT capitalized so I don't think Jesus is referring to the mythological Judgment Day that has spawned from Christian mythos since this encounter. Although the concept of reincarnation is not a primary doctrine of Judaism, there is a notion known as *gilgul neshamot* among the mystic traditions of Hasidic Judaism and Kabbalah that refers to the cycle of souls as they are offered opportunities for rectification for wrongdoings and the ability to achieve a soul's potential. The Hindu tradition is a bit different, but I don't think Jesus was averse to the concept, although Roman American Christianity certainly is.

Paramahansa Yogananda described it by writing, “Increase of delusive separation from God, and consequent evils of suffering manifesting from the bad karma created by an individual's careless or willful wrong choices and actions, are the fate of those who attune their lives with the outgoing satanic force. Extremely evil individuals, who continue to pull to the farthest depths away from God, karmically draw themselves after death to dark astral spheres of nightmarish demonic horrors and conflicts - or in rare cases reincarnate on Earth for one lifetime in animal forms of suitable expression for their self-chosen evils. As animals have no free will, being guided primarily by instinct, they accrue no karma for their actions; therefore, this temporary devolution of a degraded soul burns out some of its evil karma without the requirement of further sin.”

Many who share testimonies from near-death experiences, where their body died and their souls got a glimpse of what's beyond death, speak of being embraced by God's love and light, but since it's only a near death experience and not an actual death experience, they get shot back into their bodies and live to tell the tale. Some of them do offer accounts of being faced

with remorse for the way they lived their lives, but obviously, since they came back to this plane of existence, no one has any stories about becoming a cow.

Nevertheless, Jesus makes it pretty clear that whatever energy you vibrate with is the energy you'll get more of. You set the tone for your vibration. The more you vibrate the energy of love into the world you inhabit, the more that love is going to grow, but if you resonate with lower vibrations of selfishness and satanic influences, the more out of sorts you will be, and the more separated you'll feel from All That Is.

In Matthew 7, Jesus says, **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”**

As I may have stated, I'm not always a huge fan of Paul, but he did have his moments. When I was a kid, on the post by the stair banister was a series of hanging connected pieces of wood with the fruits of the spirit he wrote about in Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Even if I don't always see that fruit in the lives of Christians, thankfully, I see it a lot in people filled with the Spirit from other religions and some who have no religion at all.

Luke 6 offers a long sermon with many lessons, one of which is similar to when he called the scribes ‘vipers’. He says, **“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”**

Jesus doesn't use the word "righteous" here, he used the words "good man", but that does mean, according to Jesus, that good men exist, at least one of them. I just need to point out again that Jesus didn't share the same message as Paul did to the Romans that no one was righteous. Paul gets a little carried away with himself sometimes.

Mark then says that Jesus's family showed up. It probably wasn't the same family that claimed he was crazy, but when his mother and brothers arrive, he may have had a bit of a grievance over the rest of his family treating him so poorly, so he says, "**Who are my mother and my brothers?**" and then he looks to those seated in his circle and he says, "**Here are my mother and my brothers: whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.**"

Just as Jesus was able to slough off criticisms about himself, he also recognized that his highest attachment wasn't to his ego's bloodline. His allegiance, as should be emulated by his followers, was to the Spirit of Life that allows the light of love to shine in the world. True followers of Christ let that light shine through them, and whether they do it in his name or not, you know them by their fruit.

What sort of fruit are you cultivating?

SOWING THE SEEDS

In Mark 4, Matthew 13, and Luke 8, Jesus tells the parable of the sower. John doesn't mention it. Matthew and Mark say Jesus was preaching by a lake, and he preached from a boat to the people on shore.

Jesus said, "**Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were**

scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seeds fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

Obviously, these were the early days of the Agricultural Revolution because any farmer today would tell you not to throw seeds on paths, rocky soil, or among thorns, but we live and we learn, I suppose. And then he says, **"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."**

Later, when the disciples ask him about the meaning of the parable, he says, **"The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"**

This last bit comes from Isaiah 6, when the Lord Almighty is complaining about the Israelites again. Matthew adds, **"For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes."**

In Matthew he goes on to say, **"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people (again, he says that there are righteous people in the world) longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."**

Maybe it's just me, but it seems like Jesus's parables were a bit passive aggressive at times. I mean, I get it, he learned about God by reading the works of the prophets, like Isaiah, and for as much as the Lord Almighty complained about the Israelites, Jesus probably had a bit of a bad taste in his mouth. But here it seems as if he's saying that he tells parables because he knows most of the chuckleheads who follow him around aren't going to get it no matter what he says so he might as well make it a little harder to work for so those that do get it will really get it. Unfortunately,

nobody gets it, and even his disciples have to ask him to explain it to them.

In private, Jesus says to his disciples, **“Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”** Matthew and Luke don't mention this particular interaction, but Mark only offers three more parables before getting back to miracles.

Then, in all three books, Jesus breaks down the parable, **“The Farmer sows the word** (here, the Greek word for “word” is *logos*, which means “truth”). **Some people are like seeds along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sewn in them.”**

It should be noted that Mark says **“Satan”**, Matthew says **“the evil one”** and Luke says **“the devil”**. The Greek words used, respectively, are *satanism*, which means “adversary”, *hopaneros*, which means “the wicked one” (and is later used by Jesus when he is teaching the Lord's Prayer and says “deliver us from evil”), and *diabolis*, which means “slanderer” or “accuser” (and is also used in both Matthew and Luke when Jesus is tempted by “the devil”).

However you may describe it, there is a darkness in the human soul that draws us away from the light of God, the truth of our being, and though many are offered a glimpse of that truth as they travel their unbroken path, the darkness within them often overpowers it. We should also consider that the talk of Satan or a devil or some entity outside of us taking truth from us is a parable within a parable. Although he is a character in this story, and would later turn up in cartoons as the imp of temptation that sits on our shoulder and whispers in our ear, the devil is ultimately the voice in our heads telling us we are separate from God

“Others,” Jesus continues, **“like seeds sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”**

Spiritual development requires a bit of work on the part

of the devotee. Even for those seeking to be healed by Jesus, he always demanded they take some sort of initiative in order for him to perform a miracle. Sometimes, that initiative can be more work than people want to invest, and if they haven't ever really felt a deep spiritual connection, they are not as likely to pursue it further or make a practice of it.

“Still others,” Jesus continues, **“like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”**

There are a lot of people who are so concerned with material pursuits that they don't have any concept of spiritual development whatsoever. Some people have so little that they feel like they are all on their own while others are so deluded by narcissism that they only look out for themselves. Either way, they don't have the capacity to entertain much truth in their spiritual lives.

“Others,” Jesus concludes, **“like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop - some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”**

Generally, in Roman American Christianity, the Bible is referred to as the “Word of God”, the same title that John gives to Jesus. It gets a little confusing. Sometimes, when referring to this story, I've even heard it said that the “word” (*logos*) that is being spread in this parable is the “Word of God”, the Bible, a collection of selected scriptures that would come into harmony five hundred years after this story was being told. I don't think that's what Jesus had in mind.

Jesus lived in a very binary world of good and evil and certainly didn't find much information about the spectrum of human consciousness in the scriptures he was studying. At the time this parable was told, the Bible didn't exist, and wouldn't for a few more centuries, so referring to the Bible as the eternal Word of God is not really accurate. The word, the *logos*, the Truth Jesus is talking about is that direct connection to the Source of our

existence and communion with the Spirit of Life.

Jesus also makes a pretty big deal about what comes out of our mouths and the power of the word. Now, it's not a capitalized "Word" as starts the book of John, where the Greek word *logos* represents "truth", the truth of Spirit or Christ, the essence of life and the kingdom of heaven. Here in Matthew, the word to describe "word" is *rhema*, which refers to more of a verbal utterance. *Logos* is the inner truth, while *rhema* is outward expression. What we hold in our hearts as *logos* will be expressed as *rhema*, so the more we dwell on the good, the true, and the beautiful, the more we will be expressions of that.

Obviously, the Bible can be used as a tool to cultivate our relationship with truth, as I am attempting to do now, but as we have seen with the malignant hatred often spread through "Bible-based" religion, it can also be a detriment. To hear the word of Spirit requires silence, and sometimes the Bible, or any scriptures, are just a bit too noisy.

If meditation is not part of your spiritual practice, and you are not taking time to listen to the word within, you may not have as much of a spiritual practice as you might think. But practice does make perfect, and spending time in the cultivation of spiritual connection with the Divine prepares us for abundance - emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

**WITH THE MEASURE YOU USE,
IT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU**

In Mark 4 and Luke 8, Jesus continues with his message. He says, **"Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."**

Matthew has a version of this in chapter 5, but in chapter

13, he follows up the parable of the sower similarly to how Mark and Luke continue. In response to the disciples' question about why Jesus teaches in parables, he says in Matthew, **“Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”**

Jesus realized that the people following him around were not necessarily deep thinkers. The intensity of the private teachings he offered his disciples could not be fully communicated through sermons or stories. The parables he shared offered introductions into his ideas, and those who were intrigued could dig deeper to find out more, while those who were confused would continue on in their confusion, much like they do now.

Mark says he phrases it as, **“Consider carefully what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more,”** and Luke says, **“Whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them.”**

Just as the measures we take to connect with the kingdom of heaven get measured back to us, so are we also measured by our relationships to others. Especially when we are critical of others about their place on this unbroken path of spiritual connection, we can lose our own place along the path.

In Matthew 7, Jesus begins, **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**

Here, Jesus subtly demonstrates that judgment and condemnation come from humans and not from God. He says that the reason we are judged and condemned is because we judge and condemn. He says we also have the power to forgive, and that is how we will find forgiveness for ourselves.

Matthew 7 and Luke 6 also share Jesus saying, **“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye. How can you**

say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Connecting with the kingdom of heaven and cultivating a more intimate relationship with All That Is requires directed thinking. It's easy to recognize the challenge in that as the Attention Economy calls us to be perpetually consuming and triggered, but it's always been a problem for our species. As Carl Jung said, "Thinking is difficult, that's why most people judge."

In Luke 6, Jesus says, **"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."**

A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over into your lap sounds about as wonderful as Waffle House hash browns, covered, smothered, diced and chunked. By humbly recognizing our place in our spiritual growth and not judging others for theirs, we are more able to fully enjoy our place in the journey. We must realize we are all simply experiencing different perspectives of the same Unbroken Path we all share.

YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH

When Matthew talks about putting the light under a bowl, it's during what is now called the "Sermon on the Mount". But before he goes back to the metaphor of light, he has a few things to say about saltiness and stumbling.

Jesus said, **"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again. It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and**

trampled under foot.”

In Luke, he says, **“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.”**

Salt adds flavor to food as the soul’s connection with the Divine adds flavor to life. If you identify as a child of God and do not spend time cultivating that connection so that you can fully feel the kingdom of heaven within you, that relationship is going to wither, and you are not going to have much to offer to anyone.

Mark uses this salt reference in a completely different context in chapter 9, and uses a roundabout way to get there. Jesus is at a house in Capernaum with the disciples, and he takes a child in his arms.

Jesus says, **“If anyone causes one of these little ones - those who believe in me - to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.”**

I don't think Jesus meant that it was okay to make little ones who *didn't* believe in him to stumble, but for those who *did* believe in him at this point, he was referring to his teachings about the kingdom of heaven. For children to be opening up to this knowledge before being spoiled by the treacheries of adulthood, learning to connect with the kingdom of heaven would be an incredibly worthwhile education. I think we should teach more children to meditate.

In Luke 17, Jesus offers his disciples a variation of what he said in Matthew 18: **“Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So watch yourselves.”**

This bit keeps a lot of people from criticizing Christianity. Having set itself up as the One True Way, although some may have doubts, and some of those doubts have exposed actual faults and fallibilities, of all the other ways, it's the only one that thrives on

the fear of punishment for not following it. Jesus mentions punishment a few times throughout the gospels, but the majority of his message is usually more about the kingdom of heaven and how to realize it within yourself than how to avoid eternal suffering after you die.

In Mark, Jesus continues, **“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where ‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’”**

The bit about the worms and unquenchable fire is a quote from Isaiah 66, when Isaiah is quoting God about the new heavens and new earth. Verse 24 says, “and they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

Just as Jesus uses salt and light as a metaphor, and uses graphic images of drowning by millstone, lopping off appendages, and plucking out eyeballs, his reference to hell here should be considered as the same sort of embellishment. While this is pretty much the first time Jesus mentions hell, and it's not mentioned at all in the Old Testament, this is not a direct threat as Roman American Christianity may have you believe. This passage is often used by Christians to support their belief in hell, the realm they think God had to create as a place for humans to go and be tortured in the afterlife, but this hell is not that.

The word for “hell” used here in both Matthew and Mark is *gehenna*, a valley outside of Jerusalem used as a sort of garbage dump. There was constantly a fire burning trash, and with the corpses that were thrown in, the worms were kept fat and happy.

But for those who stumble and lose their saltiness, as Jesus said, they should be thrown out as garbage in this place of gehenna. One can still connect with the kingdom of heaven without a hand, eye, or foot, but losing connection with the Divine is to lose the true value of living.

Regarding hell, Yogananda says, "The orthodox notion of eternal hellfire and damnation is an utterly false precept; It arises not from God or his true prophets but from man's own unforgiving wrath against the evil actions of his brethren. It is nothing but satanic delusion that makes man ascribe to the all-loving God, who is equally the Father of all, a revengeful, vindictive spirit that creates hells and purgatories. As Jesus himself pointed out, the truth is that God in His Infinite Love is helping his children continuously to come back to his eternal kingdom of Bliss."

"With graphic imagery," Yogananda says, "Jesus exhorts his followers: 'Cut away anything and everything that keeps you enmeshed in the evils of ignorance! Unless you use discriminative wisdom to become attuned to God, your life will be a veritable hell of burning unfulfilled desires and gnawing worms of fears, worries, and trouble making ungodly tendencies, which will torment you incarnation after incarnation.'"

Then, getting into the salt metaphor, Mark says Jesus says, **"Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."**

As far as being "salted with fire", Yogananda says, "Every devotee by meditation must saturate, 'salt' himself with the fire of realization, that he may be acceptable to God on earth and in the astral world. Everyone who makes a spiritual sacrifice of material indulgences for God-communion will find his soul 'salted' or saturated with divine realization. As salt bestows good flavor on food and also preserves it, so when the human consciousness is salted with divine realization it is saved from the delusion of decay and death and savors its native immortality. But if by concentrating on material pleasures and egotism the preservative

flavor of the divine salt is lost, so also is lost all goodness it could impart in the seasoning of the soul.”

In Luke 17, Jesus doesn't get into cutting anything off for making you stumble, but he does make the millstone around the neck reference and touches a bit more on what he meant about being salt for one another.

Jesus goes on to say, **“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ You must forgive them.”**

Notice that Jesus did not say to forgive arbitrarily, but only when it is asked for. Granted, as we will see later, forgiveness does free us from the weight of carrying grudges, however, repentance does play a part in releasing that burden. Then his apostles said, “Increase the faith!” The Mirror Bible translates this as, “We will need a lot more faith to make this possible.”

Suffice it to say, dealing with other people sure can bring a lot of flavor to life, and if we are to be the salt of the earth, we ought to bring good flavor.

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus went on in Matthew 5 to say, **“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

It is worth noting that Jesus said you should not only perform good deeds, but you should use them as an example to others. When Paul takes over, he'll say that works don't matter and try to minimize people's roles in their own spiritual practice, shifting to the importance of having complete faith in Jesus, which

Jesus hasn't really been pushing all that much.

Jesus continues with the metaphor of light in Matthew 6, saying, **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness, how great is that darkness!”**

Luke 11 features a similar take on this notion when he recalls Jesus talking about the light within us: **“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.”**

Yogananda discusses the inner light of the third eye: “By fixing the vision of the two eyes at the point between the eyebrows in the interiorized concentration of meditation, one can focus the positive-negative optical energies of the right and left eyes and unite their currents in the single eye of divine light. The ignorant, material man knows nothing of this light. But anyone who has practiced even a little meditation may occasionally see it. When the devotee is further advanced, he sees this light at will, with closed or open eyes, in the daylight or in darkness. The highly developed devotee can behold this light as long as he so desires; and when his consciousness can penetrate into that light, he enters the highest states of transcendent realization. But when one's gaze and mind are turned away from God and concentrated on evil motives and material actions, his life is filled with the darkness of delusion's ignorance, spiritual indifference, and misery-making habits. The inner cosmic light and wisdom remain hidden.”

In the attention economy, much of what creates our

reality is experienced by what we look at. Whatever we focus on through our screens and the world around us shapes our perspective and becomes who we are in this stage of our journey. Our power lies in our ability to decide what we will give our attention to in order to create the reality we want. What sort of light we fill our eyes with will determine what sort of light we fill our lives with.

SCATTERED SEEDS

Getting back to Mark 4, Jesus offers two more parables, both of them about seeds. The first one is singular to Mark and is not mentioned in any other gospel accounts.

Jesus says, **“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain - first the stock, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”**

Again, this was relatively early in the Agricultural Revolution, so early that they didn't even know it was the Agricultural Revolution. Suffice it to say, they still had a lot to learn. But this does speak to how much God does in the kingdom compared to what we do. All we have to do is show up and seek the presence of Spirit, and the Spirit does most of the heavy lifting.

WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?

Mark goes on to tell the parable of the mustard seed, which is also in Matthew 13 and Luke 13, but, of course, not in John.

Jesus says, **“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on Earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”**

It may seem like sitting in silence and communing with God is a little thing, just like a mustard seed, but so much is able to sprout from that investment of time and energy. When you take that time to settle yourself and connect with the Creator within, that provides the power to calm whatever mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual storms we may face throughout the day.

In Mark 4, Matthew 8, and Luke 8, Jesus is by a lake with his disciples and says, **“Let us go over to the other side.”** So they all get in a boat, and Jesus falls asleep. Then a storm moves in, the waves pick up, and the disciples start freaking out as the boat is being thrashed about so they wake up Jesus, worried that they were going to drown. So Jesus gets up, rebukes the storm, and the water calms down.

In Luke, Jesus says, **“Where is your faith?”** In Matthew, he says, **“You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”** In Mark, he says, **“Quiet! Be still!”** to the storm, and when it calms down, he says to the disciples, **“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”**

We people love to worry. All of the things going on in the world can make it feel like we are living through a storm, especially when we are actually having so many freaking storms. But Jesus says, **“Quiet! Be still!”** That may not be a glowing endorsement for meditation since Christians don't normally go for that sort of thing, but it sure does hit the essence right on the head.

If you want the storm to calm, be quiet, be still, and connect with the kingdom of heaven.

Yogananda wrote, “As soon as Jesus, with his omnipresent consciousness and the omnipotent will of God within him,

vibrated peace, the God-guided forces of nature immediately followed his example, becoming still in vibrations of calmness. It seems to ordinary persons that the elemental processes of nature are the result of the workings of coincidental blind forces without any plan. But it is evident that the harmony in nature, the routine of seasons, the mathematics of planetary order, the sustenance of life, reveal an intelligent law and cosmic plan of God by which they are governed. Only an obstinate rationalist ascribes to chance the law and order in the universe and in the tidy life-supporting generosity of this earth; the divine man consciously perceives God in everything upholding by His divine will the scrupulous laws and forces of His wonderworks."

GO!

Mark 5 starts with Jesus and his disciples getting off the boat in Gerasenes, where a man with an "impure spirit" comes running out of the tombs, where he'd been living. The man could not be contained, and even when people chained him up, he'd break the chains and go back to living in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. He came over to Jesus and said, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!"

According to Luke, the man wasn't much on fashion and didn't wear a lot of clothes.

Jesus said, "**Come out of this man, you impure spirit!**" Then Jesus said, "**What is your name?**" to which the man replied, "Legion, for we are many... and our pronouns are they/them."

Not wanting to end their time in this plane of existence, they asked Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs, about two thousand of them.

The only thing Jesus says in Matthew's account of this story, in which there were two men who were possessed, is, "**Go!**"

So the Legion make their way over into the pigs, and then

the whole passel goes running down the bank and into the lake, where they drown, sending the Legion to the next plane anyway. I feel a bit sorry for the pigs.

The pig herders go tell the story to everybody, who kind of freak out about it and ask Jesus to get a move on. But before he does, the man who was living in the caves, and is now dressed and in much better spirits, asks to go with Jesus.

Jesus says, **“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”**

Generally, people are pretty skeptical when it comes to demonic possession, but Christianity is not the only religion to recognize demonic spirits. Yogananda wrote, “a tramp soul of demonic nature is often a disembodied spirit of a murderer or other such vicious criminal or licentious person, a ‘devil’. Because of a profane disregard for the sanctity of life, his own karma condemns his spirit to a nightmarish existence in the lower spheres of the astral world, where he remains ‘earthbound’, roaming disconsolately in the dark regions of astral etheric space. Such spirits, not finding a much-desired quick rebirth, seek out and possess demented minds of persons whose bad karma attracts that particular fate. Masters who can distinguish between spirit possession and ordinary mental disorders have the power to consciously evict tramp souls from the human bodies they have seized.”

Still, I feel sorry for the pigs. I’m sure they got an upgrade in their next incarnation though.

YOUR FAITH HAS HEALED YOU

So they cross the lake again back to Galilee, and as people start gathering around him, a man named Jairus asks Jesus to come heal his dying daughter. While he’s making his way through the crowd, a woman who’d been hemorrhaging for twelve years

thought that just touching Jesus's cloak would make her well so she did, and it did.

In Mark, Jesus says, **“Who touched my cloak?”** and in Luke, he says, **“Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.”**

He finally makes eye contact with the woman, who is afraid of Jesus getting mad at her for stealing his mojo without asking, but she falls at his feet and tells him what happened.

Jesus says, **“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”**

In Mark's and Luke's account, this is where people come to tell Jairus, the synagogue leader who asked Jesus to heal his twelve-year-old daughter, that his daughter has died. In Matthew, his daughter had died before he even spoke with Jesus.

In Luke, Jesus says, **“Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”** In Mark, he just says the first part, but when he shows up at the house where people were mourning, he says, **“Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.”**

The people actually laughed at him, which was kind of inappropriate, but Jesus kicks everybody out and goes into the girl's room, takes her by the hand, and says, **“Little girl, I say to you, get up!”**

The girl gets up and starts walking around, and her parents are astonished. Then, he tells them not to tell anybody, as if the crowd of people he just ushered out didn't already know. Matthew doesn't have him asking to keep things on the downlow, but instead has the news spreading all over the region.

It's interesting that these stories both took place over twelve years. The woman had been ill for that long and the girl had been alive for that long. I wonder if it has something to do with the zodiac and the twelve ages they represent or something.

In both of these cases, Jesus was able to participate in these miracles because the people he was serving had faith that the healing would occur. In the case of the woman touching his

cloak, Jesus didn't technically perform the miracle. It happened because of her faith, as he told her it did.

However, when he went to his hometown in Mark 6 and Matthew 13, the energy was not as high and faith not as flowing. On the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue and started teaching, blowing people's minds as usual, and instead of wanting to hear more, like in every other town, they started hassling him and saying, ""Who does this guy think he is? He's just a carpenter's son. He should stay in his lane. His brothers and sisters are knuckleheads just like us. Where does he get off being all smart and magical?" Of course, I'm paraphrasing.

Jesus says, **"A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home."** And he didn't perform many miracles or heal many people because no one believed that he could.

Isn't that just like family? It doesn't matter if you're a prophet, a rockstar, or the President, your family is always there to humiliate you in order to keep you humble. I'll bet Jeb still gives George Bush wedgies.

This story goes a little differently in Luke. Jesus goes to Galilee, and the Spirit is moving. He's teaching in the synagogues and everybody loves him. Then he goes to Nazareth, where he grew up, and he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. When it's his turn to read, someone hands him the scroll of Isaiah, and he finds the place where it says, **"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 rolls up the scroll, goes back to his seat, and with everybody watching him, he says, **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**

In Luke's account, they didn't start hassling him. They thought it was amazing that he was Joseph's son, and they all had nice things to say about him. Unfortunately, it seems like Jesus's idea about a prophet not being welcomed in his hometown was a

self-fulfilling prophecy.

Jesus said, **“Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ and you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’ Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to a widow in Zaraphath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed - only Naaman the Syrian.”**

Apparently, they didn’t take too kindly to this. They drove him out of town and were actually hoping to throw him off of a cliff, but he just walks right through them and goes his own way.

This also takes place pretty early on in Jesus’s ministry according to Luke, shortly after being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. John does finally chime in on this, mentioning that Jesus went to Galilee and points out that a prophet has no honor in his own country, but he didn’t go to the synagogue, and no one wanted to kill him, which is always a plus. Instead, the people of Galilee were really nice to him because they saw him do his thing at the Passover in Jerusalem. Plus, the last time he was in Galilee, he turned water into wine, according to John, and that sort of thing makes you a lot of fans.

A royal official comes and finds Jesus and asks him to come to Capernaum to heal the man’s sick son.

Then Jesus says something very unlike the Jesus we’ve seen up to this point. Where Jesus normally appreciates it when people believe enough to show initiative in coming to him, he’s a bit more hesitant with this guy and says, **“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.”**

The guy reiterates that he would really like Jesus to heal his son before he dies, and Jesus decides the guy genuinely believes so Jesus says, **“Go, your son will live.”**

The next day, while the guy is on his way home, one of his servants meets him and tells him that his son is better, and it happened exactly when Jesus told the man his son was healed.

I don't know why Jesus jerked this guy around or why he got the folks in the synagogue all mad at him in Luke, but it may just point to Jesus being human. Although Jesus said that hometowns don't honor prophets, prophets with big visions may not feel that great about hometowns. If prophets are like any other person with big visions, we all want to get out of our hometowns, and as much as we may enjoy the occasional visit, it's always a joy to leave again.

Jesus's seeming irritability with people from his hometown wanting him to perform miracles may best be explained by Paramahansa Yogananda: "Jesus observed that since his reputation of performing miraculous cures had preceded him, most persons in the gathering around him were a little more than spiritual thrill-seekers who wanted him to demonstrate his fabled feats as if he were a spectacle in a circus. He wanted them to understand that the miracles of prophets are sacred and are enacted not to satisfy their own or others' whims, but only according to the will of God."

He also wanted his disciples to know that following him was no ordinary expedition.

TAKE NOTHING FOR THE JOURNEY EXCEPT A STAFF

As Jesus's ministry really started to get kicking, he gathered his disciples together and started sending them out in pairs to share the gospel and have "**authority over impure spirits**".

His instructions in Mark were to, "**Take nothing for the journey except a staff - no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any**

place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

In Matthew and Luke, Jesus offers a bit more direction on what they are to do as well as what they are not to do. Actually, they expanded this interchange quite a bit from Mark's version. In both Matthew and Luke, he says, **“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”**

Basically, there were a whole lot of people who needed what Jesus had to offer, and he needed some help.

In Luke, he follows this up with, **“Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.”**

Later in Matthew's version, Jesus says, **“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”**

Obviously, the reference to sheep among wolves was to prepare the disciples for the trials they were bound to face by sharing what would certainly be considered heresy by the religious folks of the time, just as certainly as revisiting the actual message of Christ today is sure to rile up plenty of modern Roman American Christians. The notion that doves are peaceful is pretty self-evident, unless you are a bug or a worm. Generally, the Judeo-Christian tradition is one of the only human traditions that doesn't have a reverence for serpents, making it out to be the ultimate fall guy in the third chapter of Genesis.

In some traditions, the serpent is seen as the power of Kundalini energy that is drawn up through the body as we rise into our full spiritual potential. Due to its ability to shed its skin, the serpent is also seen as a metaphor for rebirth and resurrection, and the *oroboros*, the symbol of a snake eating its own tail, represents the endless cycle of life through death and rebirth. It could be that Jesus was referencing the wisdom found in understanding the endless cycle so as to not fear death, or since the serpent was the one to let Eve know about the fruit of the tree

of knowledge of good and evil, he could have been letting his disciples know to be aware of the knowledge of good and evil without being drawn in by it. Whatever the interpretation, Jesus was preparing them for the worst.

Luke adds, **“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”**

Jesus had already been traveling from town to town so he was fully aware of how people would respond to what he had to share and what they would need to consider for the journey ahead. It should also be noted that Matthew and Mark have Jesus sharing these insights with the twelve disciples, but Luke has him sharing this message with another seventy-two people.

LET NOTHING BE WASTED

In Mark 6, after Jesus sends out the disciples, John the Baptist is beheaded. Jesus didn't say anything about it so we're moving on because the story that follows is featured in all four of the gospel accounts, including John, which has barely covered anything the other accounts have shared so far. The apostles come back to tell all about their adventures in spreading the message, but with all of the people around, they didn't even have a chance to eat.

So Jesus says to them, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”**

So they get into a boat to find someplace to get some rest, but people actually follow the boat on foot, and when the boat lands on shore, they are swamped by another crowd. Of course, Jesus has compassion on them and starts teaching. When it gets later in the day, the disciples suggest that the people be sent away so they can go get something to eat.

But Jesus says, **“You give them something to eat.”** He says something similar in Matthew and Luke, but in John, he asks

Philip, **“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”**

John says that Jesus knew how this was going to go, and after Philip does the math and realizes how much it would cost to feed 5,000 people, Andrew finds a boy with five loaves of bread and two small fish.

So Jesus says, **“Have the people sit down,”** and each account says they sat in either groups of a hundred or fifty. In Luke, Jesus actually says, **“Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”**

Mark doesn't mention Phillip, Andrew, or the boy, but when Jesus asks, **“How many loaves do you have? Go and see,”** they've still got five loaves and two fishes.

In Matthew, Jesus says, **“Bring them here to me,”** and he gave thanks and started breaking the loaves up and giving them to the disciples, who started passing them around among the people. After everyone had eaten their fill, Jesus said, according to John, **“Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”**

Although Jesus was demonstrating the mentality of abundance, he also demonstrated how to be good caretakers of what we have and let nothing be wasted. At the end of the day, they had twelve baskets of bread. There was no leftover fish, but to be a good fisher of men is to realize that investing in people can bring miraculous results.

It's speculated that when the people in the crowd saw the generosity of the disciples sharing food that everybody started sharing the bread they had stashed too. Whether Jesus actually manifested bread out of thin air or simply inspired people to share, it's still pretty miraculous.

John says the people realized he was the prophet, and since he knew they intended to make him king by force, he took off to the mountains for some alone time.

TAKE COURAGE

Before heading to the mountain, Jesus sent his disciples out on the boat, and when he came down, he noticed that the wind was making it pretty hard to make any headway. So he just goes walking on the water after them.

When they see him, they think he's a ghost, but he says, **"Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."**

According to Mark and John, Jesus gets into the boat with them and they make their way to the shore, but Matthew has another wrinkle to the story. In Matthew, before Jesus gets into the boat, Peter says, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water," as if it could possibly be anyone else.

So Jesus says, **"Come."**

Peter takes his step of faith, starts walking on the water toward Jesus, and once the wind blows a bit, he loses his faith, starts to sink, and calls on Jesus to rescue him, which, of course, he does.

Jesus says, **"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"**

Then, they get into the boat, the wind dies down, and the disciples say, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Yogananda has a wonderful explanation of this phenomenon, "As with the materialization of the loaves and fishes, walking over water, as Jesus did in view of his disciples, is a miracle that can be performed when one understands the electronic composition of matter and its relation to mind. A master who by actual realization perceives the entire cosmos as a dream of God, and all matter as condensed lifetronic light and consciousness, rises above the laws governing material creation and can modify any material object by his divinely attuned creative will."

"Peter," Yogananda explains, "by the power of faith and mental concentration, became momentarily attuned to the

consciousness of Christ, free from the material dream-delusion of matter. Thus he was buoyed by Divine Consciousness when he stepped out of the ship to approach Jesus. But when the violent winds shook Peter's concentrated faith with fear, his habit of beholding matter as real came back into his mind and immediately he felt his body sinking."

"By faith Jesus did not mean mere mental belief, which evaporates at the slightest contact with contrary evidence. Faith is absolute conviction; its proof lies in the intuitive knowing of the soul. God-consciousness and its unlimited powers are available to those ardent devotees who steadily develop themselves by meditation until they form an unwavering faith in the omnipotent nature of God and His manifestation in themselves."

I remember when I was younger, someone explained from a pulpit somewhere that belief was seeing a chair and believing that it will support your weight, while faith is actually sitting in it. Religion is based on belief in ideas, most of them man-made, in order to know God. Faith is actually developing that spiritual relationship. Belief is an idea while faith is an action.

YOU NULLIFY THE WORD OF GOD BY YOUR TRADITION

In Mark 7, Jesus runs up against the Pharisees again. Religious as they were, the Pharisees were real sticklers about washing your hands before you eat. As we were all told many times during the pandemic, it's a good thing to do, but back then, it was also a part of the tradition so when the Pharisees saw Jesus's disciples eating with unwashed hands, of course, they had to make a stink about it.

Jesus said, **"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; they're teachings are merely human rules.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to**

human traditions. You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) - then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Apparently, according to Yogananda, "Traditionalists among the ancient Hebrews enlarged their code governing offerings to God, a corban, to permit a man who promised to give his earthly goods to the service of the temple to thereby disavow his duty to support his parents, even though he might have made the promise of this gift to God in a fit of anger against his parents or with otherwise wicked or selfish intentions. By merely declaring 'Corban!' regarding any of his material property, he could become free from any inconvenient obligation to his parents that was otherwise demanded by law, albeit they might be destitute and his withheld goods might never be utilized for the temple."

Jesus really knew how to spin things around. The Pharisees come around complaining about dirty hands, and Jesus points out how they don't even take care of their parents. Probably because their parents were always telling them to wash their hands.

Then Jesus rallies the crowd around him and says, "**Listen to me, everyone should understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.**"

Religious folk love to harp on their many versions of "Thou shalt not", whether it be about eating "unclean" things, drinking alcohol, or keeping things kosher. However, Jesus was more concerned with what came out of people's mouths, the

things they said to other people and the way that they treated them.

According to Matthew, the disciples asked him later if he knew that he'd offended the Pharisees, and he says, **“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”**

Basically, religious hypocrites still have a role to play in showing people how not to live. Those who want to follow them are in for a rude awakening.

But in Mark, the disciples just ask him to explain his parable, such as it was. In Matthew, it's Peter who asks.

Jesus replies, **“Are you still so dull? Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts - murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”**

While Matthew lists six defilements, Mark has a dozen of them: **sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.**

There are a lot of people these days that would completely disagree with Jesus's nonchalance about basic hygiene, but his point still stands. It's not that important to God or to our own well-being to follow traditions or empty rituals. What matters is how we think, feel, and treat others.

But still, Jesus, just wash your hands. Cleanliness is next to godliness, right? Didn't one of the prophets say that?

I WAS SENT ONLY TO THE LOST SHEEP OF ISRAEL

Then, Matthew and Mark share another story about when Jesus goes to Tyre, and was approached by a woman whose daughter was possessed by an impure spirit. Mark says she was Syrophoenician, Matthew says she was Canaanite, but Jesus just recognized she was a Gentile and ignored her plea.

When the disciples ask Jesus to send her away in Matthew, he tells her, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”**

So the woman kneels before him and asks him again for help. Matthew says Jesus said, **“It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs,”** and Mark says Jesus said, **“First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.”** Either way, Jesus is still comparing Gentiles to dogs.

Jesus was kind of the opposite of antisemitic. When Jesus refers to people as “pagans”, the Greek word most often used is *ethnikos*, which basically means “of another ethnicity”. Much like the Amish community sees the rest of humankind as “English”, to Jesus, everyone who wasn't a Jew was a “pagan”.

For someone who people think was supposed to be the savior of the world, he seemed pretty devoted to just helping the Jews. Granted, they needed it, and still do, but just the same, it may very well be that the Roman Empire's annexation of his ministry was the most blatant case of cultural appropriation in history.

The woman says that even dogs eat crumbs that fall from the table, and Jesus so appreciates her tenacity that he says, **“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.”** Mark phrases it as, **“For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”**

When the woman got home, the daughter was fine, even if

she was still a Gentile dog. I wonder if Jesus liked dogs. Compared to his own people, Gentiles were pagan, openly polytheistic, and a far cry from the people who were amazed by Jesus's teachings in the synagogue, and since Jesus probably knew that his time was limited, his focus was on getting the Jews on the right track.

As Yogananda puts it, "Let the divinely ordained children, the Israelites, be first spiritually served by me, according to the will of God. During the short period I am on earth it is not fitting for me to offer the bread of divine consciousness to any of the more materially minded peoples whose pagan beliefs seek only the miracles of physical healing, not the spiritual transformation of consciousness."

I don't want to spoil the ending for you, but ultimately, one of the last things Jesus says in the book of Mark is to, "**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.**" Granted, it wasn't in the earliest manuscripts, but it did make it in there eventually. In Matthew, he says, "**Go and make disciples of all nations,**" because the way Israel often behaves, it's obvious they just didn't get the point.

BEWARE THE YEAST OF HYPOCRISY

In Mark 7, Jesus goes from Tyre to Decapolis and people bring him a deaf man who couldn't talk. Jesus took the man aside, put his fingers in the man's ears, spit, touched the man's tongue, and looked up to heaven.

Then, Jesus said, "***Ephphatha!***" (which means '**Be opened**' and sounds just like it's spelled), and the man's ears were opened and he was able to speak.

Jesus told the people not to tell anyone, but that didn't do any good, just like the other times he told people to keep his miracles on the downlow, and they told anyone who would listen. Everywhere Jesus went, crowds gathered to hear him speak and ask him to heal them.

On one such instance, Jesus said to his disciples, **“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”** And when the disciples asked him where they were supposed to find food in such a remote place, he asked them, **“How many loaves do you have?”** to which they replied that they had seven, plus a few small fish.

This time, there were about 4,000 people, and just as when he fed the 5,000 people, he told them to sit down, said a prayer of gratitude, and started breaking the bread and giving it to his disciples to distribute. Again, everyone ate their fill, and they had seven baskets of bread left over. When they left, he got into a boat and went to Dalmanutha, where the Pharisees asked him for a sign from heaven.

Jesus says, **“Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.”** And then he got back into the boat and took off again.

Each of the synoptic gospels tells the story of the Pharisees asking for a sign, Matthew actually has two of them. The first is in the 12th chapter, which is also told in the 11th chapter of Luke.

Jesus says, **“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.”**

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus emphasized that the men of

Nineveh who repented of their material habits and awakened their spirituality in response to the preaching of Jonah would judge and condemn the generation of Jesus for not appreciating the Christ among them greater than Jonah, fully awakened in Spirit. The queen of Sheva who came from a distant land to hear the wisdom of Solomon would likewise condemn Jesus's generation for not responding to the Christ whose wisdom outshone even that of the proverbially wise Solomon. Though all souls, ordinary laymen and master alike, are potentially the same perfect images of God, their differences are manifestations of the degree of their realization and expression of soul qualities. Jesus Christ fully manifested all the qualities of soul and Spirit; the spiritual consciousness of Solomon and Jonah had yet to attain that perfection."

In Matthew 16, just a few chapters later, the Pharisees and the Sadducees asked for a sign from heaven, and Jesus said, **"When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red;' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the sign of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."**

*Red sky at night, shepherds delight
Red sky in morning, shepherds take warning*

In Luke, Jesus said, **"When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot.' And it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?**

"Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?"

People need to have their signs. They need to have some

sort of proof that what they are believing in is real because true faith is just too hard. Throughout Roman American Christianity, apologists and evangelists struggle to prove that their limited understanding of Christ, based on the miraculous stories they adore, as they stand outside the kingdom of heaven, enraged in their religious, little wars, never really knowing the power of Christ because they can't learn how to love.

In Mark, Jesus gets back in the boat and crosses again, but the disciples forget to bring any bread, except for one loaf.

Jesus says, **“Be careful. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”**

The disciples, again, don't quite get it and start talking to themselves to try to figure out what Jesus was talking about, thinking that it actually had something to do with bread.

So Jesus says, **“Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”**

“Twelve,” they said.

“And when I broke the seven loaves for the 4,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Seven,” they said.

Jesus asked, **“Do you still not understand?”**

Mark doesn't tell us if they responded, but I'm pretty sure they still didn't get it.

In Matthew's version of the story, Jesus ends with, **“How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”**

And they finally understand that he wasn't talking about actual yeast, but using it as a metaphor for their teachings and religiosity.

In Luke 12, a crowd of many thousands gathers, and Jesus

speaks first to his disciples; bringing up the yeast thing again. He says, **“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”**

Yeast is essential for making bread. It is responsible for the leavening process, but also contributes to the flavor and smell. Religious hypocrisy stinks, and the bread it offers may satiate hunger, but it feeds a greater sickness. The bread Jesus offered was baked with the divine yeast of love, and that abundance continues to rise to this day.

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Next, in Mark 8, Jesus went to Bethsaida and some people brought him a blind man. He takes the man by the hand, walks him out of town, spits on his eyes, and then puts his hands over them.

Then Jesus asks, **“Do you see anything?”**

The man looks and says that he sees people, but they look like walking trees. So Jesus puts his hands on his eyes again, and when the man looks up, he can see.

Then Jesus told him to go home and said, **“Don't even go into the village,”** probably because he still wasn't ready to draw attention to his miracle-making.

On the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, **“Who do people say I am?”** Luke's version takes place when Jesus was privately praying (in a garden in some versions of the Bible).

They tell him some say he's John the Baptist, some Elijah, and some one of the other prophets. Although not a part of our current Judeo-Christian tradition, the fact that the disciples speculated that Jesus was Elijah or one of the other prophets in a former life demonstrates that reincarnation was a plausible idea within Judaism.

So he asks them, **“Who do you say I am?”** and Peter says

that he's the Messiah.

In Matthew's account, Jesus said, **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus's proclamation that ‘upon this rock I will build my church’ had primarily an inner meaning - for Peter as an individual as well as for successive generations who would perpetuate Jesus's teachings. His singling out of Peter was in the tradition of guru-parampara, appointment of a master's spiritual successor. The commission Jesus gave to Peter and the other apostles, and all who would carry on his mission, was to attain God-contact themselves, and from that inner divine attunement to preach through the example of their lives and the lived truths of their verbal teachings.”

In all three synoptic gospels, he tells his disciples not to tell anyone that he's the Messiah.

In Luke, Jesus says, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”**

In Mark and Matthew, Peter rebukes him so Jesus rebukes him right back and says, **“Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”**

Jesus called Peter Satan because he was playing the role of adversary. Sometimes Satan comes to us as our own egos, festering negative thoughts in our minds, and sometimes Satan is revealed in other people who seek to keep us from our destinies in order to feel in control over our fates. Peter just wanted to spend more time hanging out with Jesus, but Jesus knew what needed to happen, and he wasn't having any of it.

Jesus did not identify with his body as who he was as most humans tend to do. He fully realized his existence was spiritual, beyond the realm of mortality, and that his physical body was merely an experience he was having. He wasn't inclined to protect his physical body because he recognized that it was only temporary. There is a lot of comfort in that realization.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME

At the end of Mark 8, Matthew 16, and Luke 9, Jesus gathers a crowd and says, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”**

Obviously, most Christians accept this as Jesus prophesying over how exactly he would demonstrate laying down his life for others while enduring the greatest amount of emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual suffering anyone would ever have to endure. The hope seems to be that his followers would emulate his attitude and behavior in order to withstand any challenges they may face while sharing this message of God's love for the world. Roughly 2,000 years later, too many Christians seem much more likely to cry about their victimhood under religious persecution due to people choosing other religions than actually emulating Christ.

The Mirror Bible translates it, **“Joining me in close companionship in your daily walk, involves perceiving my mission as fully representing you. Get over and done with any idea of self that contradicts your true I-am-ness! Here is how you do it: lift up your cross once and for all, by seeing it mirrored in mine! My cross is your cross. Trying to keep the self of your own making intact, is a lost cause to begin with. Losing yourself in me, is realizing that I am the source of who you are by design! This is your saving grace!”**

Yogananda gets a little more esoteric when he phrases it, "Any devotee who would attain my Christ Consciousness must by meditation rise above the consciousness of his physical self, 'deny himself,' and keep his attention constantly focused in Christ's peace, 'follow me,' even while he is daily crucified by trials and his spiritual aspirations tormented by restlessness and distractions. For whosoever will 'save his life,' keeping it familiarly identified with the body's comforts and demands, and foolishly coddle the body's unwillingness to make the necessary spiritual effort in the struggle to meditate, shall find that ultimately he will 'lose his life' of temporary joys that he sought to protect."

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus said, "**What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their soul?** (Luke says "very self")

The Mirror Bible translates: "**Here's the bottom line, how does prostituting who you really are, translate into any profit, when all you've gained is the momentary, sham applause of the entire religious world?**"

There are a lot of amazing things in this world, as well as many wonderful experiences, but nothing compares with direct connection with your Creator. Regardless of how much you may accomplish with your time and effort on this plane of existence, it's all meaningless when contrasted with realizing your identity in Spirit.

Luke says Jesus said, "**Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**"

The Mirror Bible phrases this as, "**Shame and glory are opposites! How foolish it will be for someone to exchange the glory of the Father and his celestial host of saints - this includes the entire spectrum of the prophetic word - for a fleeting sensation of the approval of the religious world of the day, by being embarrassed about me and my conversation as the Son of Man.**"

Jesus spoke much about the kingdom of heaven and how to open to it. Although religion is often recognized as a taboo conversation topic along with politics and sports, connection with the Divine should not be a conversation we discourage. If we can recognize it as beyond religion, as Jesus did, we may find a more direct path to providence

Luke says, **“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God,”** leading many to realize the kingdom of God isn't merely some place we go after we die. The Mirror Bible translates it as, **“The kingdom of God is not a future event beyond your reach. You don't have to wait til you're dead to see it; some of you standing here are about to dramatically witness what I am talking about.”**

In Matthew 16, Jesus said, **“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”**

Notice he does not say they will be rewarded for what they believed, but for what they have done. Faith is an action word.

In Mark, it's a bit more harsh as Jesus says, **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”**

Some, if not most, Christians, believe Jesus is referring to his second coming here. But he infers that some of his disciples would see it before they died. They are all dead, and no one has reported that he has come back yet so I'm inclined to believe that he's talking about the kingdom of God inside. He also could have been talking about the Transfiguration he's about to experience.

Matthew has a different version of this lesson of taking up one's cross. In Matthew 10, he continues with a phrase also used in Luke 14:26, **“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does**

not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” Matthew continues with, **“Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”**

Regarding the **“Take up your cross and follow me”** remark, Jesus may have already known that the cross would be a big part of the story he was living out, but the act of taking up the instrument of your own death and carrying it to your final act of submission is one of the most sacrificial acts one can do. **“Whoever finds their life will lose it”** means that those who seek their egoic desires will end up with nothing, **“but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it”** means that sacrificing those material cravings in lieu of pursuing the consciousness of Christ will open you up to truly living.

In Matthew, Jesus says, **“If anyone loves their family more than me,”** while Luke says, **“If anyone does not hate their family.”** Jesus wasn't using “hate” as a literal vitriolic loathing, but more used as a comparison, as Matthew states it. As we've seen, family members can be quite adversarial, and Jesus was making the point that his message and the relationship he was helping them to foster with God was much more important than pleasing their family members. He was saying that cultivating that relationship with God was even more important than their own egoic impulses or blood ties.

This was evident in Jesus's own example when his mother and brothers came looking for him in Mark 3 and he referred to his true mothers and brothers as those who do God's will.

In Matthew 10, Jesus goes on to say, **“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”**

When you invite a prophet, a righteous person, or a disciple of Christ into your presence, you are most likely going to be blessed by the experience. Spending time hearing what they have to teach and allowing them to help you cultivate your relationship with God has the potential to be a truly life-changing experience. When you see that light in everyone, your life completely changes.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

According to Matthew and Mark, six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a mountaintop, where he transfigured and had a chat with Moses and Elijah. According to Luke, it was about eight days later. Then, a voice comes from a cloud saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Although they've been listening to him for years at this point, the voice kind of freaks the disciples out and they fall to their faces on the ground. Oddly enough, they don't respond to this or ask him anything about it, but instead ask why the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first.

This is referring to Malachi 4, where in the very last two verses of the Old Testament, it says, "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

Jesus said, **"To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."**

Matthew has Jesus add, **"In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."**

And then the disciples understood that Elijah had reincarnated as John the Baptist. While Elijah may have turned the hearts of children to their parents and vice versa, Jesus, as the supposed reincarnation of Elisha, is asking people to hate their parents and will later elaborate on the division he will bring to families.

Yogananda points out the synergy of Elijah and Moses joining Jesus upon his transfiguration. As Elijah had been reincarnated as John the Baptist, Elisha reincarnated as Jesus, and they had probably shared many other incarnations together. As Moses was the spiritual leader of the Jews, so was Jesus now the spiritual leader of the Way, which would eventually transmogrify into Christianity and be stripped of its more esoteric teachings. Although the disciples could not discern what the three men were discussing, it's thought that Elijah and Moses were offering spiritual support in Jesus's upcoming endeavor.

EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR ONE WHO BELIEVES

The next day, they head back down the mountain and come across a crowd arguing with the teachers of the law, and Jesus asks, **“What are you arguing with them about?”**

A man tells him that his son is possessed, although his symptoms sound a lot like epilepsy, and the disciples weren't able to cast out the demon.

Knowing what's going to happen to him and knowing that he's getting closer to it may have had Jesus on edge, and after coming down from a literal mountaintop experience to come back to this drama obviously rubbed him the wrong way a bit because Jesus replies, **“You unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”**

When the spirit saw Jesus, the kid starts convulsing, and Jesus said, **“How long has he been like this?”**

The man tells him that he's been that way since childhood and says, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

And Jesus said, "***If you can?*** (italics mine) **Everything is possible for one who believes.**" The guy says he believes, and Jesus sees the crowd heading over so he says to the spirit, "**You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.**"

And of course, the spirit does as he's told, Jesus helps the kid up, and the disciples ask him later why they couldn't cast it out.

In Mark he just says, "**This kind can come out only by prayer;**" but he doesn't pray as we normally think of it. Jesus's life was a prayer. When Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer, he is not giving them a recitation, but a way of being, knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that his words went from his lips to God's ears

In Matthew, he elaborates a bit more and says, "**Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to the mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.**"

In Luke, Jesus says, "**If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.**"

Yogananda paraphrases this as, "To cast out the evil spirit long lodged in the afflicted boy required steady faith. When you witnessed the frightfulness of his condition and failed to heal him by one or two attempts, you disbelieved; your wavering faith was unable to draw sufficient power from the Cosmic Source of all accomplishment and healing. Through my Christ-Consciousness perception, I declare unto you that if by inner divine communion you have even the smallest seed, as a grain of mustard, a real intuitive conviction of God's power, any mountain of difficulty will be removed at your command."

I don't think Jesus was challenging anyone to actually

attempt to move a physical mountain or rooted tree. Why would anyone want to? Instead, he is demonstrating the power of intention, that although something may seem impossible, believing in the ability to do what must be done in every small task you perform wins the favor of the Divine and great forces assist you in reaching your greater goal. It's also a good idea to remember that even if you can move a mountain by faith, it's going to take a while.

In Luke 17, Jesus goes on to say, **“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won't he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”**

We also need to recognize that servitude and slavery were much more prevalent in the Bronze Age than they are in the Information Age. It was a different time of development, and different roles were required to empower the evolution we have seen. Although now we think of the idea of having servants and slaves as deplorable, ultimately, we've just started calling them employees and changed some of the conditions for the better, or so it would seem. At least servants and slaves had guaranteed housing, food, and healthcare, as meager as it was at the time.

This is also Jesus just keeping it real, and reminding his posse to be humble. Even if God uses you in amazing ways, remember that it's God using you. All you really have to do is what comes naturally for the role you're playing, but remember that it was God who wrote the role and provided you with the skills to play it.

THE FIRST WILL BE LAST AND THE LAST FIRST

Later Jesus was leading them to Jerusalem, and Mark 10 says the disciples were astonished and that those who followed were afraid. Astonishment is much easier to work with than fear, so Jesus takes the disciples to the side and predicts his death again.

He says, **“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”**

Luke says that the disciples didn't understand this and that “its meaning was hidden from them.” In Mark 10 and Matthew 20, James and John come to Jesus asking for a favor.

Jesus says, **“What do you want me to do for you?”** and they ask to sit on either side of him “in your glory.”

Jesus says, **“You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”** When they answer affirmatively, he adds, **“You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”**

Then the other ten disciples hear about this and get pissy. Jesus says, **“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Jesus did not see the role of servant or slave as shameful, but as

glorious. His whole intention was to serve, even if that meant demonstrating power over suffering and death.

Also recognize that he said his life would be a ransom for many, not all, as if not everyone needed the ransom. Jesus realized that not everyone was ready to follow his example and so he only called those who were.

Jesus continues, **“Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others - and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”**

Eunuchs are an interesting bunch. Some of them are born with congenital mutations, hermaphroditic and such, and some are physically castrated by themselves or others, but what they have in common is that they don't have much of a sex life. Sex is one of the primary drives of humanity, and eunuchs don't participate at all.

Jesus says that some people choose to live like a eunuch, and embrace a life of celibacy in order to focus on their spiritual development, leading many to believe that Jesus was also celibate. Paul would also write in one of his letters that it was his opinion that a man remain single for the same reason. Although the Roman Catholic Church enforced celibacy as a policy for its priests, it has not always worked out well.

Because people were bringing him children, in Matthew 19, Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”** Unfortunately, between the allegations of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention alone, Christianity has seemingly hindered many of them. Yet when the faith of a child is respected and honored, it can be life-changing.

In Mark 10 and Luke 18, he adds, **“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little**

child will never enter it.”

Yogananda writes, “Egotism is the surest sign of an ignorant man. A childlike humble nature in a wise man is the surest sign that he contacts God.”

Childhood is a stage of wonder, where we are always opening to new things and learning more about the world and our place in it. If we do not allow ourselves to live in the world with wonder, if we do not bring presence to the moment and allow our awareness to be expanded, we will not recognize the presence of God throughout. Children have a much greater capacity to live in that state because they don’t know all the things adults think they know.

YOU WILL HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Jesus also certainly knew a little something about humility. In Mark 10, Matthew 19, and Luke 18, a man approached Jesus (in Mark, he falls to his knees and Luke says he was a ruler) and says, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus says, **“Why do you call me good? No one is good - except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”**

Notice that Jesus does not say the man has to accept him as his personal Lord and Savior. He does not say to believe in the perfection of the Bible or to accept any sort of creed, he merely points out five things not to do and one thing to do. Basically, live your life in a way that will make your parents proud.

He also says that only God is good. He could have been being humble, or he could have been hinting at the notion that he was God. Either way, his response was the same.

When the man responds that he has followed all of those commandments, Jesus says, **“One thing you lack, go, sell**

everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

The man walks away sadly, and Jesus says to his disciples, **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”** The disciples were amazed by this, so Jesus repeats it, **“Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”**

This is a hard pill to swallow in American society, and Roman American Christianity has certainly choked on it. While the prosperity gospel has become a multi-billion dollar a year industry, the focus on material wealth has found a movement bereft of spiritual health. There is a certain freedom in being poor and having nothing you need to be responsible for, but with wealth comes attachment, and attachment in an everchanging world always leads to distress and takes our focus off the kingdom of heaven.

Yogananda says, “Attachment to wealth consists of not being able to live simply and contentedly without the luxurious surroundings and accoutrements that cater to self-indulgent desires and pleasures. However, merely because one lives in a palatial residence among material comforts does not necessarily imply dependence on them. It is not the possessions of a rich man that destroy his God-consciousness, but his mental enslavement of being possessed by his possessions. Jesus condemned the material habits of the rich man and not his wealth per se, for there are persons who have been blessed with prosperity who serve as examples of true seekers of God-consciousness, and who with Christlike compassion help to relieve the miseries of others. They utilize their good fortune in the right way.”

Then the disciples were even more amazed and asked themselves if anyone can be saved.

Jesus says, **“With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”**

It's a bit challenging to open yourself to the kingdom of

God without God being a part of it. People can work until they're blue in the face toward achieving that state of serenity and harmony with All That Is, but without acknowledging that you are part of something bigger all coming from the same Source, you're probably not going to get very far in saving yourself from the delusion you're entertaining.

Then Peter reminds Jesus of how they gave up everything to follow him.

In Matthew 19, Jesus says, **“At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”**

Although I can't speak too much to the tribes of Israel, I think Jesus was largely saying that when all things are renewed, when we have given up our attachments to material possessions and realize ourselves as emanations of God and conduits of divine love, we will find ourselves in an elevated status, ruling our own personal kingdoms of heaven.

In Mark, Jesus says, **“Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields - along with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”**

This is similar to Matthew's version, but Matthew doesn't mention persecutions. Mark is keeping it real. Yes, opening up to the kingdom of heaven within you, leaving behind all that you've known will open you up to much greater wealth, but it isn't going to be a complete cake walk, and you're bound to get some detractors among those who are still attached to their limited understanding and need for possessions.

THE SON OF MAN WILL BE KILLED AND RISE AGAIN

In Mark 9, Matthew 17, and Luke 9, Jesus predicts his death again. John has Jesus giving a lot of predictions about his death as well, but not worded like this account in the three synoptic gospels.

Jesus and his disciples are spending some quality time together in Galilee so he can teach them privately, and he says to them, **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”**

Matthew’s account is pretty similar; but in Luke, he just says, **“Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men,”** but he doesn’t mention the part about rising from the dead three days later, or that he was even going to die.

Unfortunately, according to each of the accounts, the disciples didn’t understand why he would say such a thing, and they were afraid to ask. Matthew calls it “distressed”. The disciples were just as confused about the meaning of Jesus’s death as people are today. In Mark and Matthew, this was something he shared only with his inner circle, however, in Luke, Jesus doesn’t share the prediction of his betrayal in private, but while everyone was marveling at all he did.

BECOME LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN

Then, they travel to Capernaum, and along the way, Jesus can hear the conversation they’re having, arguing about which of them is the greatest. When he gets them in private, he asks them, **“What were you arguing about on the road?”**, but none of them would say anything because they knew it was inane, ego-driven shallowness, and they didn’t want to look pathetic in front of

Jesus.

In Matthew 18, the disciples come to Jesus and ask, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" and they don't look quite as bad as they do in Mark and Luke. John never mentions the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus says, **"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."**

In Matthew 18, Jesus says, **"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."**

In Mark, he sits them down and starts with, **"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."**

And in Luke 9, he doesn't say anything about the first becoming last or anyone becoming like children, but he does add a little something not found in the other accounts. He says, **"Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."**

It's a similar theme to the first and last scenario, but still different.

Yogananda writes, "Jesus meant that anyone who is in tune with his Christ spirit, and who with wisdom recognizes and receives into his own heart the childlike heavenly qualities and guileless mentality innate in pure-hearted little ones, will dispossess his consciousness of the meanness of ego and open himself to the presence of Christ Consciousness."

Changing the subject, in Mark 9, the disciple John tells Jesus that they saw some other guy casting out demons in his name and they told him to stop because he wasn't a part of their tribe.

Jesus said, **"Do not stop him, for no one who does a**

miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward."

A much shorter account of this story occurs in Luke 9, where he just says the first and third sentiments, and doesn't mention miracles, water, or a reward. We should also consider that when Jesus says people are coming in his name that his name was called Immanuel, God with us. So it's possible that these people were not coming in the name of Jesus, but in the name of God. Either way, Jesus wasn't threatened, but his followers often were, and many still are, even after all these years.

Yogananda wrote, "Truth, like God, is one. Those who have attained real knowledge of truth through the actual experience of intuitive realization do not in essence contradict one another. However, because God-realized souls express wisdom in various modes as appropriate for their clime and time and the purpose of their mission, disciples of limited understanding lose sight of the underlying unity of truth and emphasize the superficial differences. Hence the multiplicity of religions and sects within those religions, each intent on invalidating other paths. How necessary it is that 'my way is the only way' religionists concentrate on acquiring Self-realization, that by the incontrovertible perception of God and truth the walls of divisiveness and intolerance are thrown down to accommodate the all-inclusive One Truth, which seeks a home in the shrines of every faith."

ALL ABOUT ADULTERY

In Mark 10 and Matthew 19, Jesus goes to Judea, and the Pharisees ask him if divorce is lawful. When Jesus replied, "**What did Moses command you?**", they replied that he permitted it.

Then, Jesus jumps on them.

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ so they are no longer two, but one flesh,” he reiterates. **“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”**

Probably thinking this was a bit harsh, the disciples in Mark asked Jesus about it later, and Jesus replied, **“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”**

In Matthew, the scenario is a little different in that the disciples don't restart the conversation in private. It's just one conversation in a little different order, and it does go on longer. He does offer the exception for sexual immorality, and the disciples tell him it's probably just better to not get married at all.

In Matthew, Jesus said, **“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”**

In Luke, he says, **“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”**

Yogananda wrote, “This seems to be a very drastic law to people who part from each other due to incompatibility of temper, and then decide to marry someone else,” but fortunately, it's not actually a law. It's just Jesus pointing out the importance of our intimate relationships.

“People who marry and divorce time and again,” Yogananda goes on, “never give the seeds of divine love a chance to grow on the soil of faithful commitment. The minds of such persons, being concentrated upon sex and physical attraction,

remain spiritually fallow. Hence, divorce for flimsy reasons is adulterous behavior as it focuses primarily on sexual gratification as an end in itself. Marriage should be honored by husband and wife as an opportunity for nurturing growth and an understanding through mutual exchange of their finest qualities.”

WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?

In Mark 10, Jesus has an interaction with a blind man named Bartimaeus. In Luke 18, it's an unnamed blind man, and in Matthew 20, it's two unnamed blind men. Also in Luke, Jesus is approaching Jericho, in Mark, he's arrived, and in Matthew, he's leaving. It could have been four different blind guys, but the interactions all go pretty much the same way.

In Mark, the blind guy hears Jesus is coming through and calls out for mercy from Jesus, calling him the Son of David. People rebuke him and tell him to pipe down, but the blind man just keeps yelling louder.

So Jesus says, “**Call him.**”

I imagine the Monty Python players playing out the next scene as people are trying to shout down a blind man begging for help, then switch to “Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.” So he throws his cloak off, jumps to his feet, and miraculously makes his way to Jesus. In Mark, he has to make an effort, in Matthew, they're just there, and in Luke, Jesus has him brought to him.

Then Jesus says, “**What do you want me to do for you?**” and all of the blind people say they want to see. Mark says, “**Go,**” where Luke says, “**Receive your sight,**” and they both say, “**Your faith has healed you,**” again, empowering their faith and not his actions. But in Matthew, he just feels sorry for them, touches their eyes, and their sight is restored without him saying anything. It may seem cool that he heals blind people like a mic drop and doesn't say anything, but I think Matthew misses the importance of him saying, “**Your faith has healed you.**”

THE STONES WILL CRY OUT

In Mark 11, they are approaching Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives, and he tells two of his disciples, **“Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”**

In Matthew, he asks for a donkey and its new colt to be brought to him, but otherwise, even in Luke, the request is the same as in Mark. John says Jesus just found a young donkey but it all builds up to the epic reveal that in the book of Zechariah, it says the king of Zion will arrive “riding on a young donkey, a colt no one else had ever ridden,” as if that’s an uncommon thing compared to healing blind people and restoring their sight. Zechariah also says the righteous and victorious king would take the chariots from Ephraim, the war horses from Jerusalem, that the battle bow would be broken, he would proclaim peace to the nations, and rule from sea to sea.

None of that other prophesied stuff happens here. Just a dude on a donkey.

After Jesus sent a couple of disciples to fetch him a colt, they bring it to him, put a cloak on it, and help him get on. As they’re heading down the road, people start laying their cloaks on the road so the poor little donkey won’t get its hooves dirty, and the whole time they’re singing, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

It should be noted that in Mark 11, the people also spread branches they had cut in the field, in Matthew 21, there’s a donkey and a colt, as was prophesied in Zechariah, and they cut branches from the trees. Not that it makes much of a difference as long as the donkey is good.

In Luke’s version, a few of the Pharisees thought they

were acting like fools and told Jesus he should rebuke them, and Jesus says, **“I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”**

I can't say that I've ever heard rocks cry out, but I have heard the song of God in the water moving over them.

Yogananda wrote, “The Prince of Peace, whose only battle cry could be: Victory to the Meek! rode no fiery charger amidst a panoplied army, but a gentle steed, small and serviceable to the daily ways of peace. His ‘warriors’, no ostentatious stalwarts, were only an unimposing band of selfless disciples. Verily, this king, before whom the multitudes spread their branches of palm, demonstrated once again that a son of God celebrates his dominion in weakness and lowliness of pride.”

Approaching Jerusalem, Jesus went for it: **“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.”**

Things look rather bleak for the Pharisees. Jesus rides on the donkey as people sing to him, and then he shows up at the temple, realizes how late it is, and heads to Bethany with the Twelve. Somehow, Luke says that was a prophecy fulfilled too.

The next day, as they're leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry, and, it would seem, a bit irritable for only getting the donkey and not the chariots, horses, bows, peace, or complete rule promised by Zechariah. So he sees a fig tree and starts imagining how great figs are going to taste as he's walking toward it only to realize that there are no figs on the tree because it's not fig season.

So Jesus says, **“May no one ever eat fruit from you again,”** and the Bible says his disciples heard him say it, and I assume got more than a little freaked out.

In Matthew 21, the tree withers instantly, but in Mark, they don't notice it until the next morning. When the disciples remark upon it, Jesus says, **"Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."**

The speech in Matthew is a bit shorter, and again, the order of events is a little different. In Mark, between the time Jesus curses the fig tree and the time it withers, Jesus goes to the temple courts again and starts driving out all of the people who are using it as a marketplace, flipping over the money changers' tables and the benches of people selling doves. In Matthew, the scene in the temple courts happened before the fig tree incident and probably contributed to Jesus's frustration, which he decided to take out on the poor fig tree.

In Mark and Matthew, they were selling doves, Luke 19 doesn't designate what was being sold, and since John chimes in on this story, they were also selling cattle and sheep. At that time, Judaism had been transitioning from being polytheistic, and having gods like Moloch, Baal, Elyon, and Chemosh, all of whom required animal sacrifices, to the monotheism of Yahweh, who, unfortunately, still required animal sacrifices. Suffice it to say, selling animals to be slaughtered in order to appease the gods was quite a racket, and as John had called him the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world", Jesus was having none of it.

In Mark, Jesus says, **"Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you have made it a 'den of robbers:'"** He says something very similar in Matthew and Luke, but in John, he says, **"Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"** And when the Jews asked him to prove his authority in making all of these demands,

Jesus said, **“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”**

John is the only one who makes that threat. In Mark, it takes a different tone, as it does in Matthew and Luke. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus was in the temples, and the religious folk ask him about his authority and he says something totally different.

Jesus says, **“I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism - was it from heaven or of human origin? Tell me!”**

They talk it over and answer they do not know, so Jesus says, **“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”** Paraphrase: “Here's another thing you don't know.”
Mic drop.

THE STONE THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CORNERSTONE

In Mark 12, Matthew 21, and Luke 20, Jesus tells the parable of the tenants. In Mark's version, he says, **“A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the wine press and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.**

“He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, “They will respect my son.’

“But the tenants said to one another, “This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.”

“So,” Jesus continued, “they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyards.”

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven't you read this passage of scripture: ‘The Stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

All of the uppity religious folks wanted to kill him, but because the crowd considered he was a prophet, they were afraid of what they'd do. It seems like killing people was a bit more socially acceptable back then. We still have people killing people, but for Jesus, just as with servanthood and slavery, violence just seems normalized.

In Matthew's version, there are some variances on how the tenants abuse the servants, and Jesus ends with, **“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”**

Jesus, of course, is talking about himself here as both the son and the stone. And all these years later, as the Israelites he came to serve rejected him just as they failed to heed the prophets who had come before, the movement based on his legend, has become the most popular religion of all time, even surpassing Judaism and Islam, from which it was spawned. It has certainly produced a lot of good fruit, but it's also set a lot of people up to fall, has broken up a lot of lives, and crushed a lot of hearts.

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus went on to prophesy that the Christ Consciousness, which the builders of his own civilization rejected, would be the principal stone required in constructing the temple of a heavenly life on earth... Anyone who strikes a stone with his fist is hurt through his own unwise action and not because of any desire of the stone to harm him. Likewise, Jesus warned that anyone who is foolish enough to resist consciously the unbreakable truths set forth in his teachings will hurt himself

by activating the Cosmic Law to destroy his spiritual life and delay his evolution toward salvation.”

Luke's version offers a little more interaction with the crowd and includes the last sentence Matthew shared. John, of course, doesn't mention this parable.

GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S

In Mark 12, Matthew 22, and Luke 20, the chief priests are still trying to take Jesus down. In Mark, they send Pharisees and Herodians, in Matthew, just Pharisees, and in Luke, they send spies, but they are all trying to butter Jesus up by complimenting his integrity, then ask if it is right to pay taxes to Caesar.

Jesus says, **“Why are you trying to trap me? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.”** When they do, he says, **“Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”** When they reply that it is Caesars, he says, **“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.”** The terminology differs a little from account to account, but they're pretty similar.

Then the Sadducees show up. They don't believe in “the resurrection” or the afterlife, but they come up with this hypothetical scenario where seven brothers take turns marrying the same woman and dying without getting her pregnant, and then ask him which one she'll be married to in the afterlife they don't believe in.

Jesus says, **“Are you not in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising - have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”**

In Luke he says, **“The people of this age marry and are**

given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry or be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for to him all are alive."

As Yogananda paraphrases it, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who were incarnate on earth. Though their physical forms returned to the dust of mortality, their souls are living in Me. I am Life Eternal and all things coming out of me are ever-living."

If nothing else, as long as those who have come before us are remembered, they will live with us. If they are worthy, Luke says they will accompany us in the age to come, from the Age of Pisces into the Age of Aquarius, where we may open to the living waters of Christ and infuse the resurrection of the dead, breathing new life into humanity, becoming ourselves the construction crew that builds the new heaven and new earth.

YOU ARE NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In Mark 12 and Matthew 22, one of the teachers of the law approaches Jesus and asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. In Mark, the teacher recognizes Jesus answered well, but in Matthew, he's a Pharisee trying to test him again.

In Mark, Jesus says, **"The most important one is this: 'Hear, o Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."**

In both he says, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."**

In Matthew, he just says heart, soul, and mind, leaving out strength, and the final sentence is worded, **“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

In Matthew, it ends there, but in Mark, the teacher of the law goes on to agree with Jesus about the first commandment and that to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Jesus replies, **“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”**

According to Jesus, there are no more important commandments than these two things: to love God and to love our neighbors. Living in this way puts us above the Law and the Prophets, those that came before Jesus and those that came after. Regardless of any dogma or doctrine that has been manufactured by Roman American Christianity, nothing is more important than love.

Yogananda wrote, “That system of spiritual culture whereby one learns to ‘Love God with all your heart’ is known in India as *Bhakti Yoga* - union with God through unconditional love and devotion. The *bhakta* realizes that whatever is in a person's heart, that is where his concentration is - on the thing he loves... To ‘love God with all your mind’ means with focused concentration... To ‘love God with all your soul’ means to enter the state of superconscious ecstasy, direct perception of the soul and its oneness with God... The fulfillment of the divine command to love God with all one's heart, mind, and soul is made possible by the science that enables the devotee to ‘love God with all their strength’. Yoga teaches that science.”

To love God with all your heart, mind, body, and strength is to cultivate emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health and have gratitude for these aspects of ourselves by using them in service to All That Is, the Source from which we all emanate. Realizing we all arise from this One True Source, we recognize our neighbors as ourselves so that we may see the light of God shining in them just as it shines in us.

BEWARE OF THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW

In Mark 12:35, Jesus is teaching in the temple courts and asks, **“Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’ David himself calls him ‘Lord’. How then can he be his son?”**

In Matthew 22: 41, he asks the Pharisees directly, **“What do you think about the Messiah?”** (In another NIV Bible it says ‘Christ’ instead of ‘Messiah’) In Matthew’s version, they actually reply, “The son of David.”

Then Jesus goes on to quote David from the Psalms, as he does in Mark, where the large crowd listens to him with delight, whereas in Matthew no one could reply to him and from that moment on no one dared to ask him any more questions... which didn’t last long.

In Luke’s version, people have already decided to not ask him any more questions after his response about marriage in the afterlife in Luke 20, but the rest goes on very similarly to Mark’s account.

Yogananda wrote, “The scribes and Pharisees, as likewise many Christian believers to this day, did not understand the difference between ‘Jesus’ (‘son of man’) and ‘Christ’ (‘son of God’ or ‘only begotten Son’) - between the incarnate Messiah and the infinite Christ Consciousness he embodied. Jesus’s intent was not to deny that the human body of the Messiah or Christ was as descended from King David, as both he and his listeners knew had been prophesied in the scripture; but to make clear that the all pervading Christ Consciousness could not be limited to the physical body of a son of David or any other human being. Jesus spoke to the Pharisees from his realization of the ‘Christ’. As the Universal Consciousness present in all vibratory creation, and

fully reflected in his own body, known as Jesus - and also that the Christ Consciousness was manifest to David through a vision, described in the book of Psalms.”

In Mark, Jesus goes on to say, **“Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widow's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”**

In Matthew 23, he extrapolates on this notion a bit more. He said to the crowds and his disciples, **“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses's seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”**

Religious folks had a lot more power back then, and the Pharisees tended to make life pretty hard for people. Religious folks still tend to do this from time to time but in different ways.

“Everything they do is done for people to see.”

Modern day religious folks need jet airplanes and multiple mansions, and they convince their flocks to pay for them while ignoring the homeless, hungry, sick, and imprisoned. But they sure do dress well.

“They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others. But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’; for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.”

Now they've not only got really lucrative distribution deals for the weekly broadcasts of their sermons, but also regular podcasts, as hosts and expert guests.

“And do not call anyone on earth ‘father’; for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.”

I have no idea how the Catholic Church missed this.

“Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke's version of this account was similar to Mark's other than the fact that Luke says **“Beware”** while Mark says **“Watch out,”** but they both say, **“these men will be punished most severely.”**

The New Revised Standard Version says, **“They will receive the greater condemnation.”** This could very well be referring to the afterlife of eternal torment we've come to lovingly refer to as hell, but it could also mean they'll be reincarnated as dung beetles. Suffice it to say Jesus wasn't too fond of these fellas.

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus warned his followers to be wary of those whose insincerity is displeasing to God - to him who sees the hearts of all. Jesus saw the religious hypocrites of his time as men who used their garb of holiness to obtain the money and property of widows and other naive unprotected persons. They pretended to be pious by making long prayers, which attract the attention of men but draw no notice from God. According to the law of karma, such hypocritical, speciously pious persons can have only one fate - ‘greater damnation’. That is, they will be steeped in even greater self-created delusion; the karmic consequences of their hypocrisy and wanton misuse of spiritual authority will condemn them to be far away from God.”

In Mark 12 and Luke 21, Jesus sits where he can watch people put their offerings in. After many rich people make rather large deposits, a poor widow put in two small copper coins. Then Jesus tells his disciples in Mark and to anyone listening in Luke, **“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to**

live on.”

Yogananda wrote, “There is spiritual profit in heeding the lesson Jesus’s disciples learned that day: to give unto God’s cause in a reverent spirit of selflessness, not pride. A rich man whose bequests are motivated not by devotion but by pride in his wealth will no doubt earn some good karma by benefiting the temple, but such an act does not meet the criteria of a great virtue according to Cosmic Law. It will not elevate the giver’s consciousness in God. Not activate the law of karma to yield spiritual fruits. In contrast, when a person of meager means gives to God’s cause even a few coins from a charitable heart, that offering, though small materially, is spiritually enriched and enriching.”

Being a servant of God is not about the airs you put on to act holy, but by giving every little thing you have to the spirit of service. More so than all the teachers of the law, and the way they use their perceived righteousness to take from others, Jesus saw the beauty in the poor giving what little they have. Although what we may have to give may not always seem like much, it is the power of our intention to serve that allows God to multiply abundantly.

NOT ONE STONE WILL BE LEFT ON ANOTHER

Then, in Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21, Mark says one disciple, and the others say some disciples, point out the beauty of the stones used to build the temple. Jesus says, “**Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another: every one will be thrown down.**”

In Luke, they immediately asked a follow-up question. In Mark and Matthew, they wait until later when he’s sitting on the Mount of Olives. Mark articulates that it was Peter, James, John, and Andrew asking him privately about signs that will let them know when the stones will fall, and then he really goes off.

Jesus said, “**Watch out that no one deceives you. Many**

will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains."

Luke points out that there will also be pestilences, fearful events, and great signs from heaven. All of these things have happened throughout the last two thousand years, and these days, they seem to be happening more than ever. If it brings you any amount of hope, rejoice and see them as a sign of change to come.

In Mark, Jesus continues, as he does in Matthew and Luke, **"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."**

Jesus's message was troublesome for the power structures of his time, as it is today. Although Jesus revered the Jewish scriptures, his teachings about the kingdom of heaven within providing for a direct relationship with our Creator threatened the control the religious leaders had over their congregations. The freedom offered through his words transcended the forces of tradition, and just as religious leaders today often claim a monopoly on God, the religious leaders of Jesus's day held a similar notion and were more than willing to use violence to maintain it, and Jesus prepared his disciples for the worst.

Yogananda phrases this as, "When they arrest you, do not use your calculating human reason, but let God speak through your intuition and the instrument of your voice. Let not your human ego speak, for its tongue is tied with rationalizations of personal motives; but let the wisdom of your Father speak

through your inner surrender to him. The intelligent Cosmic Vibration, the materializing manifestation of God, will drop the specific needed wisdom within your developed intuition at the time you are required to speak in defense of truth and of yourself, living for its cause.”

When we operate in service to Spirit, we don't have to defend ourselves or rely on our own cleverness. The answers we seek are made available to us as we open ourselves to it. Spirit longs to speak through us, but we have to get out of our own way.

Fortunately, Constantine put an end to the torture of Christians, although there is still a good bit of religious strife in the world. Nonetheless, what Christianity has called the gospel has certainly been preached to all nations. What is the Holy Spirit saying to the world now?

In Luke, Jesus doesn't mention the Holy Spirit. He says, **“But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”**

Making up your mind isn't just making a decision, but actually preparing your mind by practicing listening to the voice of Spirit. The biggest problem we have is our inability to listen to it. When we open ourselves to serve the spirit of God, we need not worry what we will say or do, for if we have prepared ourselves by connecting with that spirit within us, we have an eternal Source of power.

In Mark, he continues, **“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”**

Luke is a bit more direct by phrasing it, **“You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will**

perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.”

I don't know how they were put to death without a hair of their head perishing, but Jesus was known for miracles.

Matthew adds, **“When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”**

Whenever you share a new message, you are bound to have detractors, especially when those detractors have long-standing traditions. As Jesus said that a prophet is never honored as such by his family, family members are often our biggest detractors, which often makes family get-togethers gatherings of rivalry and argument. As it says in Proverbs, “A friend loves at all times but a brother is born for adversity.” And if your family turns against you, you can be sure that there will be others that hate what you have to share just as much.

When Jesus said, **“before the Son of Man comes,”** he opened up a big old, squirmy can of worms. Many Christians believe it refers to the second coming that precedes the Day of Judgment, and some think it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. But it could just mean that as his disciples make their way being heralds of his gospel, they won't run out of places to visit before he makes his way to them.

In Matthew 24, Jesus says, **“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”**

This certainly sounds like the way things are going today. Although the gospel has been preached, hate seems to abound and many feel deceived. Perhaps the end is near, and if so, what does the resurrection really look like?

In Mark, he says, **“When you see ‘the abomination that**

causes desolation' standing where it does not belong," while in Matthew, he's a bit more particular, saying, "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation'; spoken of through the prophet Daniel," and they both say, "Let the reader understand."

But in Luke, he says, "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near," saying there will be desolation, but not necessarily abomination. Then they all say, "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Mark continues with him saying, "Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again."

Matthew and Luke revisit some of the phrases about pregnant women and nursing mothers (as Jesus is pretty well known to appreciate women) and about how there will be distress. Luke points out that, "This is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written" and that people will, "fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations," and that "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled," although the other two gospels leave those things out. Matthew also points out that people should not only pray their flight doesn't happen in winter, but also on the Sabbath, because then they couldn't do anything about it. (Even though Jesus already pointed out that the Sabbath is here for men, he probably knew the Jews were still so scared of the teachers of the law that they just stand around and die on the Sabbath instead of lifting a finger to the work of saving themselves.)

Let's keep in mind that the book of Mark was written

shortly after the temple was destroyed in the year 70. Although it appears prophetic, it may be that the writer was commenting on what he actually witnessed during the destruction of Jerusalem. Either way, Judaism was changed considerably, though the Dome of the Rock would not be built on that location for another six hundred years.

THERE WILL BE SIGNS IN THE SUN, MOON, AND STARS

Mark goes on with him saying, **“If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.”** Matthew also mentions that, but not Luke. Mark and Matthew go on with, **“At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ Do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.”**

Well, he may have mentioned it ahead of time, but it appears that it happened before it was actually written down. Nevertheless, he could have been referring to another day that we’re still waiting for. It’s hard to say since Jesus refers to the past, when the Lord cut the days short, *and* toward some time in the future.

Matthew adds, **“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner room,’ do not believe it.”**

You need not go the way of suffering and seek God in the emptiness of the desert. Nor do you need to dig deeper into religious rituals.

“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.”

There are a few different schools of thought on what Jesus

meant by that, and there are some translations that use the word "eagles" instead of "vultures". Some think it is a foretelling of his own death, some think it is a foretelling of the destruction of the temple, and some get a bit more esoteric.

When life manifests something, even death, those who have need of that manifestation will find their way to it. Just as a carcass provides sustenance for the lowly vulture, or the eagle, which is known to eat carrion too, the often ignored gospel of Jesus Christ will draw those who need its sustenance as well. And when people have lost their faith and suffer from spiritual hunger, there will be those ready to take advantage of it.

In Luke, he says, **"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming in the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."**

This is sounding more and more like the way things are going now. However, they have been going this way for quite a while.

In Mark, he says, **"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."**

In Luke, he just says the first sentence and then adds, **"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."**

In Matthew, he says, **"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."**

Many see this as a reference to the second coming, and they eagerly await Jesus to actually make a physical return to the

planet in an extraordinary display, when his followers will be snatched up and taken to heaven. However, just as the wind may blow harshly from whichever direction it comes, it is still unseen, though its effects are unmistakable. Additionally, clouds are elusive and ever-changing like the thoughts in our heads, and we may very well be better off by seeking the Son of Man return to our minds than to seek him in the outer physical world.

ABOUT THAT DAY OR HOUR NO ONE KNOWS

As Mark, Matthew, and Luke agree, roughly, Jesus continues, **“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”**

It is safe to say that that generation has passed away, and no rapture was ever reported. Jesus could have been referring to the fall of the temple, or he could have been referring to a shift in consciousness. After all, he does say to lift up your head, which may be a parabolic way of thinking more clearly with the mind of Christ.

Luke then adds him saying, **“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”**

As we get caught up in the goings on of the world, it is easy to become ensnared by all the world has to offer, from carnal pleasures to drunkenness, as we seek ways to dull our senses to

what we must endure. However, when we cultivate a relationship with our Creator and seek the kingdom of heaven within us, we are much more able to resist the traps that are set for us, freeing ourselves from the concerns that plague so many others.

In Luke, Jesus said to his disciples, **“The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will tell you, ‘There it is!’ or ‘Here it is!’ Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”**

It’s interesting that Jesus says “one of the days of the Son of Man,” pointing out that there is more than just one. Jesus uses the same terminology to describe people missing the point about the kingdom of God as he does about people missing the point about the return of the Son of Man. As each of us realize it within ourselves, it does come as a bolt from lightning in the sky, but it can be a long and hard slog to get there. We all do a lot of suffering, putting ourselves through all kinds of hardships before we allow ourselves to open to true understanding.

Mark and Matthew have Jesus continuing with, **“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”**

Although Jesus is clear that no one knows the day or the hour, people have been speculating upon it for quite a while. Considering that Jesus said that not even the Son knows the day, at the time, he may not have completely understood what that day would actually be like. Then the gospels take it in very different directions.

Mark continues with, **“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back - whether in the**

evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

After the bit about only the Father knowing, Matthew has Jesus saying, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away."**

Luke shares a similar version of this and adds in more about Lot.

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all."

We are all sure to live very human lives and participate in many particularly human activities, but one day we'll wake up. One day, we will see ourselves as part of something greater. What we thought we were will be destroyed and we will open ourselves to become conduits for our higher selves. As we leave behind those things that do not serve our highest good, the past we have suffered through will have no power over us, and we will let it burn to ash.

"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a handmill; one will be taken and the other left."

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Luke's version of this is a little different. **“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife: whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”**

In Roman American Christianity, these passages are used to solidify the idea of a rapture as the second coming of Christ, when Jesus will snatch up all of those who have accepted him as their Lord and Savior and leave everyone else behind to suffer through a thousand years of Armageddon. When I was a kid, this story was shared with me through films like *The Prodigal Planet* and *A Thief In The Night*, but have more recently been reimagined through the *Left Behind* series of books and films. But in this passage, he is speaking of the Son of Man being revealed, not necessarily returning.

In that context, the revealing of the Son of Man, of recognizing who we really are in Christ, will make all of our concerns over material possessions completely and utterly obsolete. Some will get it, and some just won't.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of

teeth.”

Regarding the gnashing of teeth, the Greek word is *brygmos*, which is usually referred to as intense anger, remorse, or despair. I have heard it often used to describe the gritting of teeth to endure the pain of hellfire, yet the actual usage speaks to the pain of regret. While many Christians use it to legitimize their obsession over hell, grammatically, it's more closely akin to bitching, whining, moaning, and complaining.

THE SON OF MAN WILL COME AT AN HOUR WHEN YOU DO NOT EXPECT HIM

Then he repeats some things he said in Matthew 6, and after he's encouraged people to sell their possessions and give to the poor, he says, **“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their masters to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”**

Despite this proclamation that no one would expect when the Son of Man would return, people have been claiming they know when to expect his return for generations. Even though he said his return would be within the lives of those in his generation, and was probably a much different sort of return than most have come to expect, people still think they know when to

expect it and await it eagerly. Unfortunately, they rarely take the time to seek it within.

Peter asked if Jesus was telling this to the disciples or to everyone.

Jesus said, **“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.**

“The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows.

“But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.”

I'm curious as to what a servant needs to do in order to not get any blows. Life always has its challenges, and we all take our lickings in stride, I suppose, nevertheless, the fewer blows the better.

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, more will be asked.”

Like I said, there have been improvements in conditions since servants became employees. Employees hardly ever get beaten. Fortunately, we've managed to ease up on things like that in the last couple millennia.

Nevertheless, the point remains. If you know what you are supposed to be doing and don't do it, you're going to suffer for it, maybe not beaten by anyone, but you will beat the version of

yourself you could have been if you'd have answered the call. If you don't know what you're supposed to be doing and choose instead to do stupid, destructive things, you're going to suffer for that too, not due to the judgment of God but because you are not consciously creating the art of your life.

Whatever passions, skills, and talents you have been blessed with, put them to good use, and people will want more of what you have to offer.

SHE HAS DONE A BEAUTIFUL THING

In Mark 14, Matthew 26, and John 12, there is an occurrence that happens a few days before the Passover. In Matthew, Jesus reminds his disciples, **“As you know, the Passover is two days away - and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”**

Then a woman approaches Jesus with a jar of perfume and pours it over Jesus's head. In Mark and Matthew, it occurs in the home of a leper named Simon, but in John's version, Lazarus is there reclining at the table with everyone else. John says it is Martha pouring the perfume on Jesus's head. Mark and Matthew say that the disciples balk at the waste of perfume while John states that it was Judas Iscariot who points out the waste and states that the perfume would have been better used by selling it and giving it to the poor.

In Mark, Jesus replies, **“Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them anytime you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”**

Although Matthew's version has him saying pretty much

the same thing, John doesn't go so far to memorialize the woman, but just points out that the poor will always be with us. Unfortunately, it seems as if this verse is used to accept that there will always be poor, and I think it somehow alleviates the desire to decrease poverty where we can for whom we can. Even if it's true that we will always have poor people, we don't really need them to suffer as much as they do.

In John's version, not only do the chief priests conspire again to have Jesus killed, as they do in Mark and Matthew, but they also set out to kill Lazarus due to him causing Jews to believe in Jesus, but they never actually follow through with it. The other gospels never mention Lazarus, even the incident where he is raised from the dead.

ONE OF YOU WILL BETRAY ME

In Mark 14, Matthew 26, Luke 22, and John 12, Judas meets with the chief priests and teachers of the law and agrees to betray Jesus. Luke and John point out that Satan entered Judas beforehand, and although all four gospels point out that Judas would be recompensed with money, only Matthew states that it was for thirty pieces of silver.

In Mark, on the first day of the Passover, Jesus's disciples ask him about how they should prepare, as they also do in Matthew. In Luke, he directs Peter and John to, "**Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.**" John's gospel doesn't really mention any such preparation, but the three synoptic gospels have Jesus giving the directions to "**Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.**" Matthew doesn't mention the man carrying water (only a certain man) nor the upper room.

In Mark and Matthew, as they are reclined at the table, Jesus says, **"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me - one who is eating with me."** Matthew leaves off the last bit while Luke and John don't mention this at all. In Mark, after the disciples all point out that it couldn't be them, Jesus says, **"It is one of the twelve."** In Mark and Matthew, he continues, **"One who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."**

In Matthew, Judas says, **"Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"**, and Jesus responds, **"You have said so."**

In Luke, Jesus says, **"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."**

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks for it, breaks it, and passes it to his disciples, saying, **"Take and eat; This is my body."** Then he takes a cup, gives thanks for it, and passes it to his disciples, as each one drinks from it. Then, he says, **"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."**

In Luke, he passes the cup first, then the bread, then the cup again, saying, **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him."**

As the disciples question who it might be, they start to argue about which of them is the greatest. Jesus says, **"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them called themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who**

serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves."

Jesus was pretty adamant about the idea that his followers should have hearts of servitude. Following his two commandments of loving God and others certainly helps to cultivate that skill.

"You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Then, Jesus says, **"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."**

Again he uses the word *satanus*, meaning "the adversary." Jesus wasn't about to let his disciples be spared the transfiguration that comes with facing adversity. Jesus knew, even though Peter may have been bound to fail that he would sort things out and become the leader he needed to be eventually. I think God is waiting for a lot of us to do that.

Here, Simon (Peter) speaks of his loyalty to Jesus, but Jesus says, **"I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."** This also happens in Mark and Matthew, but not at dinner. It's later at the Mount of Olives. John even mentions this, but at an undisclosed location it seems.

Yogananda wrote, "Jesus spoke of his sacrifice on the cross as the cup, and of the spiritual lessons involved in his crucifixion as the contents of the cup of sacrifice. When he asked his disciples to drink out of that cup, he did not mean that literal physical crucifixion is necessary in order to know God - nor that physical crucifixion alone bestows Christhood. To manifest his exalted state, Jesus had crucified ignorance by wisdom, restlessness by meditation, desires by renunciation, sensed

temptations by interiorization of his consciousness, hatred by love, selfishness by unselfishness, before he was ready to take on victoriously the sufferings of the cross. These are the important prerequisites to Christhood. Anyone who can crucify physical attachment by God-communion will reach the state wherein even bodily crucifixion, in whatever form, can be endured, if necessary, for God and truth."

I've heard many say Jesus was born as the Christ, and I've also heard a few speculate that he became that throughout his human journey. I think it was an amalgamation of both. Even if you were born with a destiny, you still have to walk the path to get there.

BRING A SWORD

In Luke 22, after he tells Peter that he's going to deny him three times, Jesus says, **"When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"**

"Nothing," the disciples answered.

"But now if you have a purse," Jesus said, **"take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written; 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."**

The disciples say they have two swords and Jesus says, **"That's enough."**

I don't remember this version of the story from Sunday school, but it doesn't necessarily paint Jesus as the pacifist some may think. For one, those who wage for peace recognize they may have to use defense in the process, and apparently Jesus wasn't entirely averse to the idea. Secondly, in Matthew, Jesus will later say he didn't come to bring peace, but a sword.

Jesus knew his existence would bring contention. It's not like you can walk into the world, claim to be the fulfillment of

scripture, and just assume everyone is going to completely accept that. Jesus even realized his disciples would have issues with fully accepting him.

In Mark 14 and Matthew 26, Jesus says, **“You will all fall away, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ (quoting Zechariah 13:7) But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”** Jesus not only realizes his disciples are going to scatter, but he knows his most trusted disciple is going to falter repeatedly. Jesus is forgiveness in action and lets them know where to meet him when they come to their senses.

Then, he tells Peter that he will deny Jesus three times.

WHO IS IT YOU WANT?

Then Jesus went to Gethsemane and the disciples followed. As Jesus often went to the wilderness for some alone time, he told his disciples, **“Sit here while I go over there and pray,”** according to Matthew and Mark. In Luke, he says, **“Pray that you will not fall into temptation.”**

Although Mark and Matthew state that he took Peter, James, and John with him to pray, Luke states that he went a bit further beyond them, saying, **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch.”**

As he goes further to be alone, the three synoptic gospels state he prayed, **“Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”**

When Jesus returns to the disciples, they are sleeping, and he says, according to Mark, **“Simon, are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** In Matthew, he doesn't single out Simon, and in Luke, he leaves out the last sentence about spirit and flesh.

Luke says that Jesus was in such anguish that his sweat

was like drops of blood falling to the ground. *Hematidrosis* is an actual condition where extreme stress can cause capillaries near sweat glands to rupture and blood seeps out of the skin. Knowing you're going to be killed has got to be incredibly stressful, especially when you know it's gonna hurt as much as crucifixion.

In Mark and Matthew, he goes off to pray by himself again, saying, according to Matthew, **"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."** Then, he returns to find them sleeping again and goes away to pray a third time, returning to find them sleeping again, saying, **"Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer."** Luke leaves out the second two lines, and John, of course, doesn't mention them at all.

Then, Judas arrives with the guards. According to Mark, Judas had informed the men with swords that the man he kissed would be Jesus and they should arrest him, so he goes and does so. Matthew has Jesus say, **"Do what you came for, friend,"** and Luke has him ask, **"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"** John's version has Judas just leading the chief priests with their torches, lanterns, and weapons, and bypassing the kiss.

Jesus says, **"Who is it you want?"** They reply they want him so he says, **"I am he,"** and everybody falls back. So Jesus asks again, **"Who is it you want?"** and they say again that they want him so he says, **"I told you that I am here. If you are looking for me, then let these men go,"** so that the words he's spoken could be fulfilled: **"I have not lost one of those you gave me,"** as he said in a soliloquy in John 6.

Mark, Matthew, and Luke say that one of the disciples drew a sword and cut off a man's ear while John articulates that it was Simon Peter, and even points out that the man's name was Malchus. It's a good thing Jesus told them to bring a sword.

Luke says Jesus said, **"No more of this!"** and heals the

man's wounded ear:

In Matthew, Jesus says, **“Put your sword back in its place for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”**

In John, Jesus says, **“Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”**

It is kind of funny that in Matthew, he'd previously asked God to take the cup from him, and that he was the one to advise they bring a sword in the first place in Mark.

In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, he says, **“Am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Everyday I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me.”** Mark closes his speech with, **“But the scriptures must be fulfilled,”** Matthew says Jesus said, **“But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled,”** and Luke says he said, **“But this is your hour - when darkness reigns.”**

Quite different sentiments there at the end. Mark and Matthew rejoice in the fulfillment of scripture while Luke sees the reign of darkness. One thing about Jesus throughout these stories is that he is very concerned with fulfilling scripture. Even though he's not an actual blood relative of David, unless the “virgin” story isn't actually true, he regularly remarks on how he is fulfilling scripture by quoting David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets. To be a teacher in the synagogue as he was, he did have to memorize the scriptures before reciting them, so he knew them quite well and was quick to point out when his life aligned with them.

For me, as I've read these gospels, and previously as I've read books like *The Case For Christ* by Lee Strobel and *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* by Josh McDowell, both of which point out the miniscule chances of someone fulfilling as many prophecies as

Jesus did, the prophecies don't seem like prophecies to me. Most of the time, it seems like Jesus just realizes the coincidence of living out a word he remembered reading in scripture and pointed out the synchronicity. Some of them seem sort of arbitrary and random.

Personally, whether Jesus actually made such a hard push for this or the writers of these books just really wanted to sell that point, I don't put a lot of weight into Jesus's fulfillment of Jewish scripture. As I've said, I'm not Jewish and don't consider those books as holy as Jesus did. If he was the Messiah they were looking for, they didn't embrace or welcome him, so it seems to me the point is rather moot.

But that doesn't mean that he doesn't still have something to say or an impact to make. Just because the Jews didn't choose to be the chosen people and choose to follow the chosen one doesn't mean there isn't still a choice to make. Regardless of the obsession with Jewish scripture, Jesus has much more to offer for those who look a little more closely.

Mark and Matthew say the disciples fled, and Mark even has a random young man who followed Jesus and wore nothing but a linen garment run off naked and leave his garment behind. Quite a scene.

MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

So the chief priests take Jesus before the Sanhedrin and start accusing him of all of the things they've been holding against him since the start of his ministry, and Jesus says nothing to defend himself, knowing that he's said all sorts of things that stand against their limiting religious beliefs. Finally, Caius asks him if he is the Messiah, the blessed one, to which Jesus responds to the high priest, according to Mark, **"I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."** He has a very similar answer

in Matthew. In Luke, he says, **“If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God,”** to which they ask if he is the son of God, and he says, **“You say that I am.”**

Then Mark says they accused him of blasphemy, spit on him, blindfolded him, beat him, and mocked his notion of being a fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew leaves out the blindfold, but includes the spitting, beating him with their fists, and slapping him. Luke includes the same physical violence as Mark.

In John, when the high priest questions him, Jesus says, **“I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.”** Then an official slaps him for being disrespectful to the high priest, this one being named Annas, to which Jesus responds, **“If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?”** And then Annas sends him to Caius, but John just breezes through that exchange and sends Jesus on to the Roman government, where he meets Pilate.

In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews, to which he replies, **“You have said so,”** But when asked the same question in John, he says, **“Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?”**

Since Pilate is not a Jew, he is none too thrilled by the response and asks Jesus what he has actually done, to which Jesus replies, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”**

Yogananda wrote, “In a few potent words Jesus illumines the difference between the earthly and the Divine Kingdom. Because he was one with the Supreme Intelligence governing the whole cosmos, he had no inclination to fight for an earthly kingship and its impermanent power. His consciousness

omnipresent in myriad universes with their countless suns and moons and planets, he could not even dream of aspiring to a delimited regality. Divinely humble rather than humanly domineering in his possession of supreme power, his life on earth manifested the quintessential humility of the Cosmic Sovereign.”

Pilate asks him if he is a king, and Jesus replies, **“You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”**

Yogananda wrote, “By meekly allowing himself to be crucified, which set the stage for his resurrection, Jesus would prove his immortality and that of all souls. What conceivable fascination with an impermanent mortal kingdom could prevail when one is consciously heir to the Empire of eternity? Therefore Jesus’s reply to Pilate meant that, being the ruler of an imperishable super realm, he had trained his disciples not to fight for temporal power or for the purpose of saving a perishable earthly life. By precept and example he inspired in them the supreme wisdom of sacrificing mortal life for the sake of gaining eternal life and bliss.”

When Jesus speaks of testifying to the truth, we must look to the greatest consistencies in his message, those of loving God and one another. Regardless of doctrines, dogmas, prophecies, or scriptures, the essence of Jesus's message has permeated nearly every spiritual tradition, all of them ultimately pointing to the unity we truly share. All roads, despite their detours and setbacks, lead to the kingdom of heaven, and that is not a place we can simply point to.

IT IS FINISHED

Then, in all four gospels, Jesus stops saying anything to defend himself, and Pilate is coerced into letting the Jewish people choose between releasing Jesus or Barabbas, a known

insurrectionist and murderer (depending upon which gospel you read), and they choose to release Barabbas and let Jesus be flogged and crucified.

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus is taken to the Pretorium and surrounded by a company of soldiers. In Mark, they give him a purple robe, in Matthew, they give him a scarlet robe, and in both they twist a crown of thorns onto his head, mock him, and spit on him. In Matthew, they repeatedly strike him on the head. In both, they remove the robe and return his clothes before leading him away to be crucified.

In John, he also gets the crown of thorns and purple (not scarlet) robe, and gets slapped in the face. Pilate gives the Jews another chance to release Jesus, but they demand his crucifixion. As a Roman, he says he has no legal recourse to crucify him, but they say that their law demands he must die because he claimed to be the son of God (I've not found any such law in Judeaica, but I'm not Jewish so I may not have looked hard enough). Pilate goes back inside the palace to give Jesus another chance to defend himself, but Jesus says nothing.

Pilate tells him he has the power to free him, but Jesus says, **“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”**

So Pilate takes Jesus back to the Jews at about noon on the day before Passover. They say they are beholden to Caesar, and say Jesus should be crucified, and Pilate gives him over to them to be crucified (even though they weren't the ones actually doing the crucifying).

According to Mark, Matthew, and Luke, a man from Cyrene named Simon, who was just passing through and minding his own business, was told to carry Jesus's cross for him, but John states Jesus carried his own cross.

According to Mark, Jesus was crucified at 9:00 a.m. between two rebels who insulted him just like everybody else. The guards cast lots to divvy up his clothes, and the sign above him

had a notice of his charge reading “King of the Jews”. Very similar to Matthew’s account.

According to Luke, on the way to be crucified, a number of women and other people, mourning and wailing for him, followed along the path to Golgotha. Jesus said, **“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then, ‘They will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us! and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ (quoting Hosea 10) For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”**

Luke doesn’t mention Jesus being beaten the way that he was in the other gospels which makes it a little easier for him to offer up yet more scripture regarding the way he’s feeling about now, referencing both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. I can’t imagine it would be easy to be all that plucky and optimistic as you’re being led to your death, but as dour as his prophecy seems, Jesus still seems to take things in stride.

Then, as he’s on the cross between the two criminals, he says, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** After they cast lots for his clothes and offer him wine vinegar to drink, instead of mocking him as in the other gospels, one of the criminals points out that Jesus really doesn’t deserve this treatment. As he does and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom, Jesus says, **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

This verse is often used to validate the idea of a heavenly afterlife, and I certainly do not deny that our existence beyond the experience we are having in these physical bodies will bring a release from the suffering we experience in the material world. Yet while he does assure one criminal that he will join him in paradise, he doesn’t say the other guy won’t. Just sayin’. Jesus said he forgave everybody because they know not what they do. I’m sure that covered everybody, both the crucifiers and the crucified.

John points out that the reason the guards cast lots for his clothes was to fulfill the scripture that says, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment,” as stated in Psalms, finding “prophecy” wherever it may be found.

John also states that near the cross of Jesus stood his mother Mary, his aunt, another Mary, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus sees his mother, he says, “**Woman, here is your son** (referencing the ‘disciple Jesus loved’, assumed to be John)” and to the disciple, “**Here is your mother;**” and so the disciple took Jesus's mother in.

According to all four gospels, from noon to 3:00, the sun stopped shining. According to Mark and Matthew, Jesus's last words were “**Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?** (Which means “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”), but according to Luke, his last words were, “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**”

Luke says the curtain of the temple was torn in two before he died, but Mark and Matthew say it happened after he died.

Before he died, John says that in order to fulfill scripture (again from Psalm 69) Jesus said, “**I am thirsty**” upon which they offered him the wine vinegar in a sponge. After receiving it, Jesus said, “**It is finished.**”

Because the Jews didn't want any hanging bodies for Passover, their plan was to break the legs of the crucified so they couldn't breathe and would die faster, however, Jesus was already dead so they didn't break his legs, fulfilling a Passover rule in Exodus.

According to Matthew, not only was the curtain in the temple torn upon Jesus's death, but also the Earth shook, rocks split, tombs broke open, and the bodies of many previously dead holy people were brought back to life, but they waited three days until Jesus's resurrection to come out of their tombs and start interacting with people. Some of the non-canonical gospels, like the gospel of Peter and the gospel of Nicodemus also speak to the

hours of darkness and other occurrences, however no other historical documents mention it.

**GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND
PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL CREATION**

According to Mark, after he was dead, Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus and placed it in a tomb. After the Sabbath, a few of the Marys and Salome were going to anoint the body and wondered how they were going to move the stone in front of the tomb, but when they got there it was already rolled away. Inside, they found a young man in a white robe who told them that Jesus had risen and that they should tell the disciples because Jesus was going to meet them in Galilee as he said he would, but they were a bit freaked out and didn't say anything to anybody.

That's how the original manuscript of Mark ends. However, it was later added that Jesus then presented himself to Mary Magdalene (out of whom he apparently had previously driven seven demons). When no one believed her, he appeared in a different form to two other disciples, but no one believed them either. Finally, he appeared to the eleven remaining disciples, rebuking them for their lack of faith and inability to believe that he'd appeared to a previously demon-possessed woman and two other people in a different form.

Then he said, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”**

I think that Mark was probably better off with the original

ending. None of those things sound good to me or very beneficial to humankind.

I don't want to drive out demons; I'd rather steer clear of them altogether. I don't want to speak in any new tongues, I appreciate the tongue in which I already speak. I certainly have no desire to pick up snakes with my hands, drink deadly poison, or place my hands on sick people, although I do hope they get well soon. If being a believer means I have to do all of those things, I'm leaning toward doubt.

Yogananda wrote, "This world is a place of ambiguity and imperfection; man was not meant to find lasting peace and happiness here. Rather, souls are sent on earth to slough off their delusive mortal guise and regain expression of their divine nature by learning to behave according to the teachings of such exemplars as Jesus Christ, Bhagavan Krishna, the Lord Buddha. The histrionics of life are a motion picture shown in the movie house of God; His individualized selves are the actors who have become lost in identification with their portrayals. Jesus accepted his painful role of death on the cross to show that the Earth was not his kingdom - and that for all souls the material world is not their kingdom - by proving his immutability despite the body's crucifixion. He demonstrated for all human beings their own immortality - that they too cannot be destroyed by the light-and-shadow elements of fire or sword or any other means."

**SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS,
TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE**

In Matthew, the chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate and demand that a guard be stationed to guard the tomb of Jesus because they feared his disciples would come steal the body to make it seem as if he had risen from the dead as he said he was going to do. So they sealed the tomb and stationed some guards, but it didn't really help.

On Sunday morning Mary Magdalene and another Mary go to the tomb as they do in Mark, this time not joined by Salome. They also don't bring spices and oils to anoint the body, but to just look at the tomb. And instead of finding the stone rolled away and a young man dressed in white, things get a bit more dramatic.

There's an earthquake, and an angel descends from heaven, rolls away the stone, and sits on it. His clothes are still white though. The guards seem to faint at the sight, and the angel tells the two Marys that Jesus had risen, and they should go tell the disciples that he'll meet them in Galilee.

So they go to do so and suddenly Jesus appears and says, **"Greetings."** They fall to his feet and worship him, and he says, **"Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me,"** reiterating what the angel just told them, as well as Mark's dude in white.

The guards were paid to say that the disciples stole the body, but the disciples make their way to Galilee, and Jesus shows up. Matthew says they worshiped him but some doubted, not specifying exactly how many.

Then Jesus says, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."**

While he certainly could be referring to the age of Pisces, this verse seems to serve as the basis for the concept of the Trinity, seeing God as one in three. Or three in one. Whichever.

And that's where Matthew leaves it.

WHY ARE YOU TROUBLED?

Luke's account is a little different. Mary Magdalene and Mary go to the tomb on Sunday morning to anoint the body as in

Mark, but they are joined by Joanna and a few other unnamed women. One of them may have been Salome. However, there are no guards, and when they arrive, the stone is already rolled away and no one is in the tomb.

Suddenly, two men appear to them, not just one as in Mark's account, but their clothes gleam like lightning, which was also how Matthew described the angel. They tell the women that Jesus has risen and remind them of his quote, **"The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised from the dead."**

The women go and tell the disciples and others about what they had seen, but they don't believe them because it sounded like nonsense, even though Jesus had told them that was what was going to happen. However, Peter decides to go investigate for himself, sees the straps of linen that had been wrapped around Jesus's body, and wonders what actually happened.

Later that day, a couple of people, one of them named Cleopas (considered to be the person called Clopas in John 19, married to another woman named Mary), are walking along the road to Emmaus, and all of a sudden Jesus appears, but somehow they don't recognize him.

So he says, **"What are you discussing together as you walk along?"**

Cleopas says he must be the only person who doesn't know what things have just transpired, and Jesus says, **"What things?"**

So they give him the rundown on what had happened, from him being a prophet who the chief priests conspired to have crucified to the women visiting the tomb to see angels, and that some of their companions (beyond just Peter) had visited the tomb and found it empty.

Then Jesus says, **"How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"**

Then he goes on to recount the entire history of Judaism from Moses on through all of the prophets, and they invite him to stay with them. When he finally breaks some bread, gives thanks for it, and distributes it to them, they finally recognize that it's Jesus. Then he up and disappears so they go tell the eleven remaining disciples about what they've seen.

Then Jesus shows up again and says, **"Peace be with you."**

They're a bit freaked out so he says, **"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."**

They still find it hard to believe so he asks them, **"Do you have anything here to eat?"**

They give him some fish, and he says, **"This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."**

Then he reminds them of what the scriptures actually say, **"This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."**

Unfortunately, the Old Testament doesn't really say any of that directly, but Christians have been able to find dimensions of forgiveness in the suffering servant Isaiah mentions when he is talking about Israel, and Jesus did compare his three days in the tomb to the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the whale in Matthew 12.

Then he takes them to Bethany, where he is taken up into heaven, and they go to the temple in Jerusalem and don't leave... at least, according to Luke.

PEACE BE WITH YOU

John's account, again, is very different from the other three gospels. The only thing upon which the four gospels agree is that Mary Magdalene was the first one to visit the empty tomb, but in John's version she goes alone, without any other Marys, Salome, Joanna, or anybody else. When she arrives, she sees that the stone has been rolled away and immediately goes to tell Peter and "the other disciple, the one Jesus loved" that someone has taken Jesus's body and "We don't know where they have put him!" I'm not really sure who the "we" was since she was all alone, but the two disciples head to the tomb to investigate for themselves.

Spoiler alert: the disciple Jesus loved turns out to be John, who is apparently writing this account. John runs faster than Peter and arrives first, but just looks into the tomb to see the remaining linen without actually going in. When Peter finally shows up, he goes straight into the tomb, and John eventually follows him in.

They still didn't understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead since it doesn't say that in any scripture other than the other three gospels when Jesus had told them about it repeatedly. Nevertheless, they go back to where they were staying, still unsure of what's actually going on.

So then Mary is mourning outside the tomb, and when she looks inside, she sees two angels dressed in white who ask her why she is crying. She explains that someone has taken Jesus's body and she doesn't know where he is. Then, Jesus shows up, but she doesn't realize who he is.

Jesus says, "**Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?**"

She thinks he's the gardener and says that if he knows where Jesus is, please let her know so she can go retrieve the body.

Then Jesus says, "**Mary,**" and she recognizes who he is

and calls him teacher.

Then Jesus says, **“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”**

So Mary goes to the disciples and tells them about her experience. They're behind locked doors because they're afraid of the Jewish leaders, and Jesus somehow shows up and says, **“Peace be with you!”**

He shows them his wounds, and they are glad to see him. He says, **“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** Then he breathes on them and says, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

Unfortunately, the disciple Thomas (Didymus) wasn't present for this event, but a week later, they're again behind locked doors, and Jesus shows up again saying, **“Peace be with you!”**

Then he says to Thomas, **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe,”** which Thomas does, at least the believing part; it doesn't say anything about him actually sticking his fingers into his side. Then Jesus says, **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

Then John says that Jesus continued to hang around and perform more miracles that were not written down, but if you believe in him anyway you can have life in his name.

Sometime later, Simon, Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples are by the Sea of Galilee, and Simon decides to go fishing. They all decide to go with him, fish all through the night, but catch no fish. In the morning, Jesus is on the shore, but they don't realize it's him. I'm not saying the disciples were dimwitted for continually failing to recognize Jesus or actually hear what he said, but I'm sure they helped cultivate his

patience.

He says, **“Friends, haven't you any fish?”** They say no so he says, **“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”**

They followed this stranger's advice and can't even pull in the nets because they've caught one hundred fifty-three fish. John realizes it's Jesus and informs Simon who puts his cloak back on and jumps into the water, swimming the hundred yards to shore as the others follow him in the boat. When he gets to the shore, he sees that Jesus already has a fire going with fish and bread already cooking.

Jesus says, **“Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”**

Simon drags the net ashore, and Jesus says, **“Come and have breakfast.”**

So if you are a Christian who has been trying their darndest to sell the idea of hell to every person you meet, perhaps you should redirect your energy toward the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps you should put your energy toward connecting with God in the silence of your breath instead of attacking the deluge of satanic activity in the world your mind draws you toward. When you truly wake up to who you are in Christ, breakfast takes on a whole new meaning.

TAKE CARE OF MY SHEEP

After they've eaten, and the disciples have realized it's really Jesus, he asks Simon, **“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”** (Not sure if he's referring to the fish or the other disciples.)

When Simon says he does, Jesus says, **“Feed my lambs,”** and then asks him again, **“Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

Simon says he does, and Jesus says, **“Take care of my sheep.”**

Then Jesus asks him again, **“Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

Now Simon's feelings are a bit hurt, and he says Jesus knows all things and knows he loves him.

Jesus replies, **“Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”**

Apparently, Jesus may have been letting Simon know that he was going to be crucified as well and tells him, **“Follow me!”** even though Jesus was supposed to be the final sacrifice.

Then Simon notices John lurking about and asks, “What about him?”

Jesus says, **“If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”**

Then the writer of John's gospel reveals that he lived long enough to write all of these things down, but couldn't possibly have written down all of the things Jesus did because there is not enough room on the planet for all of the books that would have been written. So apparently, Jesus didn't ascend to heaven as in Luke's account, but remained on the earth indefinitely.

Although many Christians have been trained to say that the four gospels completely agree, we have several disagreements about all sorts of things, especially when it comes to what happened after his reported resurrection. In actuality, the only two things the gospels agree upon were that Mary Magdalene was the first to go to the tomb after the Sabbath, and that Jesus wasn't there when she got there. Beyond that, there are nothing but disagreements.

Mark says Mary had two people with her and found one person in the tomb. Matthew says Mary had one person with her (also named Mary), and an angel rolled the stone away. Luke says Mary had a group of people with her and two angelic people showed up. And John says Mary was alone, and no one showed up

to explain what happened.

These are some pretty major discrepancies. I don't understand how any Christian could say that they all agree. If your faith resides in Roman American Christianity, the inconsistencies may shake your faith.

However, if we can forgive the folly of man-made ideas turned into doctrine and dogma and still see the essence of Christ in the words that he shared, and put our faith in our ability to connect with the kingdom of heaven as Jesus said we had, well then, our faith may just find renewal. If we can forgive the misunderstandings that have occurred over the last two millennia as men have used this story to bring required cohesion to our blossoming civilization, albeit through mythical fabrications and power plays, the message Christ came to share about our ability to have a more intimate relationship with our Creator and with one another is still there. If we can realize the message of Christ transcends Christianity and the idolization of the Bible, we can accept the fallibilities of the human systems and open ourselves to a deeper relationship with the Spirit of God.

But let's go back to the beginning of Matthew and see what is included in that gospel that was not included in the gospel of Mark.

MOSTLY MATTHEW

NEGOTIATING THE GENEALOGIES

The gospel of Matthew begins with Jesus's genealogy, specifying that he is a descendant of David and Abraham, listing forty generations from Abraham to Joseph, the husband of Mary. Matthew states that there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile of Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to Jesus.

Luke also has a genealogy in the third chapter, but it is quite a bit different than Matthew's. Luke begins by pointing out that Jesus began his ministry when he was about thirty years old. It says, "he was the son, *so it was thought*, of Joseph (italics mine)" Then, it goes in the opposite direction, listing forty-one generations from Jesus to David, every name completely different than the twenty-eight generations between Jesus and David that Matthew listed. The major difference starts where the authors differ on which one of David's sons contributed to Joseph's lineage. Matthew says that Solomon's seed was passed down to Joseph while Luke says that Nathan's seed was passed down to Joseph. Regardless of whether David's seed traveled through Matthew's twenty-eight generations or Luke's forty-one generations, the point is moot since, according to the story, Joseph's seed was not used in the begetting of Jesus, and Jesus has no genetic connection to David, Abraham, or anyone else on the list.

Luke's version lists seventy-six generations altogether from Jesus being the supposed son of Joseph to Adam being the first son of God. Only the fourteen generations between Abraham and David match with Matthew's version, other than Joseph, who Luke claims was fathered by Heli and Matthew says was fathered

by Jacob. It baffles me how there could be such disagreement and baffles me even more that Christianity teaches that this discrepancy is somehow inerrant and infallible.

Either way, I suppose it doesn't matter much since, if he was born of a virgin, neither of them are Jesus's actual genealogy anyway.

THE NATIVITY STORY

Matthew tells the story of Mary getting impregnated by the Holy Spirit before Joseph had even married her. He was considering the possibility of leaving her, but an angel shows up, tells him her child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that they should name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. Matthew goes on to point out that this is happening to fulfill a verse in Isaiah that said, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')." "

In Luke's version, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary in the first chapter and tells her she is pregnant with the Son of God and should call him Jesus. There's no mention of the prophet Isaiah or Immanuel, but he does say that Jesus will be given the "throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." Joseph is mentioned to be a descendant of David, but doesn't get any angelic visits in this version.

Why the angel told them to name him Jesus instead of Immanuel, we may never know, but at least they fulfilled part of the prophecy if not all of it. Technically, they named him Yeshua, much like Matthew was actually Levi, but the Greeks who eventually wrote the gospels we are left with put their own spin on things in their own language, and now most of us know Yeshua as Jesus. Some even think he had blond hair and blue eyes, and while I've appreciated the times in my life when my long hair and

beard inspired people to tell me I looked like Jesus, I'm pretty sure he was a bit more melanin-rich than me.

In the second chapter of Matthew, Jesus is born in Bethlehem, and three Magi from the East come to find the newborn "King of the Jews" because they saw his star rise and want to worship him. Unfortunately, King Herod is none too thrilled about the Messiah coming into the world to dethrone him, and all of Jerusalem was disturbed as well. So he calls the chief priests and teachers of the law together, and they inform him that the Messiah is supposed to be born in Bethlehem, as it was written in the book of Micah, chapter 5, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Matthew words this differently, but it's the same basic gist.

Unfortunately, Jesus never became the ruler of Israel so many who hold the Jewish scriptures as sacred are stuck in a sort of limbo, waiting for a prophecy that wasn't ever fully fulfilled. I suppose some Jews are still waiting for their Messiah, but they don't seem very optimistic about it at this point, at least not as fervent as those waiting on Jesus's second coming. But good things come to those who wait, I suppose.

Anyway, Herod meets with the Magi and tells them he wants to worship the Messiah too and to let him know when they find him. They follow the star, and it leads them to the house Jesus is in where they give him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Christmas celebrations tell this story with the shepherds and Magi showing up on the actual night of his birth and having a party, but since the Magi visit him in a house instead of a stable and he's called a child instead of an infant, it's safe to say this was in the first couple years of Jesus's life. Nevertheless, they're warned about Herod in a dream and go home by another route.

Then, another angel shows up in Joseph's dream and tells him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt because Herod wants to kill Jesus. Also, it will give them the opportunity to fulfill another

prophecy in Hosea where it says, “out of Egypt I called my son.” Then Herod goes ballistic and has all boys in Bethlehem under two years old killed. Matthew says this is also a fulfillment of another prophecy in Jeremiah which speaks to the “weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more,” however, considering that First Samuel has Rachel's grave in Benjamin, roughly ten miles north of Bethlehem, and that Jeremiah is referring to the Babylonian Exile roughly six centuries earlier, as with many of the supposed prophecies the gospel writers hail, to call this a prophecy fulfilled is a really big stretch.

Herod finally dies, and Joseph has another dream where an angel tells him it's safe to go back to Israel. But before he gets to Judea, he has yet another dream warning him about the new leader there so they go to Nazareth, which works out well because Matthew states it fulfilled yet another prophecy about him being called a Nazarene. Unfortunately, not only does no such prophecy actually exist in the Jewish scriptures, I couldn't even find the use of the words “Nazarene” or “Nazareth” in the entire Old Testament.

None of this happens in Luke's account except for them eventually returning to Nazareth, where Jesus was conceived. According to Luke, when Mary is still pregnant, Joseph takes her to Bethlehem to take part in the census, and she goes into labor. They couldn't find a room to stay in so she places him in a manger.

There are no Magi in Luke's account, but angels do appear to some shepherds and tell them they'll find the Messiah in a manger. They go find him and go around telling people all they have seen, and everyone is amazed. Then they take him to Jerusalem to be consecrated in the temple. There's a guy there named Simeon who had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Messiah, and when he holds Jesus, he says a nice little poem about now being able to die and tells Mary her son is going to be an iconoclast. A prophet by the name of Anna also approaches them and says nice things about Jesus as well.

Then they go back to Nazareth until they take him to Passover in Jerusalem when he is twelve and accidentally leave him there, providing the seed of a storyline that would eventually make *Home Alone* a Christmas tradition. In Jesus's story, when they finally find him teaching in the temple, he says his first cataloged words: **“Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”**

Then they go back to Nazareth again, and nobody hears anything about Jesus for another eighteen years or so.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

In the third chapter of Matthew, we are introduced to John the Baptist, who lives in the wilderness and preaches a message of repentance, claiming the kingdom of heaven is come near. John the Baptist is also mentioned in the first chapter of Mark, but is never mentioned again other than the announcement of his beheading. In Luke's account, he plays a much bigger role and is actually Jesus's cousin, but in Matthew he is a catalyst for the first taste of stuff Jesus said as an adult.

In Matthew, John the Baptist is introduced in chapter 3 as he was introduced by the prophet Isaiah: “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” He's wearing clothes made of camel hair and a matching leather belt. He had a high protein diet and a sweet tooth, and people went crazy for him. People came all the way from Jerusalem and Judea to be baptized by him in the Jordan River. I'm pretty sure people liked it when he called out the worthlessness of religious piety, and he had quite a way with words.

Getting in on the latest rage, Jesus comes to get baptized by John, but John says, and I'm paraphrasing, “Dude! You should be baptizing me, not me baptizing you. You're like *THE DUDE!* I'm just *a dude.*”

Jesus says, **“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do**

this to fulfill all righteousness.”

So John gives him a dunk in the Jordan, and when he brings him up out of the water, heaven opens up and the spirit of God floats down like a dove and lands on Jesus. Then a voice comes down from heaven saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Whereas in the gospel of John, he is not even called “The Baptist” because he doesn't actually baptize Jesus. He's never even met him. John says he started baptizing people to facilitate repentance in the hopes of flushing out the Messiah. He says that the one who sent him, which could have been God or another person who taught him the notion of repentance, told him that if he saw the spirit come down on someone and remain, it was a pretty safe bet that he was the guy everyone had been hoping for.

So when he sees it happen, he starts letting people know that Jesus is the one they're looking for. Eventually, he even says, “He must become greater; I must become less.” In John's account, John doesn't even get beheaded. He just goes to jail and fades out, never meeting Jesus and never to be heard from again.

FORTY DAYS IN THE WILDERNESS

Then Jesus decides to go on a wilderness retreat, which is something John consistently did, and after not eating for forty days and forty nights, the tempter starts messing with him, as often happens when we're hungry.

The tempter says, “If you are the Son of God, let me see a magic trick and turn those stones into bread.” Again, I'm paraphrasing.

Matthew says Jesus says, “**It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God,’**” quoting Deuteronomy 8.

In Luke's version, his reply to the devil is simply, “**It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone,’**” leaving out the

'word of God' bit and focusing only on the danger of too many carbs.

John's gospel seems more concerned with deifying Jesus and doesn't speak much of Jesus's struggles as a human. So John doesn't tell this story.

Mark's version of this story is pretty short. The Spirit sends him into the wilderness for forty days where he is tempted by Satan, hanging out with the animals and being tended to by angels. Pretty sweet retreat if you ask me.

In Matthew's version, the devil takes Jesus into the holy city and somehow convinces him to climb up to the highest point of the temple (or the devil could have just magically zapped him up there). Then the devil tells him to jump and quotes Psalm 91, which says, "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." This was certainly not the first or last time someone twisted scriptures to elicit and rationalize bad behavior. These days, it's almost considered an art form.

Jesus replies, "**It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test,'**" again quoting Deuteronomy in a paragraph that starts with "fear the Lord your God," gets into how jealous he is, and goes on to prepare them for taking over the land and thrusting out their enemies.

Luke's version of the story has the incidences of temptation in a different order, but Jesus's response here is the same.

Then, Matthew says the devil convinced him to climb a mountain where there was a beautiful view of all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, at least as far as the eye could see. It also could have been an altitude based hallucination, but the devil tells Jesus that he can have it all if he'll bow down and worship him.

Jesus replies, "**Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only,'**" again referring to the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy without quite being

a perfect quote.

For many, this passage speaks to the existence of an actual being named Satan. For others, it is a man struggling with the voice of his ego after forty days in the wilderness. Regardless of whether our adversary is internal or external, whether we are attacked by outside spiritual forces or by our tendency to sabotage ourselves through negative self-talk, we must overcome the temptation to believe we are less than we actually are. Whatever adversaries we may face, we must remember we are children of God.

Matthew says that the devil left and angels came to attend him as Mark mentioned when he cut to the chase. Luke says the devil left him until an opportune time, meaning he may come back around for more mischief later.

THE BEATITUDES

Then, Jesus begins his ministry as I've already covered with his message, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.**" He calls his first disciples, and then he just blows up. He's teaching in synagogues, preaching the good news and healing people all over Galilee. One day, when he saw how big the crowd had gotten, he retreats again up onto a mountainside and starts talking to his disciples. What follows is often called the "Sermon on the Mount", but by Matthew's description, it seems more like a private lesson for the disciples while escaping the crowds than a sermon.

Luke's version is set up a little differently. Instead of going to a mount, he goes to a level place. There are people from Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, Sidon, and the entire coastal region, and Jesus is literally on fire. People can just feel the energy off of him and just want to touch him to get a little bit of whatever he's got. Then, he looks to his disciples and begins...

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the

kingdom of God.”

One of the blessings of being poor is that you don't have to attach yourself to material things. Some may bemoan not having possessions, especially in a society like ours that venerates the ownership of private property above all things, but when you don't have anything, you don't have to worry about taking care of anything other than your relationship with the present moment and the existence that is providing it. When you are not consumed with consuming capital, you are able to open to all of the other ways that life provides.

Matthew's version says, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Those who are rich in spirit have something to fight for. Their egos have something to prove. Those who are empty are available for a higher calling than their limited biases.

Luke says, **“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.”**

Life has its ebbs and flows and its highs and lows. They are a byproduct of the pulsing heart of the world we are in and the tides that flow through creation. Sometimes you are up, and sometimes you are down, and still the world keeps spinning round.

Matthew's version is, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”**

There are so many incredibly wonderful things to do in the name of love, and when you choose to participate in those activities, the repercussions can be extraordinary. Righteousness is righting the wrongs, standing in the gap as creation unfolds and new heights must be reached. Righteousness is opening yourself to fulfilling your purpose in every moment you are blessed with, and sharing that blessing with others is a fulfillment beyond measure.

Luke says, **“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”**

These ebbs and flows can be tumultuous and can cause us

all sorts of strife as our attachments become unglued, but there will come a time where we will recognize how silly we were to settle. As life continues to be created, we are offered a myriad of things to appreciate, and when they are stripped from us through the inevitable change that comes with creation, it can often be devastating. However, when we release what was and open to what is and what can be, we can laugh at the comedy of the tragedy we worked through.

Matthew's version is, **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."**

Life is not always what we think it's supposed to be, and we are often brokenhearted when it is not. As what we love is torn from us, we suffer loss and disappointment in those dark and stormy times. Yet when we open ourselves to the larger canvas of this work of art called life and seek to find what colors we can bring to the portrait, we can appreciate the hues that contributed to our pallet as we contribute to the big picture.

Luke says, **"Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man."**

Many people enjoy lower vibrations and scoff at those who seek to vibrate at a higher level. Many have a smaller worldview that keeps them from seeing the bigger picture that you are able to see. Don't sweat the opinions of smaller minds.

Matthew's version goes, **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

Everyone is trying to defend their own perspective and stand their ground although it may be shifting. Do not be dismayed by those who mock you for seeing love as the highest calling because they have not yet truly felt it. As a modern prophet said, "Haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate. Shake it off."

Luke repeats this idea as, **"Rejoice in that day and leap**

for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.” Then Luke takes us in a different direction, changing the “blessed”s into “woe”s.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.”

Those who have the ability to pay for everything they need never have to really work for it. There is certainly a comfort in that, but it closes you off to the comfort that comes with finding solutions when there seemed to be none. There are things poor people experience that rich people can never understand.

“Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.”

There is certainly an incredible appeal for the experience of opulence and the ability to pay servants to bring you food. However, there is a soul-fulfilling encounter with Divinity when food just appears. It's nice to be catered to, but it's amazing when you are provided for.

“Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.”

In tumultuous times, some take advantage, and mock those who suffer. They differentiate themselves from the rest of us and seek to benefit from our suffering. The separation they create through their scoffing will continue to separate them from greater understanding.

“Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”

One of the world's oldest businesses is the bullshit factory. If you buy into someone stroking your ego, that's on you. That nonsense has been going on for centuries so get over yourself.

Matthew's version doesn't offer any “woe”s, but does have some additional “blessed”s.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Those who need to collect things, increasing their personal wealth and pomposity will be limited to that which they

attain. Those who embrace humility have the rest of the world to unfold for them.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Those who recognize the challenges that others face and seek to help them rise above them will receive support in their own endeavors. Empathy is an incredibly powerful tool in that it can perpetuate understanding and allow compassion to blossom. Showing empathy to others helps to cultivate it in both of you.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Despite all of the trappings of this world, we can engage in a direct spiritual connection with the Creator of all that we have ever experienced. If we can move beyond the necessity for approval from our fellow humans and realize our role in being the embodiment of the Divine, we will be able to see things that most others never will. Unfortunately, many hearts are too filled with religious bigotry and fear to radiate with the purity of God's love.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Most of the things we fight about are nonsense. Considering the fact that all of our breaths are provided for us as well as everything else, we don't really need to fight over anything. Our Creator provides opportunity after opportunity after opportunity, giving us all the opportunity to be who we are as conduits of Divinity and the peace it offers.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

We already touched on this in Luke, but righteousness is important. Over the last several generations, we have gone down some very wrong paths, and we need strong souls to make things right. The righteousness we require involves bringing the love of God, the provider of all that we have experienced, into our everyday existence.

While some may summarily dismiss the idea that Jesus studied Buddhism while in India, the similarities between the

Buddha's Eightfold Path of Righteousness and Jesus's Beatitudes are pretty uncanny.

The first step of the Eightfold Path of Righteousness is *Right Speech*. One of Jesus's Beatitudes is *blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. We are most often persecuted when we give voice to those who have none, as Jesus instructed us to do as he spoke and preached about living a life of righteousness.

The next step is *Right Action*. Jesus's actions are about being here for the sinners of the world who need help out of their suffering. Jesus said *blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted*, and he taught his disciples how to get about the action of comforting.

The next step is *Right Livelihood*. Jesus said *blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God*. Those who are pure in heart are open to serve the world they are in and use their gifts and talents in establishing livelihoods that support the highest good for themselves and all those around them.

Right Effort is the next step of the Eightfold Path of Righteousness. For those who are taking this path, Jesus said *blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*. What better effort can there be than living righteously?

The next step of the Eightfold Path is *Right Mindfulness*. Similarly, Jesus said *blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth*. In a world that celebrates the ego, the mindfulness of meekness opens the eyes to a whole new world beyond those fabrications.

Right Concentration is the next step along the path. Jesus said *blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. Being poor in spirit means that God can fill you up, and the higher concentration of God that is allowed to flow through you, the more you will experience the kingdom of heaven. Concentrate on your Source.

The next step is *Right Understanding*. Jesus rightly said

blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. Understanding that every person we meet is at a different stage of this Unbroken Path we are all on, and that we often lose our footing, we are able to show mercy just as we receive it.

Lastly, the final step along the Eightfold Path of Righteousness is *Right Thoughts*. Jesus said *blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God*. Indeed, those who think with the mind of the Prince of Peace and follow the Son of Man are certainly the offspring of the Almighty.

DO NOT THINK I HAVE COME TO ABOLISH THE LAW

In Matthew, Jesus goes on to say, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven, for I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

In Luke, he says, **“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.”**

It may just make me least in the kingdom of heaven, and maybe it's just because I'm a gentile dog, but I don't put a lot of stock in the Old Testament as an accurate portrayal of what the Creator of all things wants humankind to be thinking about in this

millennium. As I have said, I do not consider myself to be remotely Jewish and do not embrace the laws and Prophets as Jesus and his ilk did. Nevertheless, recognizing the history of the Jewish people and the necessity for their laws and Prophets to get them on the right track, holding to those ancient writings may just be needed to keep them on the up and up.

Concerning surpassing the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, considering what Jesus said about those folks being hypocritical, blind guides, fools, and vipers with twisted hearts, I'm not sure they set a very high bar. I think Jesus called his followers to live a life of righteousness by following the two commands of loving God and our neighbors so as to live above what any human law requires.

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Murder is bad. We can all agree on that, but here Jesus breaks down the various ways we can destroy a person's spirit and destroy our own by murdering people mentally.

Simply being angry with someone forces you to resonate in the vibration of judgment, removing you from the perfection of the kingdom. Calling someone ‘Raca’ (Fool) means to call them empty-headed or stupid, which diminishes both of you. Calling someone a fool is to say that they are of no earthly good, and for you to not be able to recognize someone's worth makes you just as worthless, and you might as well be thrown on to the burning dung heap of *gehenna*. Think of all the names people call each other on the Internet these days and how it diminishes our value as people and literally wastes our lives.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has

something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

Again, Jesus is asking his followers to take action. He doesn't say to just pray away whatever problems might be itching at you and let him deal with it, but to actually go to the person you have problems with and work things out. Sometimes, the issues we have with other people can be so much on our minds that we are incapable of giving our attention to much of anything else, including connecting with the kingdom of heaven within and living a life of righteousness.

Yogananda wrote, “Ill will toward an estranged brother is a defilement of the inner temple of harmony. To ‘agree with thine adversary’ does not mean to condone or cooperate with his evil, but to cleanse oneself of malice and rancor. To seek reconciliation in forgiveness of wrongs is to please God in the forgiver and the forgiven.”

“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

It's important to again note here that Jesus supports people taking action and not relying on him to do things for them. The Way Jesus shared was how to participate in life. Sometimes that means creating forgiveness by offering it to others and sometimes it means creating forgiveness by asking for it from others.

Luke also has a version of this bit.

Matthew continues, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** Then, he gets to talking about gouging out problem eyes and lopping off problem appendages as he did in

Mark.

His stance on adultery actually contributes to the school of thought that believes Jesus spent some time in India before starting his ministry. His view of adultery beyond what Jewish law demands aligns more with Hindu teachings.

Yogananda wrote, "The Hindu scriptures speak of the following ways of committing adultery (equally applicable to women as well as men):

"To think lustfully of a woman, without the woman being present before the physical eyes.

"To talk about a woman with lustful desire.

"To touch a woman with lustful desire.

"To gaze upon a woman with lustful desire.

"To hold private intimate talks with a woman with the ultimate hope of physical union.

"The act of physical union without the consecration of marriage."

Yogananda explains, "According to human law, unless there is physical adultery, there is no cause for condemnation. Human law passes no judgment on lascivious mental behavior. But the Divine Law condemns mental adultery also, because without its advent, physical adultery would not be enacted."

In Matthew's account, Jesus goes on to talk about divorce being equal to adultery as he did in Mark before moving on to say, **"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."**

Again, Jesus calls his followers to level up. Whereas the law tells you to not break your oath, Jesus says to not even make an oath in the first place so that you will have nothing to break.

Just say 'yes' or 'no' without the need for pageantry.

In Luke, Jesus said, **"But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you."**

Again, Jesus tells his followers to do what many see as impossible, love your enemies. These days, it seems like many of us can barely tolerate our own families. How can we possibly love those who revile us so much?

I find that accepting the notion that humans are basically idiots makes it much easier to forgive them when they behave idiotically. Of course, I've also come to grips with the fact that I too often behave idiotically, and I am very grateful when people forgive me for that particular shortcoming.

Jesus goes on in Matthew to say, **"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."**

Yogananda responds, "The 'eye for an eye' law serves only the purpose of punishment for the sake of revenge. It does not teach right actions to the wrongdoer, but may well make him more hateful. To wreak vengeance does not stop the recurrence of an evil act; rather, it is more likely to foster evil thoughts and further acts of retaliation."

I think this teaching is equal parts service and freedom. Jesus teaches his followers to be good servants and to be helpful to one another, yet they were also under the rule of the Roman

Empire and often forced to do things they may not want to do. To then go beyond what you are forced to do is where Jesus was pointing toward a greater freedom, for while your energy may be taken from you when you are forced to go one mile, you take your energy back when you go the second mile.

Jesus calls his followers to a higher plane of existence. He asks them not to view life from their ego's point of view and attach themselves to the limited intimate relationships they've developed, but to love with the love of God, which flows through all of creation and the soul of every person. Jesus calls his followers to be emissaries for Divine love.

“Jesus advises man to conquer evil by the infinitely powerful virtue of forgiveness and love,” wrote Yogananda. “He speaks figuratively of turning the other cheek to illustrate the influence of goodness over inimical behavior. If anybody vents his anger with a slap and receives a slap in return, it only increases his anger and desire to deliver stronger blows - and maybe a kick or a bullet. A calm response, on the other hand, is quite disconcerting and disarming. With a resentful blow his physical wrath is quite likely to be spent. Wrath is increased by wrath as fire increases by fire, but as fire is extinguished by water, so also, wrath is subdued by kindness.”

In Matthew, Jesus said, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ but I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

This is not always prevalent in modern Roman American Christianity, where every Sunday morning folks are called again to the altar to confess their sinfulness and shame. Jesus called his

followers to be perfect examples of the love of God, not sniveling sinners playing the game of religion. Jesus taught to love even those who persecute you, even if they celebrate different holidays than you and want them to be happy.

In Luke, Jesus says, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High Because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Yogananda wrote, “The millenniums of resistance of evil by retaliation in kind have never succeeded in eradicating the scourge of enmity from man's heart. God could instantly destroy evildoers; but instead, he uses love to coax created beings back to him. In the simple words, ‘Love your enemies,’ Jesus urged man to cooperate with God in this divine plan of redemption: to love one's neighbors, and to have a place in one's love for enemies as well.”

*How can we love the conservative
who wants to take our rights away?*

*How can we love the liberal
who wants to turn our children gay?*

*How do we love the politicians
who won't take care of our vets?*

*How can we love the evil immigrants
who have come to eat our pets?*

*How do we love the ICE men
who bring fear into our streets?*

How can we love the greedy

*and the billionaire elites?
 One thing we should remember
 with whatever we may go through
 for those who do not act in love,
 they know not what they do
 So whomever may have brought you pain,
 through whatever has transpired
 You have the power of God
 to be the love required*

HOW TO PRAY

In Matthew 6, Jesus speaks about prayer, offering his followers guidance on how to pray and how not to pray. The Way Jesus shared was based on an intimate relationship with God by connecting with the kingdom of heaven within. He probably wouldn't be too thrilled about the displays of public worship made so popular through Roman America Christianity.

Jesus says, **“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.**

In an age when we can watch live multi-camera church services on our phones, you'd be hard pressed to find one that wasn't performative in one way or another as they compete for attention and market share. From the music played in major chords used to modulate emotions to the professional lighting that stages the event, many church services are designed to elicit certain feelings and simulate an experience of divine connection. While I'm sure there are many who have genuine spiritual experiences, the emotional stimulation produced by the mixture of music and lights doesn't hurt. Jesus went to the wilderness to connect with God, and I think there's a certain resonance of Divinity you connect with in silence and solitude that can't be

reached in a faith-based experience with a manufactured outcome.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret, then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Some see this as a bit of a contradiction to what Jesus said about being the light of the world in the previous chapter. There is a fine line between doing good works as examples to others and doing good works in order to make ourselves look better to others. It often seems pretty rare to find someone who knows themselves enough to achieve that balance

There's something to be said for knowing yourself, and there is also a lot to be said for realizing that you don't really know anything. Our egos are wired to crave attention and approval from others, and it's quite common to want to feel appreciation for doing a good deed, but Jesus didn't teach his followers to be common. When we help someone in need, if we are to emulate the example of Christ, we don't need to ask for adoration any more than Divinity seeks praise from creation. It's just what we are.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Jesus saw prayer as true self-care. When he says to go into your room, close the door and pray to your unseen Father, he is

teaching his followers to go inward. He is saying that connection with God is not about flowery worship services and raised hands, but truly cultivating an intimate relationship with your Creator in the stillness of your own mind and the silence of your own heart.

Yogananda wrote, "True prayer is an expression of the soul, an urge from the soul. It is a hunger for God that arises from within, expressing itself to Him ardently, silently. Vocalized prayers are wonderful only if the attention is on God, and if the words are a call to God out of the abundance of the soul's desire for Him. But if an invocation becomes merely a part of an ecclesiastical ceremony, performed mechanically - concentration on the form of religion rather than its spirit - God does not much like that kind of prayer."

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Even though Jesus warned of babbling, like a lot of Roman American Christians, I was taught to say this by rote right along with the Nicene and Apostle's creeds. More recently, my version usually goes something like, "Father God Mother Goddess, All That Is, I am so grateful for the opportunity to be Steve McAllister today. Thank you for providing for me as I feel you in every breath. May I release myself from all regrets and have compassion for the knuckleheads in the world around me. May I have the wisdom to make healthy choices for my body and my community with the 1,440 minutes I have to participate in life today and accept that not everybody else is gonna. I am grateful for my experience along the Unbroken Path and open myself to what my journey has to

reveal to me and through me today as I vibrate with love for All That Is.”

HOW NOT TO FAST

Jesus said, **“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”**

The only thing worse than a religious person is a religious person miserable over following their own religion. Whether we’re enduring feats of physical strength and endurance like fasting or embracing the delusion that we can be separate from All That Is, we put ourselves through whatever insufferable shenanigans our tradition or spiritual path of choice informs our experience. You’re gonna get out of it whatever you need to get out of it so the least you can do is put a smile on your face.

DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH

Jesus said, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

I think this is being made evident in the world around us through the growing movement of people who value experience over material possessions. Beyond the basics of minimalism, the

last decade or so has seen a surge in tiny houses, van life, and a release from the vision of the traditional American dream as a life goal. Personally, I love that my only possessions are a guitar, a motorcycle, a typewriter, and a jacket, and even those can all be replaced. Everything else is just stuff I use as I need it, but nothing I can't let go of.

However, this is not normal for much of the United States, home to 90% of self storage worldwide, where one in ten households has a self storage unit to keep their treasures from moths and vermin. Unfortunately, it's also where a lot of people keep their hearts, with things they love but don't interact with.

NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS

In Matthew and Luke, Jesus said, **“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”**

I haven't attended enough prosperity gospel mega-churches to know how they skirt this exactly, but from what I've seen on TV, it seems to be pretty well ostensibly glossed over. Unfortunately, for a lot of modern Roman American Christians, they attest to serve God with how they use their money, and God blesses them by giving them more of it. I think it's safe to say the relationship is often dysfunctional at best.

In Luke, he said to the Pharisees, who were sneering at him because they love money: **“You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.”**

Yogananda wrote, “God-knowing sages have declared that the three strongest temptations of man are money, sex, and intoxicants. In earlier eras in undeveloped civilizations, sex and wine were the primary pitfalls; in our industrial age, with its dependence on finance and individual life and society at large, it

may be said that money is the principal tool of delusion, for it buys wine, stimulates indulgence in evil sensory passions, and exerts a powerful hypnosis of self-importance and false security. Scriptural wisdom, which condemns worship of 'unrighteous mammon', needs to be heeded by money-mad modern man."

Considering how much more the American economy has leaned into finance as its primary directive, and considering how much the Protestant work ethic contributed to the veneration of capitalism as some sort of divine plan, we find ourselves now in a bit of a pickle. We all know deep down that we should not put all of our faith in man-made money, but the system in which we live declares it as the single most important thing in the world, and we've all gone and gotten ourselves completely addicted to it.

However, we are at least approaching a great rethinking. Now that human labor is not as in demand as it was throughout the Industrial Revolution, and more and more people find fewer and fewer ways to participate in the currency that gives life to our economy, we need to reevaluate the value of humanity.

DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE

Matthew 6 and Luke 12 also share a lesson about worry that's nearly word for word: **"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"**

Yogananda wrote, "Man is directly sustained by God and the abundance of nature, and indirectly by his earning capacity and physical efforts. Not by all human care can man maintain himself without the help from God, he who is the Maker of Life

and the Creator of sunlight, grain, water, and air, which support human life. But because man does his share to acquire the use of God-given things, he soon forgets the direct Divine Hand in human existence. Man cannot *make* grain, though he wields God's laws to propagate it; nor can he make the power of digestion to assimilate food, nor the life force that transforms the grain chemicals into his cellular tissues. Yet man is so solicitous of the wants of his body, that he ornaments it and seeks to grant its every whim, seldom if ever considering that without the inherent Divinity all he embellishes is a clod of earth."

As we move out of the myopia of capitalism, we'll more greatly be able to let go of the notions of "my money" and "self made man". We will more greatly use money as the currency it's supposed to be and let it flow as the life blood of our economy rather than delusionally clinging to it as if it were an actual possession. In the interconnected world we are growing more aware of, we realize that we all make one another as a collusion of individuals into a collective.

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' for the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Luke deletes the last sentence about "tomorrow", but adds the following bit: **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give them to the poor. Provide purses for**

yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

There are a number of people in the world who consider this the worst advice ever. Some see this attitude as a call to laziness and an abandonment of ambition, but Jesus was looking a bit deeper than those who seek the rush of the grind found in modern capitalism. Jesus was calling his followers to recognize that all of the stuff we may use to create our lives is provided by God and recognizing that connection with the Creator of All That Is should be our primary motivation.

Yogananda wrote, “Seeking the kingdom of God first is the cardinal message of Jesus to individuals and nations of the world because it is the shortest way to lasting individual, social, and national happiness. Perishable material possessions do not contain the immortality and everlasting Bliss of the kingdom of God, but his imperishable kingdom contains in it all the goodness of the world. To possess God is to own the universe. If the ear is pulled, the head comes with it. When by devotion one pulls God into his life, then automatically eternal prosperity of immortality, wisdom, and ever new blessings are added unto him.”

I can't honestly say that I have been in the steadfast pursuit for the kingdom of God, but I have lived a life of faith, trusting that I would continue to be provided for by the Source of my existence. And although there have been a number of times when I have barely had any money and didn't know what I was going to do next, life still provided in a myriad of ways. I don't attribute that to being religious or doing anything necessarily spiritual, but merely showing up for life, offering what I have to provide for the life I'm living as life shows up for me and offers what it has, and things just synergize.

DO NOT THROW YOUR PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

After warning of the dangers of judging others, Matthew continues, **“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”**

Yogananda wrote, “Spiritual advice is of no avail to unappreciative persons who snap at their would-be helper with cynicism and derision. Just as swine would dolishly trample on pearls cast before them, so people who are deeply wallowing in worldly muck are insensitive to the wisdom gems of saints who speak of the priceless happiness of a self-controlled existence.”

Each of us has many gifts to offer, and as we are certain to find people who will benefit from and appreciate our gifts, we will also find those who will not be able to recognize their value. Part of our responsibility is recognizing where we should direct our energy in order to create a positive impact in the world around us and realizing which endeavors would be a waste of our energy. Do not direct your energy toward anyone who will not appreciate its value.

ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU

Matthew 7 and Luke 11 continue with Jesus saying, **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.**

“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? (In Luke, he says, “Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?”) If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to

your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Although this appears to be a call for supplication, again Jesus directs his followers to act. Ask, seek, and knock. This is the beginning of whatever adventure of manifestation you are being called to, one that is not defined by what God provides for you, but the journey you take to attain it.

Ask, seek, and knock are action words, and he sums this up with **"do unto others,"** the epitome of action words. As you ask, seek, and knock, get out into the world to see where you can give, show, and answer so you may receive, find, and be opened to what you are truly seeking.

Luke's take on this is a little twisted. In Luke 11, after Jesus teaches them how to pray, he says to his disciples, **"Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.**

Although Jesus does call for action, here, it seems he is calling for incessantly asking. As if your friend won't get out of bed to help you with food because he's your friend, but he will get up and help you because you keep banging on the door in the middle of the night and won't quit. I'm not that sure about the spiritual implications of this one.

It sounds like he's saying that you should keep harassing your friend and keeping them awake until they cave. Your friend will probably be sore at you for a while, but they're still gonna be your friend. It could just be a Luke thing.

ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE

He continues in Matthew, **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”**

Yogananda wrote, “The gateway of delusion is wide, opening onto the broad pathway of evil. Many fools blithely go through the gate of ignorant impulses and find themselves on the path of evil actions. It is easy to perform evil, just as it requires no effort to roll down a hill; but every evil action repeated leads one further along the wide path of evil trod by the unthinking masses.”

Having traveled the path of self-destruction many times, I have also often journeyed through the Unbroken Path to life, and the former certainly is the path of least resistance. Taking the time to quiet your ego's mind and breathe in the Spirit of life as it flows through your body connects you to the reality you share with others as an emanation of love from the Source of all creation.

John's version of the narrow gate parable is a bit different. When he was on his way to Jerusalem, someone asked Jesus about how many people were going to be saved.

Jesus said, **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’**

“But he will answer, ‘I don't know who or where you come from.’

“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

“But he will reply, ‘I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth,

when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

The narrow door that opens to the kingdom of heaven is within us. It is the Christ Consciousness that Roman American Christianity has so often eschewed in favor of their rituals and traditions. While people from all sorts of cultures will be able to connect with the Spirit of God within them, there are a whole lot of religious folk who are just never going to get it with all of their yapping, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

NOT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ME LORD WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM

Then, Jesus warns about false prophets and talks about how you will know them by their fruit, as he did in Mark. Here, he continues,

"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. 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?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

He expands on this idea in chapter 25, with Matthew's last original parable, that of the sheep and the goats: **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.**

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“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.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

This may very well be the most glaring reference to a literal eternal hellscape where sinners will be punished in the entire Bible, and it’s presented through a parable about animals. Note that Jesus clarifies that this eternal fire was prepared for the devil and his angels, and not all of humankind as Roman American

Christianity has come to believe. Also recognize that the children of God who receive the inheritance of the kingdom are not those who accepted him as their Savior, but those who cared for the less fortunate and acted as emissaries for the love of Christ.

The last word Jesus has on eternal life in the first two gospels has nothing to do with believing in him for salvation or confessing anything with our lips, but only how we treat other people. Anyone claiming to be his follower would do well to remember that. This is among the most significant differences from followers of Jesus who practice the Way and followers of Roman American Christianity, largely as an eternal fire insurance policy.

In Luke 6, Jesus says, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

When you follow Jesus and connect with the kingdom of heaven within you as he taught, recognizing yourself as an emissary of God's love, you find yourself grounded as part of All That Is. Unfortunately, as is often the case in Christianity, people get so obsessed with trying to signify the importance of the blood of Christ, they refuse to embrace his simple message. However, for the majority of Jesus's ministry, other than the final night with his chosen disciples, he spoke of the importance of his words and his teachings, not his blood.

Ministers of Christ seek ways to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, heal the sick, and visit with the imprisoned. Connecting with the Spirit of Christ within provides the strength

and joy to give of yourself in such a way. That is why Jesus taught to secure your foundation with the kingdom of heaven within you.

LET IT BE DONE JUST AS YOU BELIEVED IT WOULD

Matthew 7 and Luke 7 share a story about a centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant. Matthew's version is pretty quick and to the point. The centurion says his servant is paralyzed and suffering, Jesus says, "**Shall I come and heal him?**", and the guy says he's not worthy to even have Jesus in his house, but that Jesus can just call in the order, so Jesus does.

Jesus says, "**Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" And he says, "**Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would,**" and the servant was healed.

Although Jesus felt a strong directive to minister to the people of Israel, seeing the faith of the Roman centurion seems to have given Jesus hope in the Gentiles. Jesus offers another glimpse into the reality that his ministry would not be carried forward by the subjects of the kingdom of Israel, but those who put faith in his teachings.

THE SON OF MAN HAS NO PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD

In Matthew 8, Jesus is herding a group of people to the other side of the lake so he can speak to them and in Luke 9, Jesus is walking along the road, when a teacher of the law and a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go," and Jesus responded, "**Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son**

of Man has no place to lay his head.”

I have to admit that as a young follower of Christ, this was a rather daunting teaching. The idea of being homeless and not having the securities of the American dream were more than frightening for me. However, after many years of being a nomad with no fixed address, I kind of get what he was driving at.

There is an inexplicable joy I find in discovering how my Creator is going to provide for me next. My concept of financial independence has been vastly different than the majority of Americans, whereas their financial independence relies on them to be active participants in their financial life, my financial independence has been realized through needing very little in the way of finance. The wealth of life shared with me through my openness to it is beyond anything I could pay for with federal reserve notes.

I also really appreciate that I rarely have to pay rent. While I was living through my year of not using money, I realized that one of my goals for life was to not have to pay to exist, something that I also wish for the rest of the world. It's been really amazing to see how many places I've been able to stay merely because I showed up as myself and offered what I could.

Then another disciple approaches and says he has to go bury his father before he can go, and Jesus says, **“Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”**

When you connect to the kingdom of heaven within, you recognize that this experience of life we are having is merely an experience we are having. Recognizing eternal life frees us from the need to mourn the dead for we know they are still living in another incarnation, flowing as life does. When death has no power over you, it really has no power over you.

In Luke, Jesus says, **“But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”** Luke's version continues with one more coming to him asking to go say goodbye to their family, and Jesus says, **“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”**

Yogananda wrote, "When one is conscious of God he is really living. Until this awakening, the body is a tomb in which the soul is encased, as if dead and buried and awaiting resurrection. To be alive with life everlasting - that is the life that Jesus taught."

Opening to the kingdom of heaven within you allows you to leave any regrets in the past, empowers you to move beyond anything you have done in the past, and enables you to become more than you've ever imagined, but you must fully open yourself to it and not attach yourself to what has come before.

DO YOU BELIEVE I AM ABLE TO DO THIS?

In Matthew 9, after he's just healed a woman, a couple of blind men ask for mercy and call him son of David. He goes inside with them and asks, "**Do you believe that I am able to do this?**"

They say yes so he touches their eyes and says, "**According to your faith, let it be done to you,**" and they can see.

Then he warns, "**See that no one knows about this.**"

Again, Jesus does not say that the healing is occurring because of his greatness, but because of their faith. He doesn't seek praise for this miracle, and actually asks them to not tell anyone about it. This is not someone seeking to be worshiped or demanding adoration, but only a reminder of the power of our own faith.

DO NOT GO AMONG THE GENTILES

In Matthew 10, Jesus says, "**Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.**"

Jesus knew that Gentiles and Samaritans had their own things going on and wouldn't give much heed to what any Jewish

folks had to say, and he also knew that after all the Israelites had gone through, after four hundred years of slavery, forty years of getting lost in the desert, slaughtering all the Canaanites, finally establishing their kingdom only to lose it again, and to now be subject to the Roman Empire, the Jews were not in a good way. God chose them to receive Jesus because they needed his message more than anyone else.

Jesus goes on in Matthew to say, **“As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The Kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”**

I don't see a lot of this going on in Roman American Christianity, but I do see some, even from my distant vantage point. Granted leprosy isn't the problem it used to be. However, it can be said that sometimes spiritual sickness is healed, those who have given up on life are given another chance, and for those who are struggling with demons, some have found the means to overcome them. There are many that Christianity has helped exceedingly.

Although I'm not a religious man and I've been quite open about the problems I have with Roman American Christianity, I do have to admit that it still changes lives. For me, part of the process of writing this book is finding forgiveness in the fallibilities of our human customs, yet also recognizing how vital they have been to get us to this point. While I don't see this book bringing an end to Roman American Christianity, nor is that a goal, I do hope it inspires a deeper look into its true heart and that redemption may bring revival.

Unlike Mark, Matthew's account is even more limited on what they could bring as he prepares them for their mission. In Mark, at least they got to take a staff, but in Matthew, Jesus says, **“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts - no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.”**

“As similarly advocated by Jesus,” Yogananda explains, “the Buddhist monks of India from pre-Christian times and the

members of the Swami Order in India confined their possessions chiefly to a staff and simple dress; And most of the time they went barefoot or wore wooden or woven-straw sandals - shoes made from the hides of slaughtered animals being considered unclean and unholy.”

I don't claim to be a holy man in that I travel by motorcycle, which is certainly not as fuel efficient as a staff, but gets me where I want to go a lot faster. I don't have any gold or silver, but I do have ATM cards. I bring a few extra changes of clothes, some various shoes, and my boots are made of leather. I also bring a typewriter and guitar so that I can work to earn my keep.

Luke says Jesus said, **“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them: if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.”**

Over the last few years, I have ridden my motorcycle to all of the forty-eight contiguous states and two provinces. Wherever I went, I usually stayed with family, friends, couchsurfing hosts, or people for whom I was house sitting. It's created a lot of peace for me and I'm pretty sure I brought peace to them as well. I've gotten good reviews, anyway.

Matthew and Luke have very similar messages here, but they're in a slightly different order, as well as some slightly different words.

Luke's account continues, **“But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”** Matthew says, **“It will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.”**

For “day of judgment”, Matthew uses the Greek word

apokalypsis, which means “revelation” or “unveiling”, where Luke uses *hemera*, which just means “day”, “time”, or “era”. Jesus is not referring to the mythological “Judgment Day” that would eventually emerge as Christian tradition. He could be talking about the realization of you who really are. The day of judgment is the day you open to proper judgment.

Matthew and Luke conclude with Jesus saying, **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”**

As examples of towns that wouldn't listen to him, Jesus points out how unwilling the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were to hear his message. Here, the word for “judgment” is *krisis*, which means “decision”, “separation”, or “trial”. The word “Hades” is *Haidēs* in Greek, referring to the “underworld” or “realm of the dead”. This is another verse Christians now use to validate the belief in hell as a place of eternal torment, but practically, it seems Jesus is saying that instead of being lifted to the kingdom of heaven where they can commune with God, they will continue to be drawn into the darkness of shadows and satanic influence.

THE STUDENT IS NOT ABOVE THE TEACHER

In Matthew, Jesus continues, **“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their**

masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household.”

Jesus probably isn't holding a grudge about people saying he was possessed by the dung god, but he reminds his disciples that if they can say such things about him, there's a good chance that the disciples would probably have to endure such biting criticisms as well.

Luke calls this a parable: **“Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.”**

So if Jesus's example teaches us how to be like Christ then we can be like Christ... and without hurting his feelings or taking any praise from him, but simply by emulating the example he set forth in a rapturous sort of faith that cannot be contained by religion. Unfortunately, Roman American Christianity has elevated a twisted teaching from Paul's letter to the Romans above the actual message of the master Jesus. This is probably why Roman American Christianity has fallen into a pit.

Matthew continues, **“So do not be afraid of them for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”**

Again, the Greek word for “hell” here is *gehenna*, the festering garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. As Jesus has just given them marching orders to share both the hidden higher teachings of spiritual development and the general teachings to draw in the crowds and entice them with parables, he wants them to understand the value of what they are doing, and if they were to give in to fear and not share their message, they would waste their lives.

As Yogananda put it, “But I warn you, and all who are

wicked, that you must learn to stand in respectful and loving awe before God - the almighty One who through his law of cause and effect evolved your soul and body from His own Self, and who alone upholds your existence and perpetuates by His divine will the immortality of your soul."

Jesus goes on, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."**

Yogananda says, "God is conscious of all things throughout the present, past, and future, even of every hair on your head. Therefore, fear not for your life and actions, as the children of God are of more concern to the Father than the mechanical life of the sparrows who, insignificant though they are, are lovingly attended to by Him."

There is a wonderful book by Christopher Moore called *Fluke: I Know Why The Winged Whale Sings*. Toward the end of the book it is explained that the song of the whales produces plankton for them to eat, as if they're crying out praises for their Creator as their Creator provides for them. While it is a work of fiction, I think it speaks to the way God responds to our gratitude.

Matthew goes on to say Jesus said, **"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven,"** whereas Luke has him say, **"I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God."**

Previously, Jesus has not been that intent on being acknowledged. Many times when he has healed people, he has told them to not tell anyone of the event. Yet even here, when he seeks acknowledgment, he passes his own power on to his disciples with the understanding that his message comes from the

Creator of all things and is not merely his own.

Luke adds, **"And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven."**

Jesus is more concerned with people's connection with the Holy Spirit than with himself. Of course, since the Roman Empire fortified the view of God as a trinity in the Nicene Creed in 325 AD, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are generally seen as one in Roman American Christianity. However, Jesus does seem to give greater preference to the Holy Spirit over himself.

I DID NOT COME TO BRING PEACE, BUT A SWORD

In Matthew 10, Jesus goes on to say, **"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'A man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'"**

In Luke 12, Jesus says, **"I have come to bring fire on the Earth, and how I wish it were already kindled: but I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."**

That certainly does sound like a lot of family holidays. Granted, these days a lot of that is manufactured through the divisive exploits of our political parties as our media platforms fan the flames of outrage in the hopes of higher numbers, but the religion spawned from Jesus's teachings and his actual teachings

often do contribute to breakdowns in familial communication. It certainly has in mine.

In this passage, Jesus is quoting from the 7th chapter of Micah, when the prophet is complaining about the misery of Israel. Written roughly 700 years before Jesus is quoting it, Micah says he is waiting for his savior. Of course, it's also interesting to note that although the prophet Isaiah refers to the coming savior as "The Prince of Peace", Jesus says he's not really about that.

Ever since Jesus started bringing division to Judaism and created a movement that would split into Christianity, there has been a long history of divisions. From the split between Ethiopian, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic Christianity into the splintering off of Anglicanism and Protestantism, and then through the thousands of denominations that have sprouted up since, Christianity has produced a lot of division. Even today in Roman American Christianity, we see the widening chasm between Christian nationalism and progressive Christianity.

I wonder if we will have the capacity to heal the rifts or if that's just the way it was designed. It could be that it splinters so much that it simply falls apart. If it does, which may be the day of judgment so many have been waiting for, blessed are those who have recognized the foundation of the kingdom of heaven within them.

BLESSED IS ANYONE WHO DOES NOT STUMBLE ON ACCOUNT OF ME

In Matthew 11 and Luke 7, Jesus goes to Galilee. John the Baptist is in prison and sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he's the one they've been looking for or if he should keep looking.

Jesus says, **"Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone**

who does not stumble on account of me.”

Basically, Jesus is saying, “If you ain’t convinced yet, I don’t know what to tell you.” But Jesus also recognizes that people will stumble over his words as they have for the last couple millennia. Yet blessed are those who see the truth beyond those who stumble over it.

Then, Jesus starts speaking to the crowd about John: **“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in king’s palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet?”**

“Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

This is often seen as another sign of Jesus’s understanding of reincarnation. Jesus recognizes his former incarnation as Elisha as he does John’s incarnation as Elijah. Their story is part of Jewish lore, and Jesus is convinced that history is repeating itself. However, if Elisha was the first coming of Christ, does that make Jesus the second coming of Christ? Should we actually be waiting for a third incarnation?

TO WHAT CAN I COMPARE THIS GENERATION?

“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’”

Though Jesus and I both love children, as a substitute teacher I have noticed that they have great need for near constant attention. “Look what I can do” is a common phrase used by children to find validation in their abilities, and adults often still engage in such practices as well. Changing “Look what I can do” to “Allow me to see what God can do through me” is a fundamental shift in Christ Consciousness.

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.” Luke phrases it as, **“Wisdom is proved right by all her children.”**

The openness Jesus had in spending time with outcasts and seeing the light of Christ within them granted him access to wisdom few people fully embrace. While the religion of Christianity has come to find contempt in human beings as reprehensible sinners, many more have since come to adopt the wisdom of Christ and are able to more clearly see the beauty of God being played out in every human they meet. By connecting with the kingdom of heaven within as Jesus taught, we also are given access to replicating Jesus's relationship with the Creator by helping others see it within themselves.

NO ONE KNOWS THE FATHER EXCEPT THE SON

Matthew 11 points out that at that time Jesus was full of joy through the Holy Spirit when he said also in Luke 10, **“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.”**

Jesus gets a kick out of the fact that he gets to share his knowledge with uneducated people. It would have been good if he'd chosen a few that knew how to write so we might have more accurate depictions of what really went down, but that probably wouldn't have been as much fun.

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

This refers back to what Jesus said about the faith of a child being a requirement before recognizing the kingdom of heaven. By releasing oneself from earthly attachment and the human knowledge that has been acquired, one can connect directly with the Source of being. By recognizing one's self as one with Christ, and opening to the connection with the kingdom within, God is revealed to us.

To truly know ourselves, we need to know who we really are in God. By quieting ourselves, God revels in revealing who we really are.

As Yogananda puts it, “No materially minded man knows the Christ Consciousness (Son); only the Cosmic Consciousness, which is the Father of Christ Consciousness. And no one knows the Cosmic Consciousness (Father) except through the Christ Consciousness (Son). Devotees realize Cosmic Consciousness only by first experiencing Christ Consciousness in meditation.”

I WILL GIVE YOU REST

Matthew has Jesus go on to say, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

Jesus doesn't really ask all that much. All he asks is to

have faith in the Creator of your existence and serve humbly in the life you are granted. You don't need to take the weight of the world on your shoulders but only serve as you are directed as life unfolds to you. He asks that his followers realize themselves as conduits of the love of God in the unfoldment of his kingdom.

In Luke 10, he says, **“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”**

Those with attachments to religiosity and material wealth will find it hard to recognize the simplicity of Jesus's message. Though they may wish for the power of eternal life, it is only by humbly releasing our connections to what we have gathered through knowledge and through human achievement that we open ourselves to become conduits of the love of God.

AN IMPURE SPIRIT RETURNS

After responding to some Pharisees and teachers of the law who asked to see a sign in Matthew 12, and referring to them as a **“wicked and adulterous generation”**, he said, **“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”**

In Luke 11, after driving out demons and the musing about Beelzebub, as in Mark 3 and Matthew 12, Jesus offers a shortened version saying, **“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, I will return to the house I left.’ Then**

it comes back with seven more.”

Jesus's wicked generation was filled with religiosity, and while that can be beneficial in removing some impure spirits, it can also invite more in. Rites and rituals can be very helpful in creating order in an otherwise disordered life, whether that disorder be caused by an impure spirit or a world gone astray. However, resting in them alone leads to a comfort that can lead a person into all sorts of other disorders.

Regardless of which rituals you may choose to purge yourself of whatever impure spirits you may be battling, be they masses, sound baths, worship services, sweat lodges, or reading scripture, the ritual is not the reward. At best, the ritual prepares you to go into the world and do something to reap your reward, and at worst, it serves as a substitute for the kingdom of heaven.

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus points out that man is a free agent and that by appreciation and contact of great masters he can develop himself; or, by spiritual indifference to God's emissaries and their teachings, he can remain as ignorant as ever; or, by becoming hidebound in narrow theological beliefs and traditions, he can imagine himself to be self-sufficient, ignoring the salvation-yielding teachings of great masters.”

For someone who inspires people to claim healing through their own faith, Jesus doesn't seem to always have a whole lot of faith in the people of his generation. And after generations of people reading these verses, Christianity doesn't seem to have a lot of faith in any generations. Yet the gospel of Christ continues to change lives from generation to generation.

Anyway, after he says this, a woman shouts from the crowd, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” Kind of an inappropriate time if you ask me, but whatever.

Jesus replies, **“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”**

Again, the word for “word” is *logos* in Greek. The word for “obey” is *phylassontes*, which is more properly translated as “watch over” or “protect” than following certain orders. For those

who acknowledge a connection with the kingdom of heaven and nurture it, they will most certainly be blessed.

SOWING SEEDS AMONG WEEDS

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells another parable: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.**

“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

“An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

“No,’ he answered, ‘Because while you are pulling weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters; first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”

Later, his disciples came to him privately and asked him to explain the parable of the weeds in the field so he says, **“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sews them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.**

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and

gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

Life is a mess. As much as it offers us the beauty of creation, it is also filled with seeds of destruction. Connecting with the kingdom of heaven does not release you from these challenges of life but provides you with the ability to harvest appropriately. By cultivating a relationship with our Creator, we are able to discern that which we should embrace and that which we should leave on the burning pyre of our past mistakes, individually and collectively. Unfortunately, the enemy planted a lot of weeds.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE...

In Matthew 13, after he shares the parable of the mustard seed Jesus also shared in Mark 4 and Luke 13, he comes up with a lot of metaphors for the kingdom of heaven, starting with, **“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”**

When you open to a direct connection with God, you have the potential to infuse it into every avenue of your life. As you breathe, you breathe in the Spirit of God. As you move, you move in the body of God. As you think, you open to the mind of God. And as you love, you do so with the heart of God..

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

When you fully realize that God is experiencing life through you, and you allow for and feel your highest vibration, other things in the material world just don't seem to measure up

to the joy of your existence. Recognizing the abundance of All That Is flowing through you as an emissary of love makes so much of what we have previously experienced pale in comparison.

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fisherman pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but throw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Just as with the weeds among the wheat, Jesus uses this parable about separating the good fish from the bad fish. I'm not sure what makes a “bad fish” bad other than it being too small, and I'm not sure why Jesus wouldn't just throw those back so they can grow into good fish, but he does have a point to make. The righteous are those who embrace their connection with the kingdom of heaven within and allow God to live through them, while the wicked will waste their lives with unawareness of what is possible and burdened with the complaints and suffering of a life without purpose or direction.

“Have you understood all these things?”

When the disciples said they did, he said, **“Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”**

Jesus didn't come to start a religion and he didn't come to end one, but he did offer a new Way of existing within it. Those who open to that Way and connect with the kingdom of heaven within them are not only able to teach others how to open to such a relationship, but also to celebrate their rituals and traditions with new eyes. In the same way, I see the potential for people who have historically followed Roman American Christianity to return their focus onto these words of Christ and allow them to transform and transmogrify their relationship with their Creator

and their religion. Burn the weeds and throw out the bad fish.

THE CHILDREN ARE EXEMPT

Later in Matthew 17, in Capernaum, a two-drachma Temple tax collector was shaking down Peter for Jesus's temple tax. When Peter goes inside, Jesus asks, **“What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes - from their own children or from others?”**

Peter chooses the latter, and Jesus says, **“Then the children are exempt. But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”**

I appreciate that Jesus was efficient and figured out ways to do things outside of the standard operating procedures. Performing miracles opens up a lot of possibilities. But still, yeah, children shouldn't pay taxes.

THE HUNDREDTH SHEEP

Then he tells a parable also shared in Luke 15: **“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.”**

We are most lost when we feel disconnected from our Creator, and in those moments our suffering is often great. However, returning to our proper alignment and recognizing the Spirit of God continuing to long to move through us offers

unspeakable joy and a peace that surpasses understanding. I believe God wants that sort of connection for all of his children, but many still enjoy the drama of weeping and gnashing their teeth.

In Matthew, he goes on to say, **“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”**

When Jesus preached repentance, a lot of folks weren't too keen on the idea, and that hasn't changed much over the last couple thousand years. I think Jesus sees sin as living out of harmony with God, and when we see someone suffering because of this misunderstanding and participating in behavior that causes harm to them or others, it is our responsibility to try to help. Unfortunately, many Christians with the best of intentions have a lot of sins they like to draw attention toward and do not always follow Jesus's prescription for remedying sinful behavior.

Yogananda wrote, “Man can go astray into an evil environment and behavior for a while, but no amount of sin can change his eternal soul-nature of divinity. Sin is a crust of ignorance accrued during men's lost wanderings that hide the perfect soul; when by meditation the soul is led back to God, the crust is washed away and the perfection is revealed.”

Too often, people are treated like pagans, tax collectors, and other irreputable types before they are reached out to as individuals by emissaries of Christ. When we approach people with judgment first and see them only as sinners, we miss out on the opportunity to cultivate a relationship with a person as an emanation of God's love for them. I've had the good fortune to meet some really wonderful pagans over the years.

**WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH
WILL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN**

“Truly I tell you whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

In the major arcana of the tarot cards, the first person the Fool meets on his journey is the Magician. The character has the four elements of heart, mind, body, and spirit laid out on the table in front of him through the symbols of the suits of cups, swords, coins, and wands, revealing our ability to create the lives we imagine with these tools at our disposal. With one hand he points toward the heavens and with one he points down to the earth, sharing the message “As above, so below,” reminding us of this shared revelation of Jesus.

Although we experience them differently, the kingdom of heaven within us and the earth on which we live are miraculously intermingled. By empowering us to forge this connection, we have the capacity to manifest amazing things.

FORGIVE ETERNALLY

Then Peter comes up and asks how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him, arbitrarily wondering if the magic number might be seven. Jesus tells him, **“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times** (I used to have a version that said ‘seventy times seven’).”

Many Christians have opted to skirt this teaching for the option of offering “tough love”. While tough love is sometimes

called for, and force is sometimes required, it is not nearly as miraculous as the power of forgiveness. Unfortunately, in Roman American Christianity, there often seems to be more concern over the cultivation of grudges than the cultivation of forgiveness.

Jesus went on to say, **“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.**

“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

First of all, I don’t know how somebody is supposed to earn money to pay back a debt if he is in jail. If a person is not free

to get out in the world and put their skills to good use, they cannot find their true value. Similarly, if we hold our relationships in the bondage of a grudge, we will not be able to see the light of God in those we interact with.

Grudges are very heavy, often imbued with the lower vibration of anger. Grudges do nothing to connect us to the kingdom of heaven or with the Creator of all things, but only serve to accentuate the limited understanding of our egos. Grudges hold us in bondage and keep us from the fullness of our being as much as they may seek to punish those we hold our grudges against.

Forgiveness helps us recognize that we are all on a journey of discovery, and just as sure as we will sometimes lose our footing and stumble, so are we offered more opportunities to rise again and continue down the Unbroken Path. Forgiveness frees us of the weight of hatred that keeps us fortified in darkness. Forgiveness allows us to see the world from an entirely new perspective and allows the light of God to break through the walls of anger that hold us in bondage.

THE LAST WILL BE FIRST AND THE FIRST WILL BE LAST

In Matthew 20, Jesus says, **“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.**

“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing

nothing?’

“Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Humans often have an obsession with fairness. It starts with us as children, and sometimes gets worse as we get older. In America, even our Declaration of Independence, the first document to help guide us forward, speaks of the equality of all men.

As noble an idea as it is, we are not actually created equal nor are we treated equally during our time here. Nor does fairness naturally occur in the world around us, but is something we attempt to create in the hopes of providing for a greater sense of universal justice. While the notion is admirable and offers something to strive for, when we connect with the kingdom of heaven within, we are able to reconcile ourselves with the challenges and fallibilities of the world around us, and we're not

that compelled to cry when we don't get our way because we are seeking a higher Way.

We don't all get the same deal. That's just a fact of life. When you zoom out to see the greater picture from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven, it's a lot easier to reconcile yourself with your position in the portrait that is the world we are experiencing.

THE TAX COLLECTORS AND PROSTITUTES ARE ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AHEAD OF YOU

In Matthew 21, after Jesus has kicked the money changers out of the temple, he stuck around to heal the blind and the lame for a while. But the chief priests and teachers of the law were having a really hard time with people praising him and singing, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Matthew says they were downright indignant about it so they asked if he'd heard what they were saying about him.

Jesus replies, **"Yes, have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise!'"** Dropping a line from the 8th Psalm and riffing a bit, he makes his exit and heads to Bethany for the night. This is before the morning he's hangry and curses the fig tree.

Later in Matthew 21, Jesus has just responded to questions about his authority from the chief priests and elders by stumping them over the authority by which John the Baptist baptized. He says, **"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'**

"I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

The chief priests and elders say, "The first."

Jesus says, **"Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."**

Religious folks tend to really lean into their understanding, even though they usually get it secondhand. Jesus taught his followers to connect with the kingdom of heaven beyond their understanding, feeling the Spirit of life in every breath. The priests and elders were too concerned with their rituals and rites to open to the understanding Jesus offered, much like they are today.

When Jesus reached out to those who had lost their way, they may have denied him at first, but seeing the light in him, they eventually came around. The religious folk cut him off pretty early as he started empowering people to cultivate their own relationships with God outside the purview of their leadership. Today, Roman American Christianity sticks its nose up at the idea of meditating in order to connect with the kingdom of heaven, preferring to introduce Christ only through the prerequisite of the kingdom of hell.

After starting the Higher Dimensions Family Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which reached attendances of 6,000 people per service, Reverend Carlton Pearson started preaching the message of universal reconciliation, the notion that none of us are in danger of hell, but can realize the kingdom of heaven through the gospel of love. In 2004, his fellow ministers labeled him a heretic and he lost his church. Christians often fight like hell for their belief in hell, but Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven.

Unfortunately, a lot of people find a lot of hope in the idea of hell. Justice is not something that people have a lot of faith in, especially in the world in which we live. Some people find solace in the idea that certain people will be punished in hell because

they got away with so much bad behavior here on earth.

For instance, I'm sure there are many people who love the idea of Jeffrey Epstein being sexually abused by demons for the rest of eternity. I'm sure people would also love the idea of Jeffrey Dahmer being punished eternally, but apparently, he said the "sinner's prayer" in prison and became a Christian, so according to Roman American Christianity, he's up in heaven waiting for the rest of us. Those who believe in reincarnation take solace in the fact that he is currently a dung beetle.

MANY ARE INVITED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN

In Matthew 22, he tells another parable that also appears in Luke 14: **"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.**

"Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

"But they paid no attention and went off - one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.

He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

While the treatment of the guy not wearing wedding clothes may seem harsh, when considering that killing messengers for inviting you to a wedding banquet was seemingly normal enough for those times to make it into this story, it sort of seems apropos. Nevertheless, if you're going to participate in the kingdom of heaven, you have to dress the part, and that does not mean submerging yourself in the fear of hell. Remember when Jesus said, **“It is finished”**? When are we going to take him at his word on that?

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Jesus began his ministry by preaching in the tabernacles, but as amazed as people were with his understanding, the priests and elders were incapable of truly getting it. So Jesus took his message to the streets, to those who were open to a new way of experiencing God, whereas the religious folk opted to maintain their limited understanding. The call of Christ still resonates through the Church of Christianity today, inviting those who feel compelled toward a deeper connection with our Creator, but few are courageous enough to choose the path of the Way Jesus truly taught, preferring to cling to their limited religious understanding.

WOE TO YOU, TEACHERS OF THE LAW

In Matthew 23, as in Mark 12 and Luke 20, the day after which nobody asked Jesus any more questions may have had something to do with the following tirade. After criticizing the teachers of the law in the temple, ridiculing them for their hypocrisy, he continues, **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom**

of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Yogananda wrote, "Jesus spoke sternly to the scribes and Pharisees, in effect warning them: 'Your hypocrisy and ill intent is drawing unto you untold sorrow and trouble! Through your ignorance and evil example that you impose on others, you close the door of opportunity for those around you who wish to enter the kingdom of heavenly Cosmic Consciousness. You throw away the key of divine knowledge I have offered to you, yourselves not trying to enter the heavenly kingdom by deep meditation and discipline, and thereby you also hinder others 'that were entering in.'"

Religious power is a very tempting mistress, and few are inclined to release it. It is built of the same energy that has formed so many life-sucking cults, the need to have followers and subjects. Because Jesus's message transcended the rites and rituals the religious leaders required to control their flock, they quivered with fear over losing their place in the societal hierarchy, as they do today.

Luke's version of this goes, "**Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.**"

One of the worst things about religious folks is when they don't actually practice their religion. Here, they have this wonderful system, designed to draw them closer to God and pointing toward a more enlightened existence, and they don't actually live it out, preferring to put on airs and pretending to be spiritual instead of humbling themselves enough to genuinely practice what they preach.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

For generations, we have had missionaries taking the

gospel of Roman American Christianity throughout the world as they have spread the ideas about Jesus Christ that have helped Roman American Christianity grow. Based on what's become known as the Romans Road, the default setting for every human being is hellbound, and only by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior can you change your trajectory. Unfortunately, this was not the message of Jesus.

“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing, but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: The gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: The gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

Recognizing the need for religion to guide people who need it, Jesus still realizes the connection to God beyond the rituals, rites, and of course, the temples. Jesus was not as concerned with the pomp and circumstance religion provided as he was with connecting people with a direct essence of the Holy Spirit that flows through all. Those who cling most adamantly to their religious traditions are often incapable of recognizing what they are actually pointing toward.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”

Luke's version of this goes, **“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other**

kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.”

While it is certainly admirable to give ten percent of your income as a tithe, there is a deeper meaning to such giving than merely the ritual. The reason we are called to tithe is to help those who are ravaged by hunger, homelessness, illness, or imprisonment. Our purpose is not in practicing the ritual but in perfecting the grace of God by allowing ourselves to be an embodiment of it.

It's a nice practice to give ten percent of what you make to charity, but it's much better to actually be charitable. It's not what you practice, it's how you practice it.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”

Religious participation is not about putting up pretenses and looking good from the outside, but by connecting with the kingdom of heaven within. Our activities should not be guided by how things look, but by how the Spirit of God guides us from within to emanate the love of our Creator.

Later in Luke 11, Jesus is invited to eat at the home of another Pharisee, and the guy is a bit surprised that Jesus doesn't wash his hands before eating.

Jesus says, **“Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you - Be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.”**

One of the conundrums of the historical Jesus is that he was not always the most gracious of house guests. Pharisees kept inviting him over, and he kept giving them a hard time about

things. This guy criticized him for not washing his hands, and Jesus shot right back and criticized him for not purifying his heart.

Whatever; Jesus. Just wash your hands without making a big deal about it.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like withered tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Religious facades are not what matter in the kingdom of heaven. What matters is the direct connection with our Creator to seek the guidance that allows us to be the servants we are called to be. We are not called to look good, but to actually be the good the world requires.

Luke's take on this is a little different, **“Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.”**

Practicing shallow religious sentiment isn't going to actually do anything to help anybody or merit their gratitude.

In Luke, he also says, **“Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.”**

Arrogance is not nearly as attractive as arrogant people think it is.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!”

Prophets can be troublesome for those who seek the

status quo. Truth telling is not always welcome for those who hide behind facade. Throughout history, prophets had often been met with violence, and Jesus knew the times hadn't changed all that much.

In Luke, the woe goes, **“Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.”**

Phew! I'm glad it was that generation and not this one. We've got enough problems.

“You snakes! You brood of vipers.’ How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on Earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.”

Again, this reference to hell is a wasted life. While Jesus was opening up the opportunity for people to connect directly with the kingdom of heaven and being conduits of love to the poor and downtrodden, the religious folk were more concerned with their attire, stature, and downright pomposity, fanning the flames of their burning ego while missing out on the fire of Spirit that longed to burn in them. Jesus cited incidents in the past where religious folk had murdered prophets in order to cling to their

ways to those who would eventually come to murder him, and prophets aren't exactly welcomed with open arms these days either.

In Luke, an expert in the law got upset because he was getting a little woe on him so Jesus started giving them some “woe”s too: **“And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.”**

People obsessed with the law need to prosecute people to stay relevant. But laws don't often do much to help people change their situations for the better. It may seemingly deter crime, but it also creates a lot of criminals.

In Matthew, Jesus says, **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”**

Beyond the pain Christ would go on to endure the last day of his life, I can't imagine the pain of ultimately being shunned by the people he came to serve. After the Israelites had ignored and murdered so many prophets before him, I have to admire Jesus's pluck for giving them the incredible opportunities he did. Hopefully, one day they'll come around.

KEEP WATCH

In Matthew 25, Jesus says, **“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time**

in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

This passage is often used to buoy the idea of Jesus's literal second coming, however, Jesus said that would happen within the lifetime of those who followed him. Since Jesus uses a parable to describe this second coming of the Son of Man, I think it's fair to say that what he is actually describing is a bit more esoteric than has been fabricated since.

I believe that the oil that brings light to the lamps is the Spirit of God and those who spend their time investing in the kingdom of heaven secure for themselves the oil of Spirit. By storing up these treasures in the kingdom of heaven, we are prepared when our purpose as sons of men is revealed to us, just as Jesus's was to him.

WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

He goes on to tell another parable: **“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and**

entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’

“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the

one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Yogananda wrote, "This parable was to disabuse the people of the false notion that the kingdom of God of which Jesus spoke would be established by him as a sovereign realm on earth. Jesus admonished that God's kingdom would be built within themselves by their realizing their soul potentials through the proper use of the spiritual endowment he had given to them in his teachings."

Like the men who were hired to work in the vineyard at different times but paid the same rate, Jesus again reiterates that not everyone is equal in what they are given to work with. However, whatever we are given to work with to create this life in which we live by finding our purposes for being here, and whatever capacities those might be revealed to us throughout the 1,440 minutes we are given every day, we've got to put it to good use. Otherwise, our lives are wasted, and we will be left complaining about all the chances we missed.

Luke also has a version of this parable, but the man is actually of noble birth, and the subjects are none too fond of him. **"A Man of Noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'**

"But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

"He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants..." and it pretty much goes down as Matthew's version with bags of gold as with Luke's version with minas, except that instead of fearing the master because he **"harvested where he had not sown and gathered where he had not reaped,"** he **"took out what he did not put in and**

reaped what he did not sow.”

But Luke's version ends with the king saying, “**But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them - bring them here and kill them in front of me.**”

Luke's version of this parable doesn't exactly paint a rosy picture of people from noble births. *First*, they have an insatiable hunger for more power, *second*, the people don't really want to be under their rule, *third*, they are completely entitled and unfair in their dealings, and *fourth*, they seem to have a penchant for rather harsh retribution. It's amazing that we still honor them the way that we do.

So we've made it through the first two gospels. I hope that you're gaining a new perspective of what Jesus had to share. Let's see what else Luke had to say.

LARGELY LUKE

Luke appears to be written as an account by Luke to Theophilus, to whom he would later write the book of Acts. Since this was written fifty years after the death of Christ, it's unlikely that it was the same Luke who walked with Jesus. They just didn't have very many names back then, and most of them were conspicuously Greek.

The first couple of chapters seem to discuss the history of John the Baptist more than Jesus, but in the third chapter, he passes the baton and Jesus's story takes the spotlight.

I've already discussed everything Jesus said in Luke most of the way through chapter 6, after Jesus shares his version of the Beatitudes and their “woe”ful companions.

GET UP

In Luke 7:11, Jesus goes to Nain with his disciples and entourage of many. They come across a funeral procession where a woman has lost her only son after already having lost her husband.

Jesus says to her, **“Don't cry,”** and then he says to the corpse, **“Young man, I say to you, get up!”** And the zombie gets up and starts talking to his mother. Doesn't even try to eat her brains.

But seriously, even though the young man was dead, in order for the miracle to happen, Jesus still called him to action by telling him to get up. For any of us who ever feel defeated, as if our lives are over, we always have the capacity to breathe in the Spirit of God and rise again. In the kingdom of heaven, resurrection is a way of being.

YOU HAVE JUDGED CORRECTLY

Luke 7:36 begins a story visited also in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and John 12. When Jesus has dinner with a Pharisee in Bethany, a woman has taken to anointing him with perfume and oil and crying and kissing his feet, and the Pharisee is none too thrilled about it. Apparently his name was Simon... not that Simon, another Simon. Like I said, they didn't have a great diversity of names.

Jesus says, "**Simon, I have something to tell you.**"

Simon says, "Give it to me, Jesus!" Again, I'm paraphrasing.

Jesus says, "**Two people owed money to a certain money lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?**"

Simon says, "The one who had more debt."

"**You have judged correctly,**" Jesus says, and then he turns to the woman and says to Simon, "**Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.**"

Then he says to the woman, "**Your sins are forgiven,**" and the other guests are like, "Who does this guy think he is forgiving people's sins like that?"

Jesus tells the woman, "**Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.**"

Notice, he didn't say he had saved her. He didn't say his blood had saved her. He didn't say his excruciating pain and torment on the cross in order to ransom her from inevitable eternal damnation had saved her. Just her simple faith, her humble service, and the abiding peace that accompanies it.

But Simon was a Pharisee, one of the top-tier religious folk who was sitting pretty. Other than inviting a fellow teacher like Jesus over for dinner, acts of service were not his primary love language. Yet those who seek out ways to serve and become a servant of love are able to find new life in Christ.

REJOICE THAT YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN

In Luke 10, it says that the disciples then returned with joy because even demons had submitted to them in Jesus's name.

Jesus said, **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."**

This passage has been used to build the mythology of Satan as the angel Lucifer, whose pride got him cast out of heaven. Many find it easier to relate with the idea of an established character named Satan who is an external enemy rather than recognizing the true adversary within. Just as lightning cracks the sky, so do our egos separate us from who we really are, children of God.

It's mind-boggling how much glory Christians often give to Satan. While Jesus describes Satan as an adversary and tempter, the mythos of Roman American Christianity has glorified him into God's dark equal. Some of the most devoted satanists in the world claim to be Christians.

But for those who still feel the compulsion to believe that Satan is an actual entity, you should at least recognize that Jesus gives his followers the power to overcome whatever adversity he may bring. So Satan doesn't need to be as glorified as often as he is in Roman American Christianity. You may be better served by glorifying the Christ within you.

DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE

Luke has an expert of the law stand up to test Jesus, asking him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him, **“What is written in the law? How do you read it?”**

The guy says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus says, **“You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.”**

Again, no miracles, no blood, no oath, no suffering, no shame, no guilt, no separation... just love the Source of all that you are as it is also the Source of your neighbor, and your neighbor another expression of the Source.

Then the guy wants to justify himself, as guys will do, especially the ones who get off on law, and he asks who his neighbor is, exactly. So Jesus shares one of his most famous parables.

Jesus says, **“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to**

an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replies, "The one who had mercy on him."

Then Jesus tells him, **"Go and do likewise."**

Again, Jesus calls for action in the way of service. He does not say that it is neighborly to tell people they are going to hell unless they adopt his religion. He does not say that he should be praised or called Lord and Savior. He calls for mercy through service to those who need it.

YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT MANY THINGS

Then they move on a bit to another village where a woman named Martha invites them over, and wouldn't you know it, she has a sister named Mary. Martha's stressing over being a good hostess and she gets a bit miffed about Mary just fawning over Jesus and hanging on to his every word.

There's also a chance Martha was the one pouring perfume and oil on Jesus earlier. If so, it's kind of ironic that she's the one getting upset with Mary as Simon had been with her. And she could have been just a bit jealous that her sister was getting more attention than her.

Jesus says, **"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed - or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her:"**

Jesus was a pretty low maintenance kind of guy. He didn't really require fancy feasts or elaborate parties, although he did often contribute to them. He just needed people's time and

attention, as the Spirit of God needs now.

**THERE IS NOTHING CONCEALED
THAT WILL NOT BE DISCLOSED**

In Luke 12, after he mentions the hypocritical yeast of the Pharisees, Jesus says, **“There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.”**

It's been said that our true character is what we do when no one is watching. Although the religious folk of his time reveled in their pomposity just as many religious folk do today, Jesus comforted his disciples by ensuring them that they will someday see justice. He also says this to caution the religious folk to clean the inside of their cup, as he had mentioned before, to fill their hearts with the Spirit of God.

BE ON YOUR GUARD

There were thousands of people gathered, trampling all over each other, and a guy yells out, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus says, **“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you? Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”**

People still ask Jesus for all sorts of silly things. Some people treat prayer as an opportunity to ask for what their egos want, beseeching Jesus to grant their every wish, as if he were some sort of genie. There are mega churches preaching the prosperity gospel all over the world now, but Jesus's message was

about much greater wealth than material possessions.

Then he starts another parable: **“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’**

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

“But God said to him, ‘You fool; this very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Unlike the impetus capitalism has for rewarding those who hoard all of the surplus for themselves in our current economic system, Jesus felt that it was better to share the surplus with the less fortunate. Recognizing that the Source of all creation has rewarded us abundance, the person with a modicum of faith should be comfortable with allowing the surplus they've helped generate to be shared with others. Unfortunately, we have venerated the practice of the wealthiest among us barely even sharing the surplus with those who've helped them create it, paying as little as they can to as many employees as they are able in order to hoard more wealth for themselves.

Moving beyond the illusion of private property as our primary goal is so important to Jesus that he actually introduces God as a character in this proverb, something he's never done before. Also recognize that God himself calls this fella a “fool”, which Jesus has already pointed out is a pretty bad thing to say to somebody. Nevertheless, this idea of storing up for ourselves in order to distance ourselves from the rest of the world is not a wise way to live.

Moving forward, may we rethink our strategies as we build the new heaven and earth.

UNLESS YOU REPENT, YOU TOO WILL PERISH

In Luke 13, some people have informed Jesus that Pilate had mixed the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. I'm not sure if it was their blood or the blood they were sacrificing. They had a lot of issues with blood sacrifices back then.

Jesus says, **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the Tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”**

Whenever a natural catastrophe occurs, there are usually some religious people saying that it was God's punishment for some sin they've chosen to chastise people for. Jesus says it's just something that happened because that's the way life happens. However, because these people had such a perverted mindset as to think in such a way about others, Jesus knew they needed a change of mind, a repentance of the way they saw the world and those with whom they shared it, and he chose to make this a cautionary teachable moment.

I'm sure that the Galileans had several admirable qualities that these Jews were missing out on. I'm sure that if Jehovah really needed blood, theirs was just as good as any other. Yet due to their bias, bigotry, and prejudice, these Jews were missing out on some really fabulous people that could have brought so much richness to their lives.

UGH! NOT ANOTHER FIG TREE!

Then he goes into another parable: **“A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but**

did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

“Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

And that's it. Jesus doesn't say anything about whether or not the tree bore fruit a year later, but just ends there with another withered fig tree. Perhaps this is a reference to the legend of Adam and Eve fashioning loincloths from fig leaves after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Perhaps Jesus just has it in for fig trees.

Essentially, Jesus is discussing the endless grace of God and the eternal continuity of the kingdom of heaven. Immediately after telling these people that they are going to perish if they don't repent, he offers this lesson on how to repent by reinventing oneself. Although we may think that our lives are meaningless, every year we get another trip around the sun and the opportunity to cultivate our own soil by embracing new practices and ingratiating new behaviors, and in every moment, we are given the opportunity to breathe in the Spirit of Christ and feel the kingdom of heaven within us as we are born again.

YOU HYPOCRITES!

One Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue and he sees a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years (he also had just mentioned that eighteen people died when the tower in Siloam fell). She's bent over and shuffling along, and Jesus tells her to shuffle over his way because everybody's got to work for it a little bit.

Jesus says, **“Woman, you are set free from your infirmity,”** and when he touches her, she straightens right up and

praises God.

One of the synagogue leaders makes a stink about her coming in to get healed on the Sabbath when she has six other perfectly good healing days to choose from.

Jesus says, **“You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”**

The religious folk were embarrassed, but everybody else really dug what he was doing. Again, he refers to the adversary Satan, and many have come to believe that Satan is an actual living being, but since Jesus did tend to hyperbolize from time to time, I think that Satan is more of a way of being. Either way, she was freed from it as we all have the opportunity to be.

Then some Pharisees approached and told Jesus to move on because Herod wanted to kill him, and they weren't too fond of him either.

Jesus said, **“Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day - for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”**

This is probably Jesus at his most sarcastic. To start out, calling Herod a fox was not the compliment it might be today. Then, he stands in his sovereign autonomy and defies their desire to behave as his authority, dictating his plan and setting his boundaries.

Then he roasts Israel as the place prophets go to die and gives the same “O Jerusalem” soliloquy he delivers in Matthew 23 after Jesus has pelted the Pharisees with a bunch of “woe”s and called them a brood of vipers. He ends the speech by citing part of a verse from Psalm 118, which he has quoted more than once, **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”**

The psalm begins and ends with, “Give thanks to the Lord,

for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Forever doesn't begin when our lives end. Eternal life happens now... and now... and now... as does the love of God.

THOSE WHO EXALT THEMSELVES WILL BE HUMBLLED

In Luke 14, it's the Sabbath and he's having dinner with another Pharisee, a prominent one at that, so everybody's got their eyes on Jesus. There happens to be a man suffering from abnormal swelling hanging out there, moaning and gurgling at this rich guy's house, so Jesus asks the Pharisee and other experts in the law who were standing around watching this freak of nature, **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”**

They didn't say anything, but I'll bet they were thinking a few things. One of them was probably thinking about the wager he'd made on the abnormally swollen fella getting any help.

Jesus grabs the guy, heals him and sends him on his way. I don't know if that meant normal swelling or no swelling at all, but I'm sure it was a big improvement to abnormal swelling. This is one of the few instances when Jesus is not recorded asking someone to do something in order to be healed, but perhaps abnormal swelling calls for abnormal protocol.

Then Jesus says to them, **“If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?”** and they've still got nothing to say.

So he reclines a little bit and starts scoping out the room since nobody likes asking him any questions anymore, and he notices the seating arrangement, and that inspires another lesson.

Jesus says, **“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the**

least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

That's just good advice. That would be more embarrassing than being the only one to do the chicken dance.

Then Jesus looks at the host and says, **"When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."**

Many believe this "resurrection of the righteous" refers to the second coming of Christ, but I think it's more likely the resurrection of the righteous mindset. Righteous people don't need thanks or applause or even payment to do what they know is the right thing to do. They know how it makes them feel to allow the Spirit of God to move through them in such a way and that is often reward enough.

Someone at the table hears what Jesus is saying and says, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

Then Jesus goes into the parable of the great banquet first told in Matthew 22, however, Luke's version doesn't have the poor guest chained up for improper dress etiquette. Then he looks to the crowd following along with him and repeats the bits about hating your family and carrying your cross in order to be his disciple, first mentioned in Matthew 10.

Then Jesus continues, **"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who**

sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

I think this points back to Jesus studying Buddhism in India. Non-attachment is one of the primary philosophical goals of Buddhism as the solution to the third Noble Truth and the reward for walking the eightfold path of righteousness. Beyond the mere human practices of building towers and engaging in warfare, Jesus was offering the people of Israel a new worldview.

However, I have to point out that these two parables do not contain the same sort of relatability as those in the earlier gospels. While Mark and Matthew spoke of seeds, sheep, and servants, things people on the street relate to, Luke is talking about banquets, building towers, and waging wars. I think Luke might have been a bit on the bougie side. But then he does bring things down to Earth by talking about coins.

WHAT WAS LOST HAS BEEN FOUND

In addition to the parable of the lost sheep he shared in Matthew 18, Jesus shared a few more parables exclusively in Luke.

Jesus said, **"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'** In the same way, I tell you, **there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over**

one sinner who repents.”

People sure do like their coins, especially when they don't have many of them. The rarer something is, the more we treasure it, and now that they're not making pennies anymore, it makes me smile every time I get one. Anyway, I'm sure that nothing makes an angel's job easier than a repentant sinner that can go with the flow and not keep getting into trouble all the time.

In Luke 15, Jesus goes on, **“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.**

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's

have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look: all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

With the life I've lived, there've been many times when I've been called the prodigal son, and I can't say that I haven't done a pretty good job of acting out the role as best I could. So I've always had a bit of an affinity for this story, and I am grateful for every time I lose my way and trip over my ego only to find my way back to the boundless grace of God.

Yogananda wrote, "Thus does the *Bhagavad Gita* offer divine hope to fallen prodigal children of God, seemingly helpless through misdeeds. No matter how noxious their evil, they can never destroy their inherent goodness. It is God who has become the finite expression of each soul no matter how far man's life is pulled away from its divine Source by the outgoing forces of evil, if he makes a conscious effort at righteous behavior he will be drawn back to God by the stronger magnetism of God's love."

Regardless of how prodigal we may become or how lost we may get along our journey, the love of our Creator is always there to help us on the Unbroken Path we all share. Despite whatever ways we find to sabotage ourselves, we can always change direction.

**WHOEVER CAN BE TRUSTED WITH LITTLE
CAN BE TRUSTED WITH MUCH**

In Luke 16, Jesus carries on with more parables: **“There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’**

“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg - I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

“So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

“‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied.

“The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred fifty.’

“Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’

“‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied.

“He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

This is indeed Jesus being shrewd. Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." If you make people feel good, they're going to want to have you around. When you invest in people, they will invest in you.

Nevertheless, I can't imagine many masters who would commend someone they threatened to fire for canceling half of the debts they were owed. Just like the people he was accused of spending time with, the people in Jesus's stories are not the most scrupulous.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

It is very worth noting that Jesus points to the difference between worldly wealth and true riches. Money and material things may come and go, but being a conduit for giving and accepting love may just be the greatest wealth there is. Nevertheless, Jesus does point out the importance of handling worldly wealth just as he told his disciples to waste nothing after feeding the 5,000 and collecting the excess bread. We must do well with what we have been given.

**IF THEY DO NOT LISTEN TO THE PROPHETS,
THEY WILL NOT BE CONVINCED**

Jesus said, **"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.**

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

In Greek mythology, Hades was the god of the underworld, but as time went on, the word was used to describe the underworld as a place where all the dead went, good and bad. The word *hades* is most accurately translated as “unseen” or “unknown”, and when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated to Greek, the word *sheol*, which represented the grave, was often replaced with the word *hades*.

The rich man is being tormented for the way he lived his life and the selfishness he cultivated, but Abraham and Lazarus are in Hades as well. They may be far away, but according to the story, everybody who dies goes to the great unknown. The main difference is how things play out for you based on the karma you build up.

“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

Many Christians accept this chasm as the division between heaven and hell, but neither of those things are actually mentioned here. It also doesn't say that Lazarus necessarily earned his way into the good graces of Abraham by any works of service, and he certainly didn't accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior. It seems to just point to the idea that things have a way of balancing out.

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus

to my family, for I have five brothers. Let them warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

"No, father Abraham' he said, 'But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

This is what we call a bit of foreshadowing. In each one of the canonical gospel records, Jesus does return from the dead, and though he does continue his message of repentance, he doesn't actually offer much warning about the possible punishments people might endure upon their experience in the unknown expanse of Hades. Instead, he told them to forgive sins and share the gospel of the kingdom of God.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST

One time, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, and Jesus said, **"The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."**

Yogananda wrote, "Many people think of heaven as a physical location, a point of space far above the atmosphere and beyond the stars. Others interpret Jesus's statements about the advent of the kingdom of God as referring to the coming of a Messiah to establish and rule over a divine kingdom on earth. In fact, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven consists, respectively, of the transcendental infinitudes of Cosmic Consciousness and the heavenly causal and astral realms of vibratory creation that are considerably finer and more harmonized with God's will than those physical vibrations

clustered together as planets, air, and earthly surroundings.”

He interprets Jesus's message as, “The kingdom of God - of eternal, immutable, ever-newly blissful Cosmic Consciousness - is within you. Behold your soul as a reflection of the immortal spirit, and you will find yourself encompassing the infinite Empire of God-love, God-wisdom, God-bliss existing in every particle of vibratory creation and in the vibrationless Transcendental Absolute.”

Roman American Christianity tends to ignore this notion of the kingdom of God, preferring to embrace the mythology of it being something we will experience in the afterlife. But Jesus does pretty clearly state that the kingdom of God is in our midst. It is not someplace we go to when we die, it is something we allow to live through us as its subjects.

WHERE ARE THE OTHER NINE?

Somewhere between Samaria and Galilee on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus comes across ten lepers who are sure to keep their distance while asking for pity.

Jesus says, **“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”**

As they started in that direction, they were cleansed, and their leprosy went away. One of them, a Samaritan, came back to thank Jesus when he realized he'd been healed.

Jesus said, **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”** Then he says to the Samaritan, **“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”**

It's interesting that Jesus tells him that his faith has made him well. Usually, he says it just before someone is healed, but since this guy's actual healing happened far from Jesus, he got to share it with him when he came back. Jesus could take credit for the healing, but he always humbly reminds people that it is their faith that is making the healing happen.

I also think that the fact that Jesus is calling him a foreigner instead of a pagan, gentile dog shows that Jesus is making progress on his reverse antisemitism and warming up to the idea that he may be open to sharing his gospel to people other than the Jews. Even though he's talked smack about them before, after the exhibitions of faith by the Roman centurion and this leper, Jesus is coming around to considering the possibility that perhaps pagans aren't all that bad after all.

BE PERSISTENT

In Luke 18, Jesus tells his disciples a parable to encourage them to pray and not stop believing in faith: **“In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’**

“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me.’”

Again, although the hero of this story is a judge, as an atheist and social nihilist, he's not exactly a lovable character. Yet this character is not used as a cautionary tale about not believing in God or not treating your neighbor as yourself. The apathetic judge is used to showcase that even those who aren't drawn to do the right thing for spiritual or social purposes, they'll do the right thing eventually if you pester them enough and they think you're a psychopath.

Then, he said, **“Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However,**

when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Now if an apathetic, atheistic, nihilistic, unjust judge will do the right thing because he's afraid some crazy widow is going to go bonkers on him, think about how willing God, who has thus far provided everything you have ever experienced, must be to give you the best life possible. God loves you and provides for you even if you have been convinced you're a terrible sinner. The question Jesus asked was whether anyone was ever actually going to notice that.

With as much fear as Roman American Christianity has cultivated over the last several centuries, it can be challenging to find the way to faith. The words "faith" and "belief" are often confused and used interchangeably, but they are quite different. Roman American Christianity brings with it an arsenal of beliefs, but none of them were required for the faith used in the miracles of Jesus, and they still aren't.

THOSE WHO HUMBLE THEMSELVES WILL BE EXALTED

In case anybody thought themselves self-righteous and looked down on people, Jesus told this parable: **"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector..."**

This is Jesus's version of "two guys walk into a bar." It actually may be the inspiration behind that joke.

"The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves

will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Arrogant people are hopeless, especially when their arrogance is based on their religiosity. Even though this tax collector may seem like he's being a little hard on himself, at least he is in a place where he is open to God's guidance whereas the Pharisee just thinks he's all that. What Jesus advised was not to boast about how great you are, but to ask God how to continually improve.

THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK AND SAVE THE LOST

In Luke 19, Jesus goes to Jericho, and a big crowd has gathered to greet him. There's a wealthy little tax collector named Zacchaeus who wanted to get a look at him, but he was too short to see over the crowd, so he shimmys up a little tree along the path Jesus is taking. Always thinking ahead, that Zacchaeus.

When Jesus gets to the tree, he looks up and says, **“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”**

So Zacchaeus swings on down out of the tree, happy as a monkey, but then people start talking smack about Jesus for going to the house of a sinner. So Zacchaeus says he's going to give half of his possessions to the poor, and for anybody he's ripped off, he'll pay them four times what he cheated out of them.

It's hard to say whether Zacchaeus was inspired to be so generous in order to overcome the shame of the crowd or if the presence of Christ truly opened his heart, but Jesus sure did have a thing for tax collectors.

Then Jesus says to him, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”**

The Mirror Bible translates this as, **“This is my mission as the Son of Man, to search out those who are at their wit's**

end in their futile efforts to justify themselves, trying desperately to clear their name! I have come to their rescue and will help them rediscover their authentic identity and redeemed innocence!"

For roughly 2,000 years, Jesus Christ has been there to help people who have found themselves at their wits end, unable to justify themselves, and start a new life. In spite of, and in all fairness sometimes because of, the doctrines and dogmas of Roman American Christianity, Jesus still changes lives. I wonder if he can change Christianity.

Let's see what John has to say...

JUST JOHN

WHAT'S THE WORD?

The Gospel of John begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Then it gets into introducing John, not the John that wrote the gospel, but the one foretold to be a herald for the Messiah by the prophet Isaiah. I sure wish they had more names back then. In the 40th chapter of Isaiah, it starts with “Comfort, comfort my people” and proclaims that Jerusalem's hard service has been completed and its sins have been paid for. Then he refers to “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, make straight the way for the Lord,” referring to John, who isn't called “the Baptist” in this book because he doesn't actually baptize, or even meet, Jesus. Later on in the chapter, Isaiah compares people to grass whose flowers wither and fall “but the word of our God endures forever.”

The word used for “Word” is *logos*, which means “truth”, the sum of all things known. The writer of John is more than suggesting that the Word of God we will be discussing in this book is the person of Jesus of Nazareth, or at least the Christ within him, the “true light that gives light to the world” the character John was called to tell people about. Unfortunately, that is not the case in Roman American Christianity.

For most believers in modern Christianity, after it has been carved into submission by the Roman and American empires, the Bible is the Word of God, not Jesus. Inspect the statements of belief for any of the 340,000 Christian churches in

the United States, and the vast majority will proclaim the Bible as the perfect, inerrant, and infallible Word of God as their most important belief. God, of course, is second, and Jesus, who was supposed to be the true Word of God, according to John, is third. It is my contention that this foundational idolatry is the cause of many of the problems with Christianity.

Yogananda wrote, "'Word' means intelligent vibration, intelligent energy, going forth from God. Any utterance of a word, such as 'flower', expressed by an intelligent being, consists of sound energy or vibration, plus thought, which imbues that vibration with intelligent meaning. Likewise, the Word that is the beginning and Source of all created substances is Cosmic Vibration imbued with Cosmic Intelligence."

Sorry, but according to the Bible, the Bible is not the Word of God.

The first chapter of John introduces the character John as someone sent by God to testify about the light of Christ, strongly establishing Jesus as the "Word became flesh", God incarnate. Other than quoting Isaiah about how Jesus's name should have been Immanuel, which means "God with us", the synoptic gospels never come out and say that Jesus was God. They called him "Lord" a lot, but a lot of people got called "Lord" back then.

The book of John doesn't go into the description of the character John, his wardrobe, his eating habits, or that he lives in the wilderness, as the synoptic gospels do. When he refers to Jesus, after the writer John deifies him, the character John says, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." John sees the Spirit of God come down on Jesus, tells other people he is the Chosen One, and even tells some of his own disciples to go follow him, calling him the Lamb of God.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

When John's disciples started following Jesus, he turned around and asked them, "**What do you want?**"

They asked where he was staying, and he said, "**Come and you will see.**"

So they go hang out with him for the afternoon, and he probably blows their minds a bit, so one of them, Andrew, brings his brother to meet him.

Jesus says, "**You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas** (which, when translated, is Peter)."

To Philip, he says, "**Follow me,**" and to Nathaniel, he says, "**Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.**"

When Nathaniel asks how Jesus knows him, he says, "**I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.**"

Apparently, this blew Nathaniel's mind because he calls him "Rabbi, Son of God, and king of Israel."

Then Jesus says, "**You believed because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that. Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending' on the Son of Man.**"

Yogananda wrote, "As soon as Spirit evolved a cosmic vibratory thought, through the action of the cosmic magical measuring power of *maya* delusion, the Unmanifested Spirit became God the Father, the Creator of all creative vibration. God the Father, in the Hindu scriptures, is called *Ishvara* (the Cosmic Ruler) or *Sat* (the supreme pure essence of Cosmic Consciousness), the Transcendental Intelligence. That is, God the Father exists transcendently untouched by any tremor of vibratory creation - a conscious, separate Cosmic Consciousness."

Jesus demonstrates his ability as a rabbi, the Son of God, the king of Israel, and the Son of Man by pointing out his ability to

reshape reality, a secret wisdom he would share with his closest followers. He starts by renaming Simon and transcending languages, and then he speaks to the various dimensions of reality that await our exploration. Given the deeper understanding that he had of scripture, Jesus certainly understood the hidden secrets of Kabbalah.

In Kabbalah, the Tree of Life represents the divine idea of creation coming into manifestation, from the offspring of God to the offspring of man. It includes ten attributes of Divinity known as *sephirot*, which is quite similar to the word *seraphim*, used to describe God's highest order of angels by the prophet Isaiah. This is also similar to the story of Jacob's Ladder in Genesis 28 with his vision of angels ascending and descending from heaven.

Jesus may not have cared much for fig trees, but I think he had a good grasp of the Tree of Life. According to the book of Genesis, the Tree of Life was the second tree God made reference to when he forbade Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Although that has changed our mindset, and created separation in this world of duality, understanding the Tree of Life also has the capacity to change our mindset, and, according to Genesis, the fruit of the Tree of Life was not forbidden by God.

MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME

In John 2, Jesus reluctantly performs his first miracle. Jesus is at a wedding, and they run out of wine. His mother, obviously aware of his capabilities, informs him about it. You know how mothers are about their wine.

Jesus says, "**Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come.**"

Jesus wasn't quite ready for the spotlight and had probably imagined a more altruistic, benevolent, and charitable first miracle than serving as a glorified bar back, but he takes it in

stride and tells the servants, “**Fill the jars with water,**” and they filled them to the brim.

Then he tells them, “**Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.**”

They do, and the guy says it's the best wine he's ever had. Fortunately, Jesus had higher aspirations than merely being a vintner, but here he does still provide a beautiful example. If you're going to do something, even if your mother makes you do it, do it the best you can.

Then he went to Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and disciples. They go to Jerusalem, and he causes a scene in the temple by flipping over the moneylenders' tables and driving out the livestock.

Then he makes his first reference to his death and third day resurrection. This went down quite differently than the accounts by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For instance, in the synoptic gospels, the scene in the temple occurs after Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a colt as people lay cloaks on the ground. John's Jerusalem Passover Temple scene is at the beginning of his ministry, not even ready to announce himself, and riding into town on a colt happens on the Passover before the last supper rather than a few years earlier as in the synoptic gospels.

**NO ONE CAN SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD
UNLESS THEY ARE BORN AGAIN**

In John 3, a Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. He was a pretty high-ranking fella in the ruling council and didn't want to be seen conversing with Jesus, especially since he actually believed Jesus had been sent by God, based on the signs he was doing, which, up to this point in John's telling of the story, has only been turning water into wine and creating a ruckus in the temple. So John could just be coming into this late in the story and all the stuff from the synoptic gospels has already happened, more

or less.

Jesus says, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”**

The term “born again” is exclusive to the gospel of John, but it has become of supreme importance to Roman American Christianity. In Roman American Christianity, to be born again theoretically means to invite Jesus into your heart, but mostly means to become a Roman American Christian. I don't believe this is what Jesus intended.

Yogananda wrote, “Divine incarnations do not come to bring a new or exclusive religion, but to restore the One Religion of God-realization. The great ones, like waves, all bathe in the same Eternal Sea and become one with it. The outwardly varying messages of the prophets are part of the necessary relativity that accommodates human diversity. It is narrow-mindedness that creates religious bigotry and divisive denominationalism, constricting truth to ritualistic worship and sectarian dogma; the form is mistaken for the spirit. The essential message of actual contact between man and Maker is diluted with ignorance. Humanity drinks of the polluted waters, understanding not at all why its spiritual thirst remains. Only pure waters can quench a vexing thirst.”

Nicodemus has trouble wrapping his head around the notion of being born again, but in a different way than people have trouble understanding it today. Today, people think it's about embracing the Roman theology of Christianity and their interpretation of these red letters and the letters of Paul, but Nicodemus was thinking along the lines of a physical rebirth, not the ideological rebirth of today's Christianity. Jesus was talking about something completely different that neither fully understand.

Jesus continues, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be**

born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Yogananda wrote, "Jesus was describing a metaphysical law of *noumena* (substance, or cause) and *phenomena* (the appearance of substances, or effect) when he compared the Spirit, and the souls emerging from It, with the invisible wind, and its presence declared by its sound. Just as the source of the wind is hidden but the wind is made known by its sound, so the Spirit-substance is invisible, hidden beyond the reach of human senses; and the incarnate souls born of the Spirit are the visible phenomena. By the sound, the invisible wind is known. By the presence of intelligent souls, the invisible Spirit is declared."

The Mirror Bible translates this as, "**We can observe the effect the wind has, and hear its sound whenever it touches objects - yet those objects do not define the wind; it comes and goes of its own accord - if life was not born out of spirit in the first place, it would not be possible to detect spirit influence at all. We are spirit-compatible by design."**

Nicodemus still isn't getting it so Jesus says, "**You are Israel's teacher, and do you not understand these things?"**

And we should stop right here to point out that just because someone has been given some level of authority, doesn't mean they actually know anything. We should also consider that the institutions and religions created by these men without understanding may not hold what we are seeking either. Just saying.

THE SON OF MAN MUST BE LIFTED UP

Jesus says, "**Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know (and you don't know much), and we testify to what we have seen (and y'all are completely blind), but still you people do not accept our testimony (cuz y'all are a bunch of**

knuckleheads). **I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe: how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?** (Y'all are way too caught up in your limited ways of understanding.) **No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man.** (Spoiler alert: you actually came from heaven too. You just don't remember.) **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."**

Many Christians see this as Jesus wanting to be praised, lifted up in worship, but that is not how Moses lifted up the snake. If the Son of Man is to be lifted up as Moses lifted the snake, this is not a call to worship, but something much more heavenly. Many mystics regard the serpent referred to here as the Kundalini energy Moses realized by finding his power in silent meditation in the wilderness, and not the staff turned to a serpent in the Pharaoh's palace.

Yogananda wrote, "Jesus said that each son of man, each bodily consciousness, must be lifted from the plane of the senses to the astral Kingdom by reversing the matter-bent outflowing of the life force to ascension through the serpent-like coiled passage at the base of the spine - the son of man is lifted up when this serpentine force is uplifted, 'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.' We must reascend, just as Moses, in the spiritual wilderness of silence in which all his desires were not more, lifted his soul from body consciousness into God-consciousness through the same path by which it had descended."

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD...

Jesus says, "**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.**"

This is arguably the most popular Bible verse of all time,

held up at sporting events and on street corners as a reminder of Jesus's story. The assumption of Roman American Christianity is that the words "shall not perish" refers to humanity's default state of being hellbound unless they believe in the story of Jesus. However, the Greek word for "perish" is actually the same word used to describe the "lost" coin and sheep in Luke 15 so while it is still tragic, it's not as bleak as the fiery hellscape Christianity has come to imagine.

The Mirror Bible translates this as, "**The entire cosmos is the object of God's affection. And he is not about to abandon his creation - the gift of his Son is for mankind to realize their origin in him who mirrors their authentic birth - begotten not of flesh but of the Father. In this persuasion the life of the ages echoes within the individual and announces that the days of regret and sense of lost-ness are over.**"

Yogananda wrote, "To think that the Lord condemns non-believers as sinners is incongruous. Since the Lord Himself dwells in all beings, condemnation would be utterly self-defeating. God never punishes man for not believing in him; man punishes himself. If one does not believe in the dynamo and cuts the wires that connect his home to that source, he forfeits the advantages of that electrical power. Likewise, to disavow the Intelligence that is omnipresent in all creation is to deny the consciousness it's linked with the Source of divine wisdom and love that empowers the process of ascension in the Spirit."

Jesus goes on, "**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.**"

The Mirror Bible translates this last bit as, "**Faith and not flesh defines you. In the persuasion of your authentic sonship there is no separation or rejection. For someone to prefer not to embrace this is to remain under their own judgment sustained by their futile efforts to define themselves through**

personal performance. In their stubborn unbelief they reject what is revealed and redeemed in the name of the Son, begotten only of the Father and not the flesh."

Yogananda wrote, "Belief is the precursor of conviction; One has to believe a thing in order to investigate equitably about it. But if one is satisfied only with a belief, it becomes dogma - narrow-mindedness, a preclusion of truth and spiritual progress. What is necessary is to grow, in the soil of belief, the harvest of direct experience and contact of God. That indisputable realization, not mere belief, is what saves people."

The tradition in Roman American Christianity is to keep the entire fate of the world on Jesus's shoulders as he hangs on the cross, bearing the burden of all humanity. However, Jesus's message was consistently about calling his followers to live out their faith through service to humankind. Truly believing in Jesus means to actually implement his teachings and realize our own atonement.

Jesus continues: **"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed."**

"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God."

The Mirror Bible translates this as, **"He who discovers the poetry of Truth, faces the light unashamedly - his lifestyle boldly displays the workmanship of Union with God. His works speak for themselves - 'Made in heaven - wrought in God'."**

Again, Jesus clarifies that his followers will bring light to the world through their works. Many won't get it, and many won't want to. By living a life in communion with Spirit and allowing that light to shine through you, you can light up the world.

I WILL GIVE YOU LIVING WATER

John 3 goes on with Jesus and John baptizing people in different parts of the Jordan River. Some of John's disciples make a stink because Jesus is getting more people who want to get dunked by him, but John says it's cool because Jesus is the man. Then John makes a speech about how great Jesus is and that whoever believes in him has eternal life, but those who reject him will get the wrath of God, but it's not in red letters so we're moving on.

In John 4, we learn that Jesus wasn't even baptizing at all, but had been outsourcing it to the disciples. But the Pharisees are none too happy about it so Jesus decides to skip town until things mellow out again. He's going through Samaria and stops by a well to take a break and when a woman comes to draw water, he asks her for a drink.

Jesus asks, **"Will you give me a drink?"** and the woman has a tizzy because Jews and Samaritans aren't too fond of each other, like Jews and Palestinians now, except that the Samaritan woman still had access to water.

Jesus says, **"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."**

I will say that the fact that Jesus often refers to himself in the third person sorta does lean toward the idea of a Trinity.

She keeps giving him flack, and he says, **"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

Water is often used to represent our emotions, with air representing our minds, the earth representing our bodies, and fire representing spirit. In his 1999 book, *The Hidden Messages In*

Water, Japanese researcher Masaru Emoti demonstrated the differences in frozen water crystals that had been exposed to different words. Words most often associated with Christ, like “love”, “peace”, and “gratitude”, generated intricately symmetrical crystals while words like “hate” and “evil” created dark and distorted blurs. Imagine what the Spirit of God can do to the water that makes up 70% of your body.

Now she's intrigued and asks for some of his living water, and he says, **“Go, call your husband and come back,”** to which she says she doesn't have a husband, and he says, **“You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”**

Leave it to Jesus to look on the bright side of things. In those times, women who've had five husbands weren't exactly held in high esteem, and here he is pointing out her honesty.

She gets a little bent out of shape talking about property rights and victimhood, and he says, **“Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”**

I'm not completely sure if Jesus meant salvation was coming from the Jews or if he was offering salvation from the Jews.

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kinds of worshipers the Father seeks, God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

When she says she thinks it will get better when the Messiah shows up, he says, **“I, the one speaking to you - I am he.”**

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus declared that the mass of religious believers take part in ceremonies or rituals but never

know the object of their worship. It is those who have God-consciousness, who commune with God, that can truly speak of worshipping God. Ceremonial worship - whether it be of diverse images venerated by different cultures down the ages, or customized prayers, chants, or hymns, or symbolic rites - without inner communion rarely uplifts the consciousness of the worshiper beyond vague concepts of Divinity to actual perception of God. This is why Jesus said, **“You know not what you worship.”**

Similarly, Roman American Christianity often favors the Bible over God. Instead of encouraging the cultivation of communion with God through a silent mind and listening for the still small voice of the word of God through Christ, they opt to read their Roman Empire-approved Bible as their Word of God. They know a lot about what they are worshipping from the perspective they are offered, but they don't actually spend a lot of time with it.

Whereas Jesus calls for connection with God in boundless Spirit, Roman American Christianity demands boundaries of doctrine, dogma, and divisiveness. While it certainly can be helpful in establishing spiritual experiences and developing community, religion does create limitations, many of them necessarily required for the day and age they were established. Regardless of which rituals or traditions anyone may hold to, we must remember that they are ultimately signposts toward the reunion with our Source, and our journey will be more bountiful when we realize they all point within.

The disciples come back and are surprised to find him talking to a Samaritan woman, but they play it cool. Meanwhile, her experience with Jesus has her so excited she forgets her water jar to go tell people about this guy she just met. So Jesus has his first mega fan.

His disciples tell him he should eat something, and he says, **“I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”**

The disciples think somebody else must have brought him some food while he'd been sitting there, but he says, **“My food is**

to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields: they are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'one sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

The Mirror Bible phrases a section of this as, **"Would you say that it will take another four months for the seed to ripen in the ear? This is not the food that I am talking about. The fruit of your own toil will never satisfy permanently. I want to show you the real harvest. From now on, look at people differently; see them through your Father's eyes, and you will know that they are ripe and ready to discover how perfectly mirrored they are in me."**

Yogananda wrote, "Jesus was also trying to heal the spiritual ignorance of his disciples: the delusion that man is essentially a physical being. When a master is with his disciples, he makes use of every opportunity, no matter how significant or insignificant, to help them spiritualize their consciousness. No lapse into identification with accustomed mortal habits is too trite to warrant correction. The untangling of delusion's net is achieved one knot at a time. Jesus wanted the disciples, first and foremost, to think of the body as an instrument for doing the will of God, even as he was demonstrating by his example that the sole purpose for his life on earth was to finish whatever work God wished him to do. The secondary concern is to care for the body only as necessary to maintain it as a fit instrument."

I think that Jesus was just in the flow. There is this space in life where our talents and preparation perfectly align with the requirements of service we are provided with, and this state was described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as "flow". We can just be who we are, doing what we do best, and completely enjoying our

existence so much so that time passes without our knowledge and we can go for hours without eating or drinking or even feeling any hunger or thirst. I think that's how Jesus felt when he was healing and teaching.

WHATEVER THE FATHER DOES, THE SON DOES ALSO

After all of the hoopla caused by the woman at the well, the Samaritans take a shine to Jesus and invite him to stay a few more days so he builds up quite a following, because they're not only hearing stories about Jesus, they actually get to experience his presence, and they are convinced he's the guy they've been waiting for. Eventually, he's got to go back to Galilee, and even though Jesus had previously said that a prophet has no honor in his own country, after all the tumult he'd caused at the temple and turning water into wine, it turns out they'd taken quite a shine to him as well.

So he goes on to do some healings we've already discussed, and some of the Jewish leaders started to give him a hard time for healing people on the Sabbath.

Jesus says, **"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I am too working."**

Well, they didn't take too kindly to that because he was not only working on the Sabbath, but he was also saying God was his Father, in their little minds, equal with God.

So Jesus says, **"Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son**

just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”

Yogananda wrote, “No matter what a God-attuned devotee does, his actions, will, and reason are of his own free choice, but he feels them guided by the wisdom of the Heavenly Father. Such devotees are not slaves of God; rather, in acting wisely of their own volition, they find that the wisdom in man's soul is the wisdom that comes from God. The Lord never constrains His devotees to do anything; But those who feel the presence of God know the wisdom of His will and prefer His guidance rather than their own egoistic determinations.”

We must also recognize that we are all children of God, each of us an emanation of the shared Source of our being. Our goals as the spiritual sons of God should be to see the light of God in everyone for that divine spark is in each of us, although sometimes they seem to shine quite dimly. That is why communion with God in Spirit is required, to help our lights shine more brightly.

THOSE WHO HEAR WILL LIVE

Jesus said, **“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”**

Jesus's message, loudly and clearly, was about connecting with the kingdom of God within each of us. Those who actively use part of the 1,440 minutes we are given every day to connect with the Divinity within us are able to draw from that endless Source of power and comfort through the rest of the day, eternally connected to the Creator of All That Is. We have already crossed over from death to life, and no longer need to wait for anything.

Yogananda wrote, “Devotees who by constant meditation and spiritual ecstasy feel Christ in all creation are the real Christians. Through direct experience they know and believe in Christ

Intelligence and the Father who reflected that Intelligence in all creation, and they know Christ as manifested in the Cosmic Vibration. That is why it is emphasized 'he that heareth my word... hath everlasting life'; that is, he who listens to the Cosmic Vibration and intuitively feels Christ-wisdom flowing into him not only knows and believes in God and Christ, but becomes one with the imperishable life emanating from Them."

Jesus said, **"Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live."**

For the last 1,500 years it has been challenging for those of the Church of Christianity to hear the voice of the Son of God over the din of Paul and the Roman influence. But by releasing the trappings of Christian fundamentalism and the idolatrous doctrines of scripture worship, believers who are prepared for an experiential knowledge of God are recognizing their power to connect to God within their own hearts, unreliant upon the architecture of chapels and religiosity. As deconstruction abounds, many are forging a deeper relationship with Christ.

Jesus said, **"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."**

I find it interesting that Jesus usually refers to himself as the Son of Man, rather than the Son of God as Christians do today. Beyond the references to the Son of Man in the books of Daniel and Isaiah, and the prophecies that have been drawn from them, I think that by using the Son of Man, Jesus was communicating how like us he was and how like him we are. For we are all man, whether we are male or female or somewhere in between, we are all part of this cosmic movement called humanity, and Jesus was the ultimate expression of what humanity is really all about, the perfect example of what we are capable of.

Jesus said, **"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done what is good will rise to**

live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."

How many in this society of ours are already living as if they were dead? How many live in the grave of economic slavery? How many will rise to live and how many will cling to their condemnation?

Jesus said, **"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."**

Although the book of John generally is used to argue for Jesus's Divinity, here, that is not what Jesus is trying to communicate. He realizes his personal limitations in the character he is playing, yet realizes the supreme power of the Source of his existence.

Jesus said, **"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth."**

Will Rogers said, "Get someone else to blow your horn and the sound will carry twice as far." Even though Jesus and John never met in this gospel, Jesus recognized that John had good things to say about him.

Jesus said, **"Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish - the very works that I am doing - testify that the Father has sent me."**

Jesus didn't need human testimony, and he has little need for praise. What he wanted then and what he wants now are for people to actually listen to his words and follow them to connect with the kingdom of God within them and to love one another.

Jesus said, **"And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not**

believe the one he sent. You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

It is amazing to have so many Gentiles pouring over Jewish scriptures, seeking some semblance of meaning in books not written for them, but completely unwilling to actually listen to the voice of Christ calling them to inner communion with the living God within. How many Christians will venerate their Bibles, but never truly understand the underlying message of Jesus?

Jesus said, **"I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts."**

Every Sunday morning, Christians gather to cry and wail over their sinfulness, praising Jesus for saving them from the hell they've been told they deserve instead of opening up to how he truly longs to shine through them. It seems many common Christians repeat the cycle of sinfulness and shame because they don't take the time to cultivate the love of God in their hearts

Jesus said, **"I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him."**

How many get rich quick, get healthy quick, or change your life quick diets and schemes have we fallen for over the years? Wouldn't we be so much better off if we just shut off our minds and listened internally for the voice of God?

Jesus said, **"How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"**

If only we could spend half as much time seeking communion with our Creator in stillness as we do seeking likes on social media. What if we could quiet the chatter emanating from our screens and find communion with our Creator, breathing in the Spirit through meditation?

YOUR ACCUSER IS MOSES

Jesus said, **“But do not think I will accuse you before the others. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.”**

I'm glad to be Gentile. I've never had much hope in Moses, and he probably wouldn't have wanted anything to do with me. However, I appreciate the part he played in this whole scenario.

Jesus said, **“But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”**

I don't need Moses to believe the words of Jesus, but I appreciate the stories. I appreciate that Moses was trying to guide the people of Israel into a greater relationship with God. Ultimately, the Ten Commandments do break down into the two commandments that Jesus cited about loving God with all of your heart, mind, body, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. Many Jews have accepted and live out that message, as do many Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and people from other spiritual traditions.

WORK FOR FOOD THAT ENDURES TO ETERNAL LIFE

After Jesus feeds the 5,000 in Matthew 14, Mark 6, and Luke 9, and walks on the water in Matthew and Mark, the crowd finds him on the other side of the lake the following morning and ask how he got there. In Matthew and Mark, they went to Gennessarat.

After John's version of those stories, the crowd finds him in Capernaum on the other side of the lake, and Jesus says, **“Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that**

endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

They asked him what sort of work God required, and he said, **“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”**

The Mirror Bible translates this as, **“Living from meal to meal can keep you busy - there is so much more to life than survival - toiling merely for that which perishes is such a waste. The life of the ages requires a different kind of labor. This labor is not the kind which rewards you for something you have done but blesses you with the gift of humanity's Son - this gift of sonship celebrates the authentic life which God the Father has endorsed from the beginning.”**

The crowd then asks for something to believe in, a sign. Moses had manna, but Jesus just had words and a few miracles.

Jesus said, **“Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”**

Yogananda wrote, “By ‘the bread of God’ Jesus signified the Christ Intelligence emanating from God, which is present in Cosmic Energy working the work of creation, giving ‘Life unto the world’ - the divine sustenance of all animate and inanimate objects and forces in creation. By this analogy, Jesus was telling the people that through his own presence on earth ‘my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven,’ in that he had come to bring to them the way to realize, as he did, that the body is not sustained by ordinary human consciousness but by the infinite Christ Intelligence that is within them, and which gives consciousness and life to all living creatures.”

Jesus made it sound pretty good so the people ask for some of what he's got.

Jesus said, **“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will**

never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.”

Yogananda wrote, “It is to be noted that the two phrases ‘cometh to me’ and ‘believeth on me’ have different significance. ‘He that cometh’ signifies a soul who becomes one with Christ Consciousness, and ‘he that believeth’ signifies one who has only occasional contact with Christ Consciousness in meditation.”

One of the signs God gave to Moses was presenting himself through a burning bush. At that time, God revealed himself to Moses as “I Am That I Am”, Cosmic Consciousness bringing light to the world as Jesus did with his own Christ Consciousness. “I Am That I Am” is also sometimes translated as “I will become what I choose to become”, and it was that I am-ness from which Jesus operated and taught his disciples to do the same... or at least he tried to. They had as hard a time understanding it as people do today.

Jesus said, “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

The words used for “last day” are *eschatē hēmera*, the first of which is where we get the word “eschatology”, study of the end times. While some refer to this as a certain time in the future, since Jesus has already pointed out that those who have eternal life have already passed from death to life, this could also refer to the spiritual awakening that allows people to transcend the loop of reincarnation, opening to eternal life beyond the limits of time.

Some of the Jews get a little out of sorts over him claiming to have come from heaven, and can't believe they're hearing this sort of talk from Joseph's kid.

Jesus says, **“Stop grumbling among yourselves. No one**

can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

I think him talking about the last day could also be referring to him being in it for the long haul, not that there will be an ultimate judgment day when things will cease to exist, but that he is a friend to the end.

Jesus said, “It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

While Roman American Christianity tends to highlight the sacrifice that Jesus was in order to keep people from going to hell, the true sustenance he offered came from his teachings on how to align with the Divine. Teaching people that they are emanations of Divinity and how to commune with God by serving others opened up an entire world of spiritual development that has continued on in spite of religious interference.

The Mirror Bible translates this as, **“I am the living bread, I stepped out of the heavenly realm into this earth suit, in this incarnation, so that everyone may feast on the idea of their true incarnate identity mirrored in me and discover the life of the ages incarnate in them. The bread that I will give is my own flesh; it will translate into life for the entire cosmos.”**

Jesus went on, **“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and**

drinks my blood remains in me, and I and them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that comes down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Jesus was not promoting cannibalism. His call to eat his flesh and drink his blood was obviously not literal. It is often used to legitimize his role as a sacrifice, but is too often used to make the Jesus story about what he did rather than the sustenance he actually offered, teaching people how to open to the Spirit of God moving through them. The Israelites were still lost in the wilderness when God provided manna for them, but Jesus was shining a light on the path out of the wilderness and into a greater understanding of God.

There were quite a few people who weren't really buying into what he was throwing down here, just like people have issues with it today and have ever since.

Jesus addressed it by saying, **“Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe. This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”**

Roman American Christianity is very centered around the idea that God required blood and that Jesus's crucifixion satiated that celestial need. However, the words of Jesus speak more to the connection of Spirit. Among the eight billion people we currently have in the world, many are way too entangled in their own egotistical affairs to be able to open to this sort of connection with Spirit, but I believe that God has prepared many to participate in the coming revival and following Renaissance.

However, when Jesus shared these ideas with the people of his time, it didn't do much to win anyone over. People started to leave since eating flesh and drinking blood didn't sound that

appealing.

Jesus looks to his favorite Twelve and says, **“You do not want to leave too, do you?”**

Peter says, “Heck, no! You got it going on!”

Jesus says, **“Have I not chosen you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!”**

Of course, this is Jesus calling out Judas for his role in betraying him. I've got to say that Judas got a really bad deal in this scenario and I'm glad he finally got his own gospel written in his name, although few have actually read it. Yet you have to give it up to Jesus for including someone in his inner circle who he knew would eventually betray him. That's a rare kind of faith.

MY TEACHING IS NOT MY OWN

In John 7, Jesus is hanging out in Galilee because they want to kill him in Judea. But the Festival of Tabernacles is coming up, and his brothers start trying to goad him into going, even though they don't even buy into the whole Messiah phase he's going through.

Jesus says, **“My time is not yet here; for you anytime will do. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil. You go to the festival, because my time has not yet fully come.”**

So John says Jesus stayed in Galilee until the next sentence when he changes his mind and goes to the festival in secret. The Jewish leaders were trying to kill him, and some people were whispering that he was a good man while others said he was a deceiver, but halfway into the festival, Jesus can't help himself and starts preaching and teaching in the temple again. All the people there are really impressed that someone with no education could have such great understanding.

Jesus says, **“My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of**

God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

The people in the temple think Jesus sounds a bit paranoid and want to kill him.

Jesus says, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

Then people seem to remember that the religious leaders actually do want to kill Jesus and they start wondering if he might actually be the Messiah. But according to their prophecy no one will know where the Messiah will be from, as if finding that information out would extinguish the whole prophecy. However, this does contradict the non-prophecies about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem or Nazareth.

Jesus said, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

Apparently some tried to seize him, but were miraculously unable to. But quite a few people are becoming convinced that he might actually be the Messiah, which freaks out the Pharisees so they send temple guards to arrest him.

Jesus says, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

Yogananda wrote, "All beings originally were sent to the

Earth through the will of God. Those who do not realize this truth misuse their God-given free will to wander in a maze of mortal desires, reincarnating again and again as they thread their way in circuitous routes toward ever elusive fulfillment. But those who live a life guided by divine will and wisdom find the opening back to God after completing their God-given purpose on earth.”

The Jews are not really jiving with what Jesus is saying because he's talking way over their heads. But on the last day of the festival, Jesus stands up and says loudly, **“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”**

The scripture he was referring to seems to be Isaiah 58, where it says, “If you do away with the yolk of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noon day. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”

This isn't Jesus being an answer to prophecy, but it is him fulfilling scripture. In the same way, followers of Christ should live out these words as well.

LET HE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN CAST THE FIRST STONE

The earliest manuscripts don't include the first few verses of John 8, but it's a pretty popular story so we're going to include it in our journey here.

After some alone time at the Mount of Olives, Jesus shows up at the temple with the rising sun and starts teaching. Then the teachers of the law bring a woman accused of sleeping around on

her husband. They tell Jesus that the law of Moses says she should be stoned to death, and ask what he thinks about that.

Jesus doesn't say anything, he just bends over and starts writing on the ground with his finger. There has been much speculation about what he was writing. Some have assumed it was a list of all the sins the Pharisees and teachers of the law around him had committed, maybe a list of names.

They continue to ride him until he finally stands up and says, **"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."** And then he goes back to writing on the ground.

Starting with the oldest, all of the men get the hint and leave the woman alone with Jesus, who says, **"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"**

She says that no one has, and he says, **"Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."**

Yogananda wrote, "'Sin' requires a complex definition. It is not a transgression against an arbitrary code of behavior decreed by a whimsical god. The Creator made man a spiritual being, a soul endowed with an individualization of his own divine nature. He gave to the soul, evolved from its own Self, The instruments of a body and a mind with which to perceive and interact with the objects of a *maya*-manifested universe. The soul's mental and physical instruments come into being and are held in existence by specific lawful processes of God's creative power. If man lives in perfect harmony with the machinations of these principles, he remains a spiritual being in charge of his body and mind. Sin is that which compromises that perfect self-mastery. It has its automatic negative effect to the degree of the influence of delusion within it - involving no condemnation of an irate God. Man's free will actions simply harmonize and strengthen the expressed essence of his soul perfections, or weaken and degrade it into mortal enslavement."

Jesus demonstrates that condemnation doesn't come from God, but from humans. Although religion can be helpful in

changing people's lives for the better; even Roman American Christianity, it can also breed condemnation and judgment. That is not what Jesus was teaching, as he said that he did not come to condemn the world. May his followers go and do likewise.

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The next time Jesus spoke to people, he said, **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

It's interesting that here he says he is the light of the world, where in the other gospels he says you are the light of the world. The writer of John paints Jesus as quite a different character than what we've seen in the synoptic gospels, but perhaps it's just a shift in perspective.

Yogananda wrote, "Jesus's words 'I am' in the context of this verse thus refer to Christ Consciousness - the subjective Intelligence of the universe. The 'light of the world' refers to Cosmic Energy, the Word or Holy Ghost, which informs the physical cosmos, endowing all beings and objects therein with the life of intelligent vibratory power - each element from atom to sage manifesting that intelligent life according to its evolutionary potential."

The Pharisees said Jesus was full of it and that he couldn't serve as his own witness. He really should have brought John with him.

But Jesus says, **"Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I came from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one."**

It's interesting that Jesus chides them for judging by human standards when they are actually following levitical laws. Perhaps he knew that those laws were actually man-made.

Although Jesus previously said, **"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true,"** here he says his testimony is valid. Perhaps it's a contradiction or perhaps Jesus has more fully embraced who he really is.

Jesus said, **"But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."**

The Pharisees ask where his father is, and Jesus says, **"You do not know me or my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also."**

Yogananda wrote, "Egotistical persons are wont to exaggerate their merits. But since Jesus spoke from his oneness with the Father, any of his statements that seemed to extol himself were in fact interpersonal references to the Cosmic Consciousness of his Heavenly Father. Therefore, it was entirely proper for Jesus to declare himself through his ego-disengaged divine wisdom."

Then Jesus said, **"I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come. You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins."**

The Jews are still having a hard time following him and ask who he is, what exactly they are to believe about him.

Jesus says, **"Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."**

It's interesting that first Jesus said he doesn't judge, then he said if he were to judge, he would be justified, and then he just flat out says that he does hold them in judgment. That escalated fast. They also weren't understanding who his Father was.

Jesus said, **"When you have lifted up the Son of Man,**

then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

And then they finally started believing him.

Yogananda interpreted this as, "When by deep meditation you will lift your consciousness from the Son of Man or physical body, then you will be able to realize the universal Christ Consciousness, which is present within you and me. Realizing that, you will further perceive that this inherent Christ Consciousness is the reflection of the Cosmic Consciousness. And when you realize the Christ Consciousness within yourself and myself, then you will know why I say I perform no bodily nor mental actions actuated by the ego or human consciousness. As my Father or Cosmic Consciousness has transmitted his wisdom to the Christ Consciousness in me, so my consciousness reveals that wisdom alone."

Imagine starting each day connecting with the Source of your being. Imagine if, before you set out on whatever quests your ego must engage on your hero's journey, you were to offer 1% of your day, fourteen minutes and twenty-four seconds, to sitting in silence, in gratitude for the breaths you are given and the life they allow you to live. What if everyone who has ever felt an inclination toward Christ were to make a habit of lifting up the Christ within them for 1% of their day?

What if we all were to find the courage and patience to quiet our minds and seek the truth God has placed in our hearts? What if that is the second coming of Christ we are all waiting for, a revival of life in Spirit? What if you were to contribute to that movement?

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

Jesus said to the new believers, **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

Yogananda wrote, “It is evident that merely believing in the words of Christ does not make one a qualified disciple of Christ. Jesus wanted true aspirants to strive to manifest the Christ Consciousness which was present in him, to be one who feels continuously in his daily life the guiding presence of the Infinite Christ that frees the soul from ignorance and bestows salvation.”

Notice that Jesus tells these new believers to hold to his teachings in order to know the truth. He did not tell them to believe in his death or resurrection, and he did not tell them to accept him as their Savior. He didn't say to go turn some other dude's letters into scripture. He told them to hold to his teachings.

EVERYONE WHO SINS IS A SLAVE TO SIN

The people tell Jesus that they are descendants of Abraham, and have forgotten all the time they were enslaved in Egypt. But they feel pretty free now under Roman rule and wonder what he's going to free them from.

Jesus says, **“Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”**

Anyone engaged in a mindset that keeps us from the fullness of God's love is addicted to that mindset, and we spend our energy in behaviors, often harmful to ourselves or others, trying to fill the chasm of separation within us, never realizing we need only a change of mind to embrace the freedom truly offered

to us. Sinfulness is the inability to recognize the power we have as children of God to affect the world around us, and thinking that we are disconnected from that power, disconnected from the love of God, we wield our power unconsciously and wastefully, not realizing what we do or the effect it truly has. Breathe in and embrace your freedom.

“I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.”

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus points out to the descendants of Abraham that they had lost the quality of their good ancestry by succumbing to ignorance, sinful thoughts, and following tradition and family habits instead of God's laws and truth.

“Some high-caste Brahmins of India also boast of their divine parentage, as do the hierarchy of many cultures. But Jesus points out that physical good birth in itself is not an adequate credential. Each soul, though an image of God and notwithstanding good parentage, can temporarily become the servant of sinful habits, as Jesus admonished the descendants of Abraham. But while Jesus speaks of their degradation, he also reminds them that they could not remain in servitude to sin forever, but should realize that they are eternally made in the image of God.”

They point out that Abraham is their father, and Jesus says, **“If you were Abraham's children, then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father.”**

Recall that there is a story about Abraham where God tells him to kill his own son, and he gets right up to the point of Isaac pissing himself in terror before God stops him and tells him he was just testing him. In order for Jesus's prophecy to come

true, these folks actually have to kill him in order for God's will to occur. It gets a little confusing over how mad he should really be with them for playing their part in his drama.

WHOEVER BELONGS TO GOD HEARS WHAT GOD SAYS

The people say the only father they have is God.

Jesus says, **"If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no trust in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."**

The devil here is *diabolos*, which translates as "slanderer" or "false accuser". Christian mythology still loves to entertain the devil as a character, but in Jesus's time and currently, that character plays itself through humans as they see the worst in others and strive to tear them down. Lately, the devil and his minions have possessed an army of internet trolls.

At this point, they think he's possessed by a demon, or at the very least, a Samaritan.

Jesus says, **"I am not possessed by a demon, but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death."**

When you connect with the kingdom of heaven and recognize the eternal life you have, you realize death is just a transition and not the end many think it is. Unfortunately, now they really think he's off his rocker. But again, Jesus tells these new believers to obey his word. He doesn't tell them to accept his sacrifice, but doubles down on the idea that to obey is better than sacrifice.

Jesus says, **"If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."**

He is not seeking glory for himself, and he is not asking to be worshiped by these new believers. He asks them to commune with God as he does and to love one another as God commands. Then again, initially he wasn't too keen on testifying about himself, but he eventually came around on that one, so he may need some glorifying here pretty soon.

They tell him he's way too young to have seen Abraham, and he says, **"Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am!"**

That was just a bridge too far for them, and just as he stopped them from stoning a woman to death at the beginning of chapter 8, at the end of it, they're picking up stones to hurl at him. Not Jesus's best day.

Yogananda wrote, "In order to be a part of God's dream-drama, The Divine Man outwardly adapts to the nature of the dream while inwardly seeing his Spirit-identified Self as an eternal existence of omnipresent consciousness: 'I am present before Abraham was, I am present in the here and now, and being all pervading I am conscious of my presence in the infinite future.'"

I find it remarkable how different John's version of Jesus is from the other gospels. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus's focus is on the kingdom of heaven and the value of connecting within to

open up to that reality. In John's version, Jesus is working much harder to sell himself. This is one of the reasons some scholars think it's inauthentic at best and a fake at worst.

Jesus doesn't articulate what they're supposed to believe about him other than that they should follow his teachings, which should be enough. But he doesn't tell them to believe in the Holy Trinity. He doesn't tell them about his death and resurrection and their need to accept the gift of his blood atonement.

If there is any validity to the idea that this chapter is an actual account, I would have to think he's vibrating at such a high rate of Cosmic Consciousness that he can't easily communicate with normal people. Although he starts off well by saving the woman accused of adultery, his communicative skills wane dramatically, and he does more to piss people off than to win them over. Although there's lots of beautiful expressions, it's not Jesus in his highest form.

Then again, we also learned early on that if people don't believe in him, he doesn't have the power to work miracles. These folks were having a pretty hard time believing and made for a really tough audience. True believers don't throw stones.

THE BLIND WILL SEE

As he's moving along, he comes across a man who'd been blind from birth, and his disciples ask if he was being punished for his sins or his parents'.

Jesus says, **“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”**

Jesus recognizes his role in serving God and realizes his purpose to draw people toward the same realization. As he says that he is the light of the world here, and in the other gospels, he

says you are the light of the world, so he offers this example of servitude toward God, inspiring his followers to live their own lives with such devotion.

Then Jesus spit on the ground and made some mud that he put on the man's eyes. Then he told him, **"Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam."**

So the guy does and he can see for the first time in his life. Then there's a whole lot of hullabaloo because it happened on a Sabbath, and the Pharisees have all kinds of problems with it.

Eventually, they kick the guy out and when Jesus catches up to him, he asks, **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"**

Of course, the only time the guy had met Jesus, he was blind so he may not be sure who he's talking to, but he says he'd love to believe in the Son of Man if he knew who he was.

Then Jesus says, **"You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."**

I can only imagine how grateful the guy must have been, and he starts heaping all sorts of praise on Jesus.

Then Jesus says, **"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."**

It's safe to say that if there's ever a Pharisee within earshot, their feathers are going to get ruffled, and it happens here too, so they ask if Jesus is calling them blind. Of course, previously, Jesus said he was not here for judgment, and now he has changed his mind again.

Jesus says to them, **"If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."**

Yogananda interprets this as, "If you acknowledged your spiritually blind mentalities, you would be helped by me to be free from the sin of ignorance; but as you arrogantly say 'We see,' while you do not perceive truth, sin yet abides with you."

It's also interesting to note that in this chapter Jesus starts getting much more into wordplay. Granted, he just healed a

blind guy, but he uses the word “blind” three times in this passage, a pattern that will continue through the rest of the book that wasn't as prevalent in the first few chapters.

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Then Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.”

Yogananda wrote, “Jesus here again cites false prophets and charlatans who claim empowerment to bestow enlightenment and liberation, but offer only self-fancied ways that have no foundation in truth or the backing of the will of God. Jesus decries those who confound seekers with untruths, themselves lacking in God-communion or in attunement with the wisdom teachings of a God-recognized spiritual emissary.”

Unfortunately, the Pharisees don't know what he's talking about. But he does mention “gate” four times and “sheep” five times

Then Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

Now he's mentioned thieves three times. Yogananda interprets this as, "The universal thief is ignorance, (*maya*, delusion), which has come into the world solely to steal man's consciousness from God, and to make him a mortal through the experience of death, and to destroy with misapprehension his divine inheritance of soul wisdom and joy. False teachers, themselves victimized by delusion, partner in this thievery. They do not know God and therefore cannot impart his consciousness to others; rather, in their ignorance they not only destroy their own potential wisdom, but that of their hapless followers as well. The Christ Consciousness, omnipresent in the world, has appeared in my body that true seekers may have evidence that in the Infinite Christ they will find eternal life and its divine abundance."

Although it's often been considered that John was written for the express notion of deifying Jesus, recognizing his use of the words "**I am**" as an expression of Christ Consciousness, the same I am that I am that spoke to Moses from the burning bush, this does take on a different meaning. What if the gate to the kingdom of heaven isn't merely the man that was Jesus, but the experience of Christ through us? What if the thieves and robbers are those selling rites and rituals, doctrines and dogma, keeping people from truly experiencing the kingdom of heaven?

Jesus said, "**I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the world attacks the flock and shatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**"

Jesus is demonstrating his commitment to his followers and his ability to care for them like no other. Recognizing the dangers that may befall them, his commitment is to guide them into alignment with God. Although Roman American Christianity has served as a wonderful hired hand in spreading the gospel of

Christ, albeit glazed over with the gospel of Paul, this man-made institution is starting to shatter, and has, in many instances, veered quite far from the original message, yet the truth of Christ is still here for those with ears to hear?

“I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

This is beyond merely foreshadowing. Jesus knows that he's going to be killed, and he knows he's going to rise again. But him laying down his life wasn't just about being a sacrifice, although he just mentioned it four times, but by providing such an amazing example of how to live the love of Christ.

I think Jesus may also be talking about ego death here. Laying aside his ego identity, Jesus was dying to himself and living as the sovereign Christ and so calls his followers to do the same. Jesus lays down his life as his only compulsion is to help people draw nearer to God, not to store up for himself earthly treasures or material possessions or to seek praise from others, but simply to teach people how to align with their Creator.

When Jesus speaks of the other sheep that are not of the sheep pen (among the many times he's said “sheep”), most have considered those to be the Gentiles who would convert to Christianity. However, for those who don't seek to limit God, this could also mean other spiritual traditions where the light of Christ also shines.

Some people say he's demon-possessed again while others point out that demons don't normally heal the blind.

I AND MY FATHER ARE ONE

The Festival of Dedication comes around, and Jesus is teaching in the temple courts again when some of the Jews ask him to stop beating around the bush and let them know for sure if he's really the Messiah.

Jesus says, **"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."**

After all of the wars Israel had started after they found themselves a king, and all the slaughtering they did when they moved into Canaan, they were expecting a Messiah a little more on the violent side. They were expecting someone grounded in their physical reality and limited understanding. They weren't expecting a teacher who could guide them toward spiritual renewal so their fighting would no longer be necessary, so naturally, they were not picking up what he was throwing down.

Some of the Jews got a bit irate about this and picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus says, **"I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"**

They say they're not stoning him for the works, but for saying he is equal to God.

Then Jesus comes back, **"Is it not written in your law, 'I have said you are 'gods'? If he called them 'gods', to whom the word of God came - and scripture cannot be set aside - what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy**

because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

Jesus is referring to Psalm 82, when David wrote, "The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mortals; you will fall like every other ruler."

That doesn't sound too flattering to call them "gods". But as far as the "works of my Father", in the same Psalm, David lays them out as, "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

They're still not convinced and try to seize him so he slips out to where John used to baptize on the Jordan, and Jesus finds a lot more followers there.

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

In John 11, Jesus gets word from the Mary that poured perfume on Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair in Luke 7, Matthew 26, and Mark 14 (but not anywhere in John) that her brother Lazarus is sick.

Jesus says, **"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."**

Although John says Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, he decides to wait two days after hearing this news and making his proclamation before finally saying to the disciples, **"Let us go back to Judea."**

The disciples warn him that the Jews there want to stone him, and Jesus says, **"Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night**

that they stumble, or they have no light.”

I think this was Jesus telling his disciples that they were going to be traveling at night and that the light of Christ would help them not to stumble. You've got to have faith to go walking at night

“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

The disciples figure that sleep would probably do him well and help him get better, but Jesus says, **“Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”**

It's hard to believe that at this point, after all they have seen, that the disciples still don't believe, but it continues on even after he rises from the dead. Thomas suggests that they should all go so they may “die with him.” Thomas may have had some issues.

So Jesus and his disciples make the trip to Bethany, and Martha comes out to meet him. She says that Jesus could have healed him if he'd been here, but she still believes he'll do something amazing.

Jesus says, **“Your brother will rise again,”** and when she says she knows he'll rise in the resurrection at the last day, he says, **“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”**

Again, Jesus was speaking as the Christ beyond his ego and physical manifestation, where he called his followers to find their identity in the kingdom of heaven, where death is just another transition in our eternal life. For those to whom ego identity does not satisfy, faith in Christ offers the resurrection of being born again into a new perspective and a new life of higher consciousness beyond the fear of senseless eternal punishment and separation from our Creator.

She says she believes he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and then she goes to send her sister Mary out to meet with Jesus. He's still laying low because there are a lot of Jews there that have

come from Judea, and some of them may still want him dead, but when he saw them following Mary and weeping for Lazarus, he finds it touching.

Jesus asks, **“Where have you laid him?”**, and when they respond by saying, “Come and see, Lord,” he weeps openly, possibly because that was the invitation he used to first invite his disciples, and he knows that the end is nigh. But they think it's because of how much he loved Lazarus, which I'm sure he did.

So they lead Jesus to the tomb, and he says, **“Take away the stone.”**

Martha informs him that Lazarus has been dead for four days, and it's going to be pretty ripe, but he says, **“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”**

So they move the stone, and Jesus says, **“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me. Lazarus, come out!”**

When Lazarus walks out of the tomb still wrapped in his burial clothes, Jesus says, **“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”** And wouldn't you know it, he smelled like a daisy. Well, at least no one complained about him stinking.

Some of the Jews who watched this go down became believers in Jesus, but some of them were loyal to the Pharisees and let them know what they saw. The Pharisees call a meeting of all the religious bigwigs in the Sanhedrin and share their fear that if they do nothing, all the Jews will start believing in Jesus and the Romans will take away their temple and their nation, as it was.

But the high priest Caiaphas had prophesied that Jesus would die for the nations of Israel and all the scattered children of God, and like all prophecies, you've got to apply a little elbow grease if you want to make them come true, so they start plotting to kill Jesus. So Jesus steered clear of Jerusalem and stayed in a little out of the way village called Ephraim with his disciples.

ANYONE WHO LOVES THEIR LIFE WILL LOSE IT

Six days before Passover, Jesus goes to Bethany to spend time with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and that's when she does the perfume thing that the other three gospels mention even though they make no mention of raising Lazarus from the dead or existing in the first place.

So then he makes his procession into Jerusalem as people wave palm branches, not actually laying them on the path as in the other gospel accounts. But John says that the disciples didn't realize the prophecies were written about him until after Jesus was glorified. Some skeptics say the writers of the Gospels backtracked through the scriptures to build their case for Jesus's messiahship, especially John's emphasis on it.

Then some people from Greece come to see Jesus, and when Andrew and Phillip come to tell him about it, he says, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”**

It's also a very Jesus thing that he thinks lowering himself to be beaten, spit on, and crucified is glorifying. However, Jesus knew that the experience he would have would reverberate throughout human time and open people to what he had to share, be it forgiveness of sins or direction to the kingdom of heaven, or that and more.

Yogananda wrote, “A selfish existence focused on the self-preservation of one's own ego, with its attachment to the body and its love of all things temporal, is a mental hedge that prevents the soul from enlarging into Spirit. Jesus thus continued; ‘he who loves his physical life, giving undue solicitude to his body, will nevertheless lose the body and all its material trappings in the

Oblivion of death. But he who sacrifices attachment to the familiar comforts of his physical life to seek the everlastingness behind the facade of matter will find his consciousness transmuted by salvation into Eternal Life.”

Jesus said, **“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.**

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

Then, everybody heard a voice from heaven say, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

Then Jesus said, **“This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the Prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the Earth, will draw all people to myself.”**

The Prince of this world is often thought to be another allusion to Satan. This world certainly does offer many influences that are accusing, adversarial, slanderous, and tempting, and it's safe to say they have not been driven out. However, there are many people who can testify to having those energies driven out of them, and give Jesus full praise for that.

The crowd said that they'd heard of the Messiah, but were a bit unfamiliar with the “Son of Man”, even though he didn't mention either of them.

Jesus says, **“You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.”**

Then Jesus ran off and hid.

Even after all Jesus is reported to have done, people still didn't believe in him, which means those who don't believe today are in good company. John points out that this is to fulfill yet another prophecy from Isaiah. But many did believe, although

they were not inclined to speak about it for fear of what the Pharisees would do to them.

From somewhere in hiding, Jesus cried out, **“Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.**

Jesus came to be a light pointing toward God. He was not lifting himself up to be praised, but simply to help people align with the Divinity from which they were created. This is something he believed to his core, which may be why he said it in solitude.

“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

I'm glad Jesus is back to not judging again. We humans have been thinking that about him for a very long time. Perhaps it's time we repent from the way we've been thinking about Jesus.

Again, Jesus does not proclaim his own greatness, but humbly defers to his Creator, but it is interesting that he highlights what he has to say, because in the gospel of John, what he says next is very different from the synoptic gospels... and a whole lot longer.

UNLESS I WASH YOU, YOU HAVE NO PART OF ME

In the gospel of John, as Jesus prepares for the last supper with his disciples, he does not send his disciples out looking for a new colt to ride into town. Rather than offering wine and bread to

symbolize his blood and body, he offers to wash the disciples' feet. And while the synoptic gospels deal with the last supper in a few verses, the gospel of John has Jesus talking for four chapters straight.

When Jesus decides to wash their feet, Peter has a bit of an issue with this.

Jesus says, **“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand,”** And when Peter continues to decline the offering, Jesus says, **“Unless I wash you, you have no part of me,”** to which Peter asks him to wash his hands as well.

Jesus says, **“Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you,”** an obvious reference to Judas.

We should also recognize that feet were a lot more dirty back in those days. They didn't have socks and shoes that kept their feet protected as we do now. They wore sandals or nothing, with their feet always exposed to the elements and collecting every piece of dirt and grime imaginable. I'm just saying, this was a pretty nasty job.

When he finished, Jesus said, **“Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”**

This is one of the few times that Jesus refers to himself as Lord, and as such, his example is complete and utter humility. Jesus's message was not about seeking worship and adoration for himself, but about service to others. Even though the writer of John seems to be really pushing the idea of Jesus's Divinity, Jesus was still giving the credit to God.

ONE OF YOU IS GOING TO BETRAY ME

Earlier on in chapter 13, John says that Judas had been prompted by the devil to betray Jesus. Jesus obviously knew all about it, but he knew he was returning to his Source, so he tried not to sweat it too much.

“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me.’

Here, Jesus is referring to Psalm 41 in which David bemoans what a sinner he is, and how bad things are in his life before praising God for pulling him through and giving him the opportunity for retribution against those who let him down. Jesus does not say this is a prophecy, only a scripture to be fulfilled. Since he’s not actually related to David, it seems as if he is trying to align with him as much as possible by quoting so many psalms.

“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.

“Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”

I’m pretty sure I’ve already covered this, but Jesus says, **“It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish,”** and then he gives it to Judas.

John says as soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him, whereas in the other gospels, Satan had entered him much earlier.

Jesus says, **“What you are about to do, do quickly,”** and Judas took off to play his role.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Then Jesus said, **“Now the Son of Man is glorified and**

God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: where I am going, you cannot come.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Three times he repeats, “Love one another.” I'd say that's a pretty important message. However, like so many things in the gospel of John, Jesus does not say it in the other three gospels, but he did say to “love your neighbor as yourself,” which is pretty much the same thing.

Peter asked where he was going, and Jesus said, **“Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”**

Peter says he wants to follow him now and that he'll lay down his life for him to which Jesus says, **“Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”**

After telling his disciples to love one another three times, he tells Peter that he will disown him three times, and he has already mentioned that he will rise after three days. And most everything he says throughout this last supper, he repeats at least three times in different ways. For the next few pages, Jesus repeats a lot of things three times like he also just did with “glorify”, which he mentioned five times. John's version of Jesus enjoys varied repetition.

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there

to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

Many believe the place he mentions three times here is the heaven we will go to when our human experience is finished. And of course, his promise to come back and take them with him leads many to wait for a rapturous second coming. However, he is talking only to his twelve disciples here, and that second coming was supposed to have occurred while they were alive so it's a safe bet they are in the place they're supposed to be.

Thomas says they don't know anything, and Jesus says, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”**

The way, the truth, and the life are three different things. Roman American Christians like to use this verse to convince people to put their trust in Jesus and the blood he shed, but Jesus isn't calling for that. He's saying to know him is to believe his message and live the love of Christ. He lived the Way. He shared the Truth. He shines the Light. Now we must do likewise.

Philip said that Jesus should show them the Father and that would be enough. To this day, people are seeking proof of the Father. Unfortunately, things like our existence, consciousness, mythologies, and the wonder of mathematical perfection throughout everything we've ever experienced is not enough for most people to believe in a Creator.

Jesus said, **“Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father**

and the Father is in me; or at least believe in the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Three times he reiterates that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. Unfortunately, it's rare to find people who perform the sorts of works that Jesus did under Roman American Christianity, however, it has provided greater works than healing one person at a time. In all fairness to the tradition I am criticizing, there are a whole lot of hospitals, homeless shelters, recovery centers, and halfway houses that have been started by various Roman American Christian organizations. Although many may feel that it has hindered as much as it has helped, I am grateful for all the help it has created.

IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDS

Jesus went on, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me. And I am in you. Whoever hears my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

After reiterating the importance of keeping his commandments, Jesus speaks of the coming Holy Spirit, the third

aspect of the Roman Trinity. In the latter part of this segment, he lays out the Trinity of the Father, me, and you.

Then the other Judas asked why Jesus would show himself to them but not to the rest of the world.

Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teachings. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."

Jesus mentions love three times.

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Do you believe the Holy Spirit is still advocating for humanity in the world today? Do you think that Christ not giving as the world does, seeking immediate gratification, could be reaching across time and space to deliver this message to you? If you believe, will you listen for the voice within?

"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the Prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me."

Unfortunately, even when Jesus is crucified and appears to them after he is resurrected, they still don't believe. Jesus does have a soft spot for the stubborn.

The Prince of this world leads his subjects only to death, for this world is a temporary experience. He will offer entertainment and some memorable times, but the life of Christ

seeks more and shares more.

Then Jesus says, **“Come now; let us leave,”** but then he just keeps on talking for three more chapters..

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Jesus says, **“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.**

Again, we have another trinity of vine, gardener, and branch.

“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am divine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Three times he says remain in me and I in you, and many more remains than that. As he goes on to state here, remaining in Christ is to live by his teachings and follow his commandments, and in this instance, it is pretty obvious that his greatest commandment is to love one another. While Paul will describe what he called the fruit of the spirit in his letter to the Galatians, ultimately, it's important to remember that fruit, nearly whatever kind you may think of, is known for its sweetness and vitality, and that is what should be evidenced in a follower of Christ.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now

remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

While Jesus's story has come to be known for his sacrifice on the cross, laying down one's life for their friends needn't be so harsh. Simply putting other people's needs above your own is sufficient. Granted, dying for someone else is certainly a grand expression of love, but not normally required.

As Yogananda wrote, "The preeminent instinct in man is to love himself first. When there is danger of any kind, one's first impulse is to save oneself. Spirituality begins with the effort to place the well-being of someone else above one's own interests. The smallness of ego's self-centeredness must be resurrected into the largeness of caring and self-sacrifice, by which others are felt as a part of one's own expanded self. The friendship of close human relationships all too often degenerates through over familiarity or taking selfish advantage of one another. But in divine friendship each one thinks only of the highest welfare of the other; that was the friendship Jesus demonstrated."

"You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Generally, friends do not follow commands, but servants most definitely do. However, as Jesus points out, his followers are not servants because servants must follow commands. Friends choose to follow commands... or not.

Yogananda wrote, "Friendship is the purest human expression of God's love, because it springs not from any dictates of biological or social instincts but from the free-will choice of the heart. All other forms of love - between parent and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, lover and beloved, master and

servant - are partially motivated by instinctive compulsions and prospects of selfish gain, and, as such, are imperfect. Blood relatives are imposed upon an individual, but one is free to choose his friends. The love of friends, which grows from the spontaneous mutual attraction of hearts, affords the possibility of a relationship truly based on unselfishness; it therefore more nearly approximates the perfect love - that between God and His devotees, between soul and Spirit."

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

Again, this was not merely a very important message for Jesus. The only command he cared about was that we love each other.

YOU DO NOT BELONG TO THE WORLD

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember that I told you: 'a servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their law: "They hated me without reason."

Again, that last bit is from Psalms 35, another instance of

David complaining about all the people who let him down and thanking God for the patience to deal with them. It's not necessarily a law, per se, but Jesus did like to identify with David.

As far as their sin goes, Yogananda wrote, "Sin means ignorance, individual delusion (*avidya*). It is the misuse of free choice, influenced by the cosmic delusion of satanic evil, to perform those actions that take man away from the kingdom of God. The sins of most persons are worldly; few are categorically evil. To be worldly means being foolish, giving undue importance to materiality and gratification of the senses. And staying away from God out of ignorance. But outright evil is a deliberate sin of turning one's back on the Lord. It was that sin which Jesus condemned in those who witnessed the divine manifestation of his life, and yet rejected him and his message from God."

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH COMES FROM THE FATHER

"When the advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father - the spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father - he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."

Did Jesus mean the beginning of his ministry or the beginning of the world? If souls are eternal, they began long before physical manifestations did.

Yogananda wrote, "In Spirit there is no beginning and no end. The category of beginning and end applies to the waves of creation that arise on the bosom of the Infinite Ocean and then end after the storm of cosmic delusion is withdrawn at the sovereign command of God. Jesus gives assurance that every soul emanated from Christ Consciousness in the beginning of the finite creation of worlds and planets; and that therefore man as a pure soul deserves to be reunited with the Christ Intelligence after seeming separation through long incarnations of delusion. All souls, before delusion or *maya* enshrouded them, knew Christ

Intelligence as their source; and when advanced devotees have freed their souls from delusion, they give testimony of their inseparable forever connection with Christ Consciousness."

Jesus said, **"All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me."**

Yogananda interprets this as, "I am forewarning you about what is to befall you, that you may not be offended and discouraged when trials come to you as tests of your spiritual strength. Your persecutors will put you out of the orthodox congregations; they will even murder some of you, my disciples, thinking they serve God thereby, as though he were bloodthirsty, appeased by the sacrifice of perceived heretics. In their blind ignorance, these religious leaders know nothing of the Father, the wisdom of Cosmic Consciousness, nor of the Christ Consciousness that is fully manifested in me."

Just as Carlton Pearson was cast out of his church for preaching universal reconciliation, I imagine there are many in Roman American Christianity who will not appreciate my reconsideration of the message of Christ beyond the parameters of their man-made doctrines. I'm sure there are many trolls out there who may even send me death threats. That will certainly prove that they truly don't know God.

"I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

Having a teacher is like having training wheels.

Eventually, whether we are learning to ride a bike or do anything else, we have to do it ourselves. Jesus recognized that his disciples would not fully understand all he had taught them through his limited physical body, but that they must forge their own relationship with Spirit, as must we.

“When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

When Jesus pointed out the world's error about sin, it was that they could not believe that such a direct relationship with the Creator is possible and instead live tiny, ego-driven lives beholden to religious limitations. But the Holy Spirit gives people direct access to Christ, opens them to righteousness, and grounds them in good judgement to recognize the limitations of this world.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.

In order for the Holy Spirit to tell us anything, we have to listen. In order to hear the Spirit speak, we need to quiet ourselves. In order for the Spirit to guide us, we have to follow silently.

I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD

Jesus said, **“In a little while, you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”**

His disciples were confused so Jesus said, **“Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’? Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. On that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.**

So far in this soliloquy, Jesus has mentioned asking for things in his name three times. The name he was given was “Immanuel”, God with us. Just as Jesus felt oneness with God, so did he teach his followers to be one with God.

“Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

That's five “Father”s in as many sentences. Now the disciples think he's speaking clearly and they don't even need to ask him clarifying questions.

Jesus said, **“Do you now believe? A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.**

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take

heart! I have overcome the world.”

Jesus certainly never said life would be easy. In this world of physical manifestation, matter bumps up against matter and ideas bump up against ideas. However, connecting with Christ and feeling it move through us empowers us to be overcomers, just as Jesus taught his followers. Although he warned his followers that they would most certainly be persecuted for carrying his message, he also realized that they would be able to see beyond the veil and realize the illusion this life is.

A PRAYER FOR HIS FOLLOWERS

In John 17, Jesus prays as the high priests did, first for himself, then for his disciples, and then for his nation. In Jesus's version, he prays for the believers to come. This is often called the High Priestly Prayer.

Then Jesus began to pray: **“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your son, that your son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, rather, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.**

Yes, that's a lot of glorifying, and there are a few different ways this word is used. While it may seem that he is seeking praise, the word used, *doxazo*, refers more to having a good opinion of someone than out and out praise. In the last sentence, he is asking to be restored to his former status before he took a lowly human form.

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; You gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you

have given me comes from you. For I gave them the world you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that scripture would be fulfilled.

Again, Jesus demonstrated why he was called "Immanuel" by introducing his disciples to the divine spark in each of them. For all who follow Christ are as one with him because *God is with us*.

Unfortunately for Judas, he didn't make the cut, but Jesus was really set on making sure things lined up with scripture so somebody had to betray him. Although Judas gets a bad rap in these gospels, in the gospel named for him, he does get some redemption. He was, after all, chosen for the task and didn't have much choice in the matter.

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world anymore than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctified myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Jesus realized that the essence of his existence was spiritual and that this world was an illusion, but he does use a few

variations of the word “world” throughout this prayer. The Greek word *kosmos* sometimes refers to the actual physical universe, sometimes it refers to the humans who live on this planet, and sometimes it refers to the system of separation perpetuated on this planet. Since he is praying here, I’m sure God knew what was what.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that day may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Again, Jesus touches on this trinity of I, them, and you, praying for unity not only for his disciples, but also for those to come. For glory, the Greek word is *doxa*, the noun form of *doxazo* that he used for “glorify”. Giving his disciples the glory here is about respecting them enough to pass on the understanding of Christ Consciousness.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you have loved me before the creation of the world.

Jesus’s greatest goal, as he first mentioned in the book of Mark, was to share this message of unity, to preach the gospel. He wanted people to see through his eyes, to understand their relationship to God as he did. Despite how off-kilter the movement he started has gotten, I think that is still his hope today.

Yogananda wrote, “The universal Consciousness of Jesus lovingly prays not only for his immediate disciples but for truth-seekers of all generations. He identifies his true followers as those who would believe in him not in name only but through actual contact with Christ Consciousness in the cosmic vibration felt in meditation. They are the ones who can be ‘saved.’ Jesus also

prayed for all the people of the world, that they might know God loves them; and that in sending Jesus to earth, he had manifested through him His divine love.”

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

This is not Jesus speaking. This is Christ speaking. While there are several Roman American Christians that don't believe anyone can achieve Christ Consciousness but Jesus, **“that I myself may be in them,”** seems like he's pretty open to the idea.

There will always be people on this level of existence that have no idea about any other levels of existence. Some people are completely ignorant of any spiritual reality and do not consider things like spirituality and communion with God. And some will ignorantly think that they understand it all based upon whatever they have learned through whatever religion they were raised in.

But for those who are open to truly connecting with the Creator of All That Is, that possibility is available for us in every moment of every day. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word still remains.

EPILOGUE

In the last year, I've typed out every word ascribed to Jesus in the four canonical gospels, read them into digital text, and poured through them many times. There were quite a few parables, a sampling of prophecies, a number of lessons, a smattering of contradictions, and some things that I still don't fully understand. Granted, nobody wrote down anything Jesus said or did until over forty years after his crucifixion (except for the writings the Roman Catholic Church and others had destroyed), so there's obviously a lot of things left out, but from what we have left, there were not many things that the common Roman American Christian thinks there should be.

Jesus never said every *homo sapiens* was destined for hell, and he never said anyone needed to accept him as their personal Lord and/or Savior to change the trajectory of their afterlife. As a matter of fact, one of the only times he refers to himself as Lord is when he is mimicking those who don't keep his one simple commandment: Love One Another.

There was also no prophecy about Paul. For as articulate as Jesus was about the future of his ministry beyond his death, resurrection, and ascension, if he'd intended for someone other than the twelve disciples he chose to take over his church, one would assume he would have mentioned it. Even Paul's account of the only time he heard the voice of Jesus, since he never met him in person, has him giving pretty specific directions. Since Jesus never commanded anyone to venerate Paul's correspondence with his churches, I don't think his letters should supplant Jesus as the Word of God.

And I don't think my salvation depends upon it.

Jesus never said we should fashion together a collection of books about him, attach it to the books of Judaica and call it

sacrosanct. He never said we should aggregate graven images into a book and make their complete acceptance a prerequisite for following him. And he never said to put said book above God as so many Christian churches do in their statements of belief, calling their book the Word of God instead of Jesus, whom said book calls the Word of God.

Jesus never proclaimed any of the tenets of the Nicene Creed, except the part about him coming back, and like his parables, that probably means something much different than the popular understanding. The Creed has certainly been a useful tool for those fishers of men who have used it as a net as they have worked so hard to make Christianity the most popular religion of all time. Unfortunately, they also used tools like swords, arrows, fire, and all sorts of twisted torture devices through the seven crusades and six hundred years of inquisitions that empowered this religion to prosper over the last several hundred years. The Nicene Creed is a beautifully worded, man-made document, but it contains none of Jesus's teachings. The gospel of Jesus drew people toward the inward knowledge of God, and that is why I follow Christ instead of Christianity.

Jesus never described God as a trinity, as the Nicene Creed dictates, nor did anyone else in the Bible. It's an interesting way to consider God, and I've heard some wonderful interpretations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Thought, Word, and Deed, as well as Creator, Created, and Creativity. As a metaphor, I appreciate Yogananda's explanation, "As long as vibratory creation exists, throughout the long cyclic span of universal manifestation, God exists as the Father (The transcendent Creator), the Son (Christ consciousness, the reflected intelligence of the Father omnipresent within creation), and Holy Ghost (Cosmic Vibration, maker and substance of every manifestation in creation)."

Yet while I appreciate the perspective as a thought experiment, I think God is more than just that, and I don't feel inclined to limit my relationship to All That Is based on 1,700-

year-old political theology. Since Jesus didn't include the trinity in his teachings, I am not drawn to making it a fulcrum of my faith.

And I don't think my salvation depends upon it.

The Trinity Jesus taught about included the Father, the Son, and us. The Roman Trinity separates us from God and tells us that God is outside of us and away from us. The Trinity of Christ teaches us that we are in God and God is in us. The Roman Trinity disempowers us while the Trinity of Christ fulfills us.

Jesus did not tell people they had to believe he was born of a virgin. And since a number of other traditions that the Nicene Creed rolled into the new "one, holy catholic (universal) and apostolic Church" the Roman Empire was fabricating also had virgin birth stories, it's not as extraordinary as we are often led to believe. The idea of a virgin birth is also shared in the stories of Perseus, Krishna, Siddhartha, Romulus and Remus, Horus, and Attis, to name a few. I think it's more myth than message and often deters more than contributes to truly following Christ.

And I don't think my salvation depends upon it.

Similarly, although many Roman American Christians see Jesus's resurrection as the most important thing to believe about him, and although I was told early on that Christianity was the only religion to have their Lord rise from the dead, it's an old story that occurs in many traditions. Osiris rose from the dead in Egypt, Ishtar rose from the dead in Mesopotamia, Dionysus rose from the dead in Greece, and the legends go on from there. I'm not saying that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, but it is not the most important thing I get out of his existence, especially since the four accounts we have of it are so contrary to one another.

And I don't think my salvation depends upon it.

I completely get that for most of Christianity, be it Roman American, Orthodox, or Ethiopian, the main sentiment is that Jesus died for our sins to satiate Jehovah's need for blood so that humans would not have to go to hell. However, personally, I don't think that believing God is so short sighted and narrow minded that he has to send everyone to hell is actually loving God, and I

don't think that believing every human I meet not only has to go to hell, but also deserves to spend eternity there, is very loving to my neighbor nor to myself. I happen to think that God is much greater than Christianity and that Christ still has much to teach us beyond the confines of that manmade religion.

What if Jesus didn't speak much about the need to accept him as Lord and Savior because it wasn't required? What if Jesus didn't demand everyone believe that he would rise from the dead because not everyone really needs to? What if Jesus was true to his word and came for the sinners, those who had lost their way and needed a story of redemption?

What if, when Jesus spoke of condemnation, perishing, eternal punishment, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, he was talking about this existence and the hellscape we perpetuate by being out of alignment with our Creator? What if we keep creating a world of suffering, generation after generation, life after life, because of our dependence upon the ways of this world and our obsession with the hell produced by guilt and shame? What if Christians started redirecting their attention from the hell they warn about to the kingdom of heaven within?

According to Jesus, initially, he came for the Jews, a group of folks who'd had a really rough go of it. I don't really go in for the idea that God preferred them over any other folks in the world, but I do believe he chose them to bring Jesus into the world because they needed him the most. Granted, they ultimately rejected him, but that first batch had a whole lot of people whose lives were changed because he was a part of it.

And there are still people today whose lives are changed because Jesus becomes a part of it. There are still a lot of people who are so mired in darkness in this world of binaries that they cannot see the light, and they need a savior to guide them home. Considering that his initial message about being a conduit of God's love got subdued by the idea that he was the *only* conduit of God's love and we need only to believe in him, perhaps it's time we resurrect the true message of Christ. Perhaps it's time we

remember the importance of loving the Creator of our hearts, minds, bodies, and strength with all of our hearts, minds, bodies, and strength. Perhaps it's time we remember the importance of loving one another, loving our neighbors and ourselves.

For anyone who needs a savior, Jesus is there for you, but you still have to do the work. You've got to breathe in the Spirit of God. Jesus is not going to breathe it in for you. You've got to let your light shine. Jesus is not going to shine it for you. You've got to be the salt of the earth and bring flavor to life. Jesus can't do that for you. He's done enough.

Roman American Christianity is built on the foundational idea that God requires blood sacrifice for the atonement of sins and that Jesus was the final sacrifice required. However, Jesus did not teach atonement. He taught forgiveness, and whatever he may or may not have said or done, he gave all of us the power to forgive - to forgive ourselves, to forgive our neighbors, to forgive our culture, and to forgive our past so that we may open ourselves to the kingdom of heaven and live in the state of love he preached, and if we can allow that power to flow through us, we truly can co-create a new heaven and new earth.

In Matthew, Jesus mentions hell seven times on four different occasions. In Mark, Jesus mentions hell three times in the same conversation, and then never again. In Luke, Jesus mentions hell once. In John, he never mentions hell at all. None of the mentions of hell are regarding eternal damnation.

If Jesus's purpose were to save us from hell, he probably would have mentioned it more often. But just as Judaism built on the idea of blood sacrifice in order to bolster their agricultural business and keep people dependent on the temple, so did Christianity build on the idea of sin and eternal punishment to keep people devoted to the Church.

As it is, Jesus did say he did not come to bring peace, but a sword of division. There are those who will open to and embrace the kingdom of heaven within them in order to bring heaven to earth, and there will be those who will defend their hell and wait

to die as they live in death. In our current state of affairs, sometimes it seems like hell is winning, but it is always darkest before the dawn.

What if we can repent from our fixation on hell and open to the kingdom of heaven?

For anyone who needs to believe in hell in order to keep from going on a killing spree or any other such evil activities, please, go ahead and believe in it. But for those who don't think God is as short-sighted and evil as the most popular religion of all time often portrays God as, merely being grateful for the life you've been given and opening to your eternal existence beyond the experience you think you are having opens you to the kingdom of heaven available for you. For those who need scripture for guidance or for boundaries, they are there for you, but they aren't required, and they certainly aren't perfect.

What is required is that you realize you are a child of God, an emanation of All That Is. You've been chosen to have this particular experience of life, and it can often be a messy and painful scenario as we make our way through it. It often gets a lot easier when you take the time to practice connecting with your Source.

In the four gospels, Jesus mentions the kingdom of heaven thirty-three times. Thirty-one of them are in Matthew. In Mark, he refers to it as the kingdom of God eleven times. In Luke, he calls it the kingdom of God thirty-two times. In John, he mentions it twice in one conversation. At least John mentions it more than hell, which, again, he never mentioned.

Jesus empowered other people to find the light of Christ in themselves and taught them how to truly recognize the kingdom of heaven not as something to experience after death but as something to awaken to in this eternal life he guided them toward then, and toward which he guides people now.

Jesus was a conduit of healing, but he never claimed credit as the healer. Whenever anyone came to Jesus for healing, he told them, "*Your* faith has healed you." Jesus knew that healing

came from our Source, and he was able to help them cultivate their alignment with their inner Divinity.

Jesus wasn't about claiming credit for himself and making people dependent on him, but about helping them align with their Creator, and despite all of the religious pageantry we've developed in order to get there, I believe that many have realized that alignment, possibly more than most people realize. Although the traditions developed upon celebrating his legacy may have been warped by human intervention over the last couple thousand years, and although none of the many versions of the gospels, neither synoptic nor gnostic, may be the perfectly accurate account of his ministry, those red letters contain seeds of wisdom that have been echoed through many other religions and spiritual traditions ever since, and in that way, the gospel of Christ has certainly spread throughout the world.

I've met many followers of Christ in my life. Some of them have been Christians. Many have just been human - beautifully, fallibly, wonderfully human. Beyond the performative religious traditions that have developed over the last 2,000 years, despite all of our fallibilities, mistakes, and violent tendencies, humanity has also grown in our relationship with the Spirit and our ability to love unconditionally.

In the four gospels, Jesus mentions love fifty times, more than any other topic. That is the primary message of Jesus. Anything else is religious bunk.

Do you know what Jesus did do? He called out the religious authorities of the time. Just as the prophets before him had done, he rebuked the selfishness, greed, and wrong-thinking that prevailed throughout the people of Israel, especially among the religious. Since those principalities have become so prevalent in Roman American Christianity as it has transmogrified into an industrial religion that idolizes the Bible as a collection of graven images always put before God, as a follower of Christ beyond the demands of the Roman Empire, I am hopeful for a revival of the love of Christ.

We don't need to honor the Roman Empire in order to connect with the kingdom of heaven. We don't need the Bible to be perfect in order to have a relationship with our Creator. And we don't need for Jesus to be born of a virgin or of any royal lineage to be emissaries of God's love.

If more people could start with Jesus's two commandments of loving God and one another, all those dogmas and doctrines would become far less important. If our primary motivation were to do good and help people, as Jesus did, we'd feel a lot more joy than we do when we are arguing for our limited understanding to be completely accepted. If we were to prioritize shining with the love of our Creator and using the Holy Spirit of creativity to make art of our lives by using all of our hearts, minds, bodies, and strength into being emissaries of divine love for ourselves and others, we'd probably entice a lot more people to look into Jesus than when we are driven by anger, ignorance, judgment, and fear.

Christianity has served a vital role in the development of our civilization. For generations, it has been one of the primary providers of assistance to the poor and downtrodden. Many Christians have truly answered the call of Christ and have strived to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and visit the sick and imprisoned.

Perhaps some have done it out of fear of eternal torture, and perhaps that was necessary for a time, but the wisdom of Christ has transcended the religion, and people who have never sat in a pew have realized the joy in lifting up those who have fallen. Regardless of doctrines and dogmas, actually, usually in spite of them, people have embraced the notion of loving their neighbors as themselves.

Granted, many others have not, including those who do sit in pews every week. With the outrage economy on full throttle, many people are too angry and anxious to open themselves to the vibration of love. If those who do know how to love can understand that, we may just have a chance for a new Renaissance

and open ourselves to the Wisdom Revolution.

If you are interested in deepening your relationship with the Source of your being, I challenge you to give Christ 1% of your day. For fourteen minutes and twenty-four seconds a day, quiet your mind, have gratitude for every breath, let go of your ego, and breathe in the Spirit of God. In India, they call it meditation, but I think Jesus called it prayer.

For those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Jesus said stuff, this I know
for the Bible tells me so.
I'm not quite sure what to do.
I'm not a Roman or a Jew.

Yes Jesus said stuff,
but I've had enough of
religion that's really screwed up
what he was really trying to say.

Jesus said stuff then he died
in the hopes our minds would open wide.
We got so carried away with sin,
but now a new life can begin.

Yes, Jesus said stuff,
Yes, we've lost control of
things we don't approve of,
but that's the way it goes.

Jesus said stuff that was good,
but he's not always understood.
His followers can be really bad.
They may be trying, but it's so sad.

Yes, Jesus said stuff,
but you don't need to go nuts
over the entire religious apparatus.
You could just have a little faith.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve McAllister is an artist, author, filmmaker, poet, songwriter, teacher, and performer and shares a lot of work as Steve McAlphabet. After challenging himself to live without the use of money for a year, Steve developed a theory called ABC Squared Economics based on the Artistry, Business, Citizenry, and Community we cultivate in our lives, and has since applied that theory as he lived for a decade without gasoline before riding his motorcycle through all of the lower 48 states (as well as 2 provinces).

He is the author of several books including *Money, Sex, Power & Faith: Questioning the Building Blocks of Civilization* and *Steve McAlphabet Explains ABC Squared Economics*. His next project, in the works for nearly two decades, is *The Unbroken Path*, an amalgam of various worldviews and human paradigms of understanding, guiding people toward a more unified and holistic vision of who we are and what we're doing here.

Steve has also produced a number of one man performances, including *Will Rogers Revived*, based on the political humor of the 1928 Anti Bunk Party presidential candidate. That same year, Will Rogers became the only person to ever be invited to speak at both the Republican and Democratic conventions. Since Will said the party was 100 years ahead of times, Steve is seeking to revive the Anti Bunk Party in 2028.

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OTHER BOOKS

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