

Gospel and Worship — 1 (In Spirit and Truth)

Outline

1. Samaritan Worship and Samaritan Woman
2. Meaning of Worship
3. God desires Worship in Spirit and Truth

Read John 4:4-26

1. Samaritan Worship and Samaritan Woman

Samaritans believed they were the true descendants of the Ephraim and Manasseh tribes and were the Torah's keepers (the first five books of the Old Testament, written by Moses). Though their name is similar to the city of Samaria, the Samaritans took their name from the phrase "keeper of the law" (*shmarym*). Jewish historians and rabbis, however, believed that the Samaritans were not of pure Jewish descent but were people whom the Assyrians brought after they conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (Read 2 Kings 17. It does not mention the Samaritans by name but refers only to the inhabitants of Samaria). Though the Samaritans are only mentioned in the New Testament, a racial conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans existed from the time the Jews returned from Captivity in Babylon.

Jews and Samaritans recognised that God had commanded their forefathers 'to seek the place He would choose to put his Name for His dwelling' (Deut 12:5). But they drew conflicting conclusions from this command. The Jews recognised all the books of the Old Testament as holy scripture. They concluded Jerusalem was the place to build the Temple—because David chose that place, and God solemnly authorised David's son Solomon to build it there. But the Samaritans recognised only the Torah and concluded that Mount Gerizim was the correct place to build the Temple because it overlooked Shechem, the site where Abraham and Jacob built altars when they entered the promised land (Gen 12:6-7, 33:18). Furthermore, Mount Gerizim was where the blessings were proclaimed to the Hebrews when they entered the promised land (Deut 11:29-30; 27:2-7, 12).

So, in addition to racial conflict, there was a prominent "place of worship" conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans. For example, when Jesus healed the ten lepers, only the Samaritan, whom Jesus called a foreigner, returned to thank Him (Luke 17:11-19). In John 8:48, Jews despised Jesus and called Him a

Samaritan and demon-possessed (John 8:48). These references highlight the racial conflict. In John 4:20-21, Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman highlights the place of worship conflict.

A Samaritan Woman came to draw water from Jacob's Well. She came alone at noon (John 4:6-7), indicating she felt like a social outcast among her people. (Women would generally come in groups early morning or late evening to avoid

the

sun's heat). Jesus senses it and reaches out to her by asking her for a drink. There follows a conversation between them, and Jesus tells her to call her husband and return (John 4:16), to which she replies, "I have no husband". Jesus agrees but adds, "You had five husbands, and the man you are living with right now is not your husband." Jesus wasn't trying to embarrass her but was trying to reveal who He is. She gets it and says, "You are a prophet" (John 4:17-19).

Women in ancient days were very dependent on their husbands. And if her husband died early, she would need another one to survive. It was also easy for men to divorce their wives. Having lost five husbands, either through death or divorce, the Samaritan woman, getting on in age, would settle for being "kept" by a man who was not her legal husband.

Jesus can see her tragic life and tries to get personal to help her. But she tries to divert the conversation by being academic, which is always easier than dealing with emotional pain and tragedy. So, she tries to change the topic by saying, "OK, since you are a prophet, tell me the proper place of worship, an age-old conflict between Jews and Samaritans".

Jesus gives her an amazing answer. But he doesn't say Jerusalem is the right place; Mount Gerizim is wrong. He also doesn't say you can worship anywhere because God is spirit. But He says the "**hour**" is **coming**, and when it comes, you do not need a fixed place (Temple) to worship the Father, but you can worship Him anywhere. This transit from a fixed Temple to anywhere depends on "the hour". Jesus repeatedly uses the word "hour" in John's Gospel to denote the hour of His death, resurrection and exaltation. The hour was when Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us so that in Him we might have the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). It is **the good news** of our reconciliation with the Father because He accepted Jesus' death on the cross in our place.

The moment Jesus died on the cross, the thick veil in the Jerusalem Temple was torn from top to bottom (Luke 23:45). The veil was the separating four-inch-

thick curtain in the Temple between the outer court, where the people were and the Holy of Holies, where God dwelled. By tearing the veil, God meant that you don't need the Temple anymore because Jesus is the Temple. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6). If you try to come to God any other way except through Jesus Christ, you will not connect with Him now or ever in the future. You can never worship God on your terms. You can only worship Him on His terms.

Jesus' answer to the Samaritan woman was amazing because even though her life was tragic and despised, He reached out to her and revealed so many truths that He did not reveal yet to His disciples. Jesus revealed to her the existence of the Holy Spirit, the essence of worship, which is by the Spirit and truth and that He is the Messiah (John 4:21-26).

2. The Meaning of Worship

The English word *worship* comes from the word worth-ship. Whatever is most worthy of your time and money is what you worship. Whatever you treasure most in life is what you worship. It's the thing, person, or issue on which much of your stability and self-image is built. The item you worry about the most—that's your treasure; that's what you worship. So, by this definition of worship, everyone worships something or the other. A person may say, "I don't worship anything." But that's not true. Everyone builds their lives, gives their hearts, and sets their hopes on something. Why? Because you have to live for something. You have to find your meaning in something. You have to look either at your career or your family, or your profession, or your art, or money or fame, or a lover, and you're looking at it and saying, "That's what gives my life meaning". Then that something is what you treasure. That is what you worship. Jesus says in Matt 6:21, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*".

Worshipping God means you must know who God is before you can treasure Him as worthy of your worship. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in John 4:22, "*You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.*"

Jesus does not directly say where to worship, whether Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim. But He insists that the Samaritans worship what they do not know. ^{Their}

knowledge of God is incomplete and insufficient for salvation and worship. For example, though they expect a prophet like Moses to come (Deut 18:12-15), who is the Messiah, they would not know much about Him, for they only believe in the

Torah and not the rest of the Old Testament. They don't know, for example, the Messiah of Isaiah 53. And without the Messiah, they cannot worship God (John 14:6). However, the Jews believe in the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi. It contains a greater revelation of salvation than just the Torah. Therefore, *salvation is of the Jews*.

3. God desires Worship in Spirit and Truth

You can only worship God if you come to Him through Jesus Christ. But it does not automatically mean you are worshipping God unless you start worshipping Him the way that pleases the Father. He desires that you worship Him in Spirit and truth (John 4:23) — which is **the essence of worship**. Worship in Spirit and truth

means you cannot worship only in Spirit or only in truth. It has to be both together. Unless you do that, you cannot have authentic worship in your personal and church lives.

Truth means God's word. You do not know who or what you are worshipping without knowing God's word. But knowing the truth of God's word is still head knowledge. It needs the revelation of the Holy Spirit to imprint God's word into your heart. Your heart drives your life (Prov 4:23). There is an old saying, "Only truth will dry you up. Only Spirit will blow you up. Both Spirit and truth together will grow you up".

God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Humility, community and prayer are the main ways to receive God's grace of revelation by the Holy Spirit. So, besides reading, memorising, and meditating on God's word, we need to be people of prayer, humility and community. You can only test your humility by how you relate to others in a community.

The Holy Spirit is a person. We need to be careful not to **grieve** the Holy Spirit by careless speech (Eph 4:29-31), nor **lie** to the Holy Spirit by telling lies (Acts 5:3), nor **resist** the Holy Spirit by refusing to listen to the truth (Acts 7:51), nor **quench** the Holy Spirit or put off the Spirit's fire, by being passively lazy when He wants you to go ahead and serve Him (1 Thess 5:19).

When you worship God in Spirit and truth, you will experience three things:

- (i). You will experience God's covenant love, His loving kindness. In turn, you will love Him. It will set you free from insecurities. One result will be that you will be a giver. You will give not to get more but only because you love Him.
- (ii). You will experience His wisdom. He will show you His purposes for your life and purpose in suffering so you can walk through trials knowing He has not

abandoned you but is with you. He teaches us to relate with others with love and truth. He teaches us to deal with temptation and discouragement.
(iii). You will also experience knowing His Kingdom work — how to serve Him in His kingdom in prayer and works of faith.

Conclusion: God wants you to worship Him in Spirit and truth, which is the essence of worship. Truth refers to the proper knowledge of God — a head knowledge. Truth alone will not transform you because it must be impressed upon your heart, which drives your life and changes your character. You need the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to your heart. Then you will know God in your heart, and you will offer Him, through Jesus, the sacrifice of praise and the sacrifice of serving others, both of which pleases God.

Heb 13:15-16 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Gospel and Worship — 2 (Psalm 95—Entering Rest)

Main Content of Ps 95: This psalm is about biblical congregational worship. It teaches us to worship the LORD (Yahweh) with joyful praise (95: 1-5), with reverent worship (95:5-7) and with trusting obedience (95:7-11). In the second section (95:5-7), the believer seriously engages with God. No one who comes to worship God should leave that place without finding rest in God and making Him the Lord of his heart.

The first two sections begin with an invitation to worship. The four “let us” (vs 1, 2 and 6) suggest that a choir invited the congregation to sing the psalm as they gathered for the weekly Sabbath worship in the Temple.

Worshipping God means you must know who God is before you can treasure Him as worthy of your worship. God wants you to worship Him in Spirit and truth, which is the essence of worship. Truth refers to the proper knowledge of God — a head knowledge. Truth alone will not transform you because it must be impressed upon your heart, which drives your life and changes your character. You need the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to your heart; worship is one of the **leading spiritual disciplines** the Holy Spirit uses for this purpose. (The other spiritual disciplines are reading, studying and meditating on scriptures, hearing sermons, actively engaging in a worshipping community, and personal devotions).

Ps 95 teaches that when you worship God, you enter a deep intimate relationship with an awesome God. His awesome majesty must affect your whole person — body, soul and spirit. Your mind, emotions and will are part of your soul. And if your worship doesn't affect them all, it is not worship.

Worshippers must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, for only He can lead us into God's incredible presence and reveal God's awesome majesty to us. In congregational worship, the leaders must have the gift and character to come into God's presence and lead the congregation into God's presence, all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They must choose worship songs directed to God based on scripture so that our minds and hearts stay on who God is.

Outline of Ps 95

1. Worship with praise (vs 1- 5)
2. Worship with reverence (vs 6-7a)
3. Worship with trusting obedience (vs 7b-11)

1. Worship with praise (Ps 95:1-5). *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. 3 For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. 5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

vs 1-2: One of the signs of a believer who worships God in Spirit and truth is the

joy of a covenant relationship with God, and singing is the best expression of joy. The morning stars and the angels sang for joy when God was at work in creation (Job 38:4-7). The singing for joy and shouting aloud His Name are not merely demonstrations of voice but come willingly from a heart of thanksgiving touched by the Holy Spirit (the opposite is mentioned in v8 — “do not harden your hearts”).

The LORD (in Hebrew, Yahweh) is the redemptive covenant-keeping name of God. He is the Rock of our salvation. His redemptive name Yahweh is the firm ground of our confidence, the basis of our hope and the security in our salvation.

Thanksgiving and vigorous praise will set our hearts and minds on the LORD and will overcome oppression in the congregation. We defeat the enemy with high praises in our mouth (Ps 149:6) — meaning that our praises to God must be higher than the oppression, worries, or disappointments that occupy our minds. Indeed, the LORD is enthroned in the praises of his people (Ps 22:3).

Ps 95 gives us two primary reasons to praise and thank God:

- *For who He is:* He is a Rock of our salvation— unshakable, dependable, faithful (v1). He is greater than all gods and ruler over all nations (v3). He is Yahweh (LORD), the covenant-keeping self-existing eternal God of Israel and all believers in Christ.
- *For what He does:* He does marvellous deeds in Creation (vs 4-5) and Redemption (v1).

2. Worship with reverence (Ps 95:6-7): *Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

The whole mood changes from joyful praise in Section 1 (vs 1-5) to solemn and reverential worship in Section 2 (vs 6-7). It is as if the worship leaders are sensing the presence of God and changed to reverential worship.

In v6, many beautiful words express reverential worship to Yahweh.

Come: The Hebrew word 'yawlak' is used for "come" in v1, which means an invitation. But in v6, the Hebrew word 'bo' is used for "come", which means actively engaging in something (taken from Albert Barnes's notes on Ps 95). Here in v6, we are called to engage in the worship of Yahweh actively. Worship will always be an active engagement of our hearts with God; therefore, we cannot afford to harden our hearts (v8) when we worship Him. **Without actively engaging our hearts, there is no worship.** Heart engagement with God will automatically result in our body posture responding in reverence to Him.

Worship: (from the Hebrew word 'shawkhaw') which means 'to prostrate' before God, acknowledging His total supremacy over us.

Bow down: which means to crouch low in submission to God our master.

Kneel: acknowledging His goodness to us with deep reverence.

The reason why we worship God is because He is our God, and we are His people.

This is covenant language. It isn't that we have made Him our God, but He has condescended to accept us as His people (read Ezek 16:1-8). He chose us; we did not choose Him. He loved us first, even when we were powerless and ungodly; Christ died for us to make us His people (Rom 5:6-8). We respond by offering

our whole life to Him (Rom 12:1).

Rom 5:6-8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

3. Worship with trusting obedience (vs 7b-11): *Today, if only you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, 9 where your ancestors tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. 10 For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." 11 So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."*

The passage in section 3 above refers to when the Israelites, whom God delivered from slavery under the Egyptians, kept grumbling, complaining, disobeying God, and worshipping idols on their way to the promised land. God

swore they would never enter their rest, meaning they would never enter the promised land. The Book of Hebrews, chapters 3 and 4, refers to this passage in Ps 95:7-11 and talks about the rest in the gospel of Jesus.

Grumbling and complaining are signs that you have forgotten the gospel that saves you. Eventually, it will lead to idolatry. Idols are anything else besides God to make your life satisfying and fulfilling. Ultimately, your heart will harden and make you unable to listen to God's voice and obey Him. The gospel of salvation would have lost its light in your life. And though you may say you believe in God and His gospel, your life is no better than that of an unbeliever.

Many Christians, saved by faith in the gospel, neglect church attendance. But though saved, they get stuck in their walk with God. The world will eventually capture their hearts, the light of the gospel will grow dim, and so will their joy and power to live a life pleasing to God. You can never worship God individually and change your life. You can never live a changed life without participating actively in a church.

An illustration: A poor woman inherited some jewellery from her deceased mother. Most of it was not valuable, though a pearl with a peculiar glitter was among them. But the woman was busy earning her livelihood and soon forgot

about

the pearl. It lay neglected in her drawer for years. One day, out of the desperation that comes from poverty, she took this pearl to a jeweller to see

how

much she could get for it. After carefully and repeatedly examining it, the shocked jeweller found it a very rare and expensive pearl. He told the poor woman, "*You are more foolish than you ever thought you were by neglecting this pearl for so many years, but now you are more wealthy for the rest of your life than you could ever imagine or hope*". (adapted from Tim Keller's illustration).

Conclusion: The pearl of great price is the gospel that makes you a beloved child of the Most High God, secure in His love. But it also tells you how precious you are in His sight. He loved you so much that Jesus gave His life for you to make you His treasured possession. You don't have to work for this precious pearl. It is a gift to receive by faith. This is the gospel. And when you are engaged in worshipping God with your body, soul and spirit, the truth of the gospel will settle

in your heart, and you will hear Him speak to you of His love. You will remove the idols of your heart that kept you anxious, and you will find your **rest** in God as Lord and Saviour and the **joy** of your life. When you come to this phase of

worship,

you don't pray to God; instead, you enjoy His love and love Him in return. There is a receiving and giving. You receive His love and give Him your love in return.

Entering Rest: Jesus says in *Matt 11:28-30* *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

There are two rests in this passage— spiritual and emotional.

Spiritual rest: Jesus **gives** us spiritual rest. He says in v28, "*I will give you rest*". We are saved by faith in Jesus, not our works. Therefore, we can rest from trying to earn our salvation by good works (*Eph 2:8-9, Matt 11:28*).

Emotional rest. Here, we must make every effort to **find** our emotional rest as we learn to accept the yoke of Jesus upon us by trusting Him through all the trials we face (*Matt 11:29-30, Heb 4:11*). Such a rest is possible only by true worshippers of Yahweh who acknowledge and trust Him as their God and King, who receive His love, rest in His love and love Him in return.

Entering rest in God and enjoying His love is what transforms our life. It should be our goal in every worship service and our daily personal devotions with God. Functioning as worship leaders in Mumbai, my wife and I have occasionally experienced God's favour of His presence resting on the congregation, resulting in transforming lives, deliverance from evil spirits, and healing.

Gospel and Christmas Story

Outline

1. It's the Greatest Prophetic Story
2. It's the Greatest Historical Story
3. It's the Greatest Humble Story
4. It's the Greatest Love Story
5. It's the Greatest Glorious Story (His Story Becomes Our Story)

1. It's the Greatest Prophetic Story

There are **over 300 prophecies** about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus right from Genesis to Malachi, of which there are **16 major prophecies concerning His birth**. But for now, we will examine just a few, and that too, briefly. They are the prophecies of Isaiah, written around 725 BC.

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

- Birth of the Messiah—1st Coming (v6: *For to us a child is born*)
- Divine Names of the Messiah (v6: *Mighty God and Everlasting Father*)
- Ways and Work of the Messiah (v7: *Reigns with justice and righteousness*)
- Reign of the Messiah—2nd Coming and to eternity (v7: *forever*)

Isa 11:1-9 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the

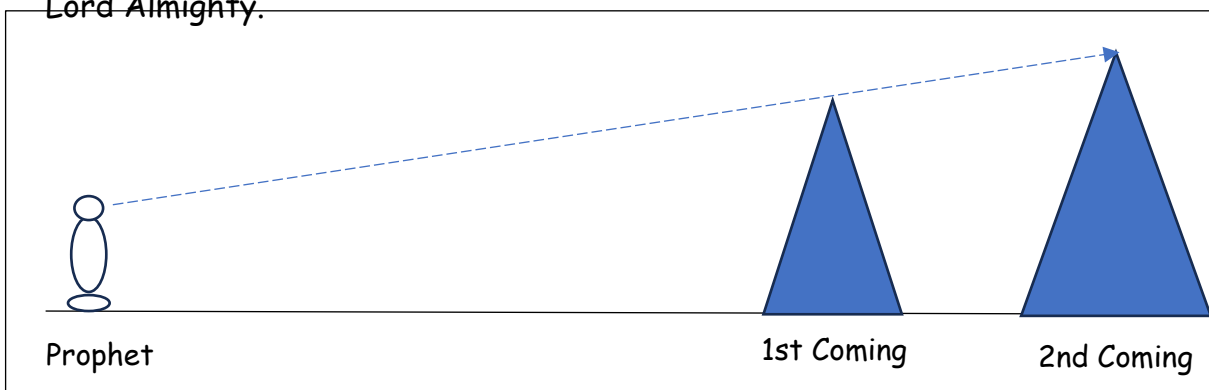
sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

- Birth of the Messiah — 1st Coming (v1: shoot from the stump of Jesse) • Spirit of the Messiah (v2: Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him)
- Ways and Work of the Messiah (vv 3-5)
- Reign of the Messiah — 2nd Coming to eternity (vv 5-9)



The prophets saw the future like we see a mountain range in the distance. They see God's purpose in sending His Messiah and establishing His kingdom. But they see it all together, just as we might see

distant mountains but unable to gauge the distance between them. Does Isaiah speak of the first or the second coming of Christ? The answer is both and also in between — and simultaneously. This helps us look to the birth of Christ as the beginning of a story that has still reached **its conclusion — it's unfolding the wonderful story of Christmas.** It's a story that you and I have a part to play. It's a story that involves the zeal of the Lord Almighty.



2. It's the Greatest Historical Story:

Luke 2:1-2, 4, 11 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria). . . 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. . . . [Then the Angel said to the shepherds]. . . .11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

It happened at a real and particular time—a set time in history. Not a time in some mythological, imaginary story, but a time set when **Caesar Augustus** was the emperor of Rome “and Quirinius was governor of Syria” (v2). It was a time planned in eternity because the Lamb was slain before the world's creation. “*When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law*” (Gal 4:4).

Augustus Caesar was the first and greatest emperor of the Roman Empire. He was the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar. Augustus was the one that built the Roman roads (some of them exist today). He entered Rome, a city made of bricks and left it a city of marble. Augustus Caesar ruled from 27 BC to 14 AD — a period of 40 years.

But the greatest emperor of all time, indeed of the Universe, made everlasting roads right into the hearts of men. He entered the world of the sons of men to make them the sons of God. And His rule never ends. History is His Story.

It happened in a real town: Not in a fairy tale land. It happened in a town that still exists today. “*Joseph also went up from Galilee . . . to Bethlehem, the town of David*” (Luke 2:4). Bethlehem, the city that Micah prophesied: “*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you shall come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times*” (Mic 5:2).

3. It's the Greatest Humble Story:

Isa 11:1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots, a Branch will bear fruit.

Jesse was the father of King David. Samuel the prophet visits Jesse and his family to anoint David as the future king, the man God has chosen to

replace King Saul. Samuel sees all of Jesse's sons except David, the youngest, the shepherd boy. He was **so insignificant** that no one had even thought to fetch him along with the others. But he was God's chosen king, the man after God's heart. But his descendants, from Solomon to Zedekiah, with few exceptions, were a great disappointment.

So what Isaiah sees is the tree of Jesse - the royal house of David - cut down to a mere **stump** by God's judgment because of sin. The royal line of the kings of Israel came to an end. But a **shoot grows out of the**

stump.

We would have thought that the tree was dead. God will return to the dynasty's origins and raise a king from the very root of the dynasty. Just as David was not raised in a royal palace but was an insignificant shepherd boy, the new David, the Messiah, will be born in a trivial manner of humble origins. Unexpected. Not in a palace with prestige, pomp and privileges

that kings and rulers have and so often abuse. But he was born in a stable in Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, where David's family originated, but not where Solomon or any of the kings of Israel were born. This Jesus is God's Messiah, raised unexpectedly from **humble origins**. But because David the shepherd boy came from humble origins, he was a man of the people, besides being a man after God's heart. Jesus was like neither Herod

nor Caesar. He was a different sort of king after God's heart, and that difference began with his birth in humble circumstances to a family of no status in society and to a life of no reputation. Look at His lineage, His looks and His life.

His Lineage: *The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1*, mentions four women in the lineage of Jesus. Why? As if to make a statement because these women

were of questionable character. Tamar had committed incest with her father-in-law, Rahab was a prostitute, Ruth was a Moabite (an enemy of Israel), and Bathsheba was an adulteress. Yet Jesus was not ashamed to call them His mothers.

His Looks: *Isa 53:2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, like a root out of the dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

His Life: *Isa 53:3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

4. It's the Greatest Love Story — His Story

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

God had a great plan **to establish an eternal kingdom** (rule of God) with a race of men & women who are not angels (angels are ministering servants) but a race of men & women who could be called His sons and daughters

with

God-like character. **Let me elaborate on this plan:**

- (i) This plan was conceived before man was created because the Lamb of God was slain before the world's creation.
- (ii) This plan was meticulously carried out through the ages, despite man's repeated failures until today.
- (iii) This plan was carried out by the Trinity—the Father conceiving the plan, the Son giving His life for the plan and the Holy Spirit working out the plan till today.
- (iv) This plan was that God's only Son should come into this world (*son is given*) and become a man (*child is born*) in every aspect except sin.
- (v) This plan involved the birth, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- (vi) This plan involved His bloody sweat, tears and loud cries, intense suffering, excruciatingly painful death on the cross and very shedding of the blood of God.

But Why? Why? Why? Because--

- (vii) This plan would involve **wooing us with His love and transforming us** from rebellious, selfish, unbelieving, hard-hearted sinners into soft-hearted and willing lovers of God.
- (viii) This plan would make us children of the Father and the Bride of Christ.

Now, dear friends, it was such a plan as this that aroused the zeal of God.

- This plan could not be accomplished by just speaking the word (even though His word is so powerful that the universe was created by it) nor by His breath (even though His breath was so powerful that man

was created by it). Still, it must involve all the attributes of God—His holiness, His love, His goodness, His faithfulness, and His power—in full flow.

- This accomplishment of this plan was worthy of a great Creator;
- The execution of this plan is the **Greatest Love Story ever**—it is His Story, and it can become Our Story.

And how can it become our story? — When you believe in the gospel that God sent His one and only son, whoever believes in Him will have eternal life (John 3:16). God is passionate about us. We love because He loved us first. We have joy because we see Him rejoicing over us. We have peace because He first made peace with us by dying on the cross to pay the price for our rebellion against God

5. It's the Greatest Glorious Story — Our Story:

Luke 2:13-14 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

The coming of this child will be the **greatest revelation of God's glory, even in heaven's highest place**. And the arrival of this child will bring peace to God's people. God's offer of peace goes out to all, yet only His chosen people who receive Christ and trust him as Saviour and Lord will experience the peace He brings.

But notice the relation between His glory and our peace through the gospel.

Remember: When we find Our Peace in Him, He gets the Glory, His Joy becomes Our Joy, His Righteousness becomes Our Righteousness, and His Story can become Our Story. Also, remember that when we get our peace, it is the God of Peace that crushes Satan under our feet (Rom 16:20)

I pray that you will start a new story this Christmas, enjoy His peace, and thus glorify Jesus Christ.

Gospel and Genealogy of Jesus

Outline

1. His Genealogy shows that God is faithful and true
2. His Genealogy shows that God entered our history
3. His Genealogy shows that God gives us Sabbath Rest
4. His Genealogy shows that God has no class or caste, or gender distinctions

Read Matt 1:1-17

1. His Genealogy shows that God is faithful and true

Matt 1:1 begins with, "*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" King David ruled Israel around 1000 BC, and God promised him that one of his descendants would reign forever (2 Sam 7:11-13,16, Isa 9:6-7). Abraham lived approximately 2000 BC, and God promised Abraham that all the people of the earth would be blessed through his offspring (Gen 22:18, 26:4),

But God did not fulfil that promise for 2000 years. It seemed that God had forgotten. And David's descendants did much wrong and lost the throne. But the angel appeared to Mary and told her she would conceive a son and call him Jesus. He would be the Son of the Most High, ascend to the throne of David, and reign forever (Luke 1:32-33). Then, Mary realised that God had fulfilled His promise. She sang when she met her cousin Elizabeth in Luke 1:54-55, "*He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his*

descendants

forever, even as he said to our fathers."

The Genealogy of Jesus teaches that:

(i) God is faithful and true to His promises. God may take time to fulfil His promises, but He never forgets them. God fulfils His promises in His appointed time, not according to our expected time. But when He fulfils His promises, He does so in grand style in ways we can't imagine.

(ii) Some of you may be saying to yourself, "Yes, God is faithful to His promises, However, maybe He shouldn't be faithful **to me** because I have made a mess of my life. Even as a believer, I have done some foolish things and am reaping the fruit of those blunders. Maybe I'll never have all these great things God has promised. Maybe I missed my chance and now have to settle for less."

Matt 1:2. "Jacob was the father of Judah." But Jacob was cunning and lied and stole His brother Esau's birthright by deceiving their father, Isaac. Because of his deception, Jacob had to run for his life. He experienced terrible and long years of suffering away from home. What Jacob did was wrong, and he suffered the consequences.

But God does not give Jacob an inferior plan. Jacob loved Rachel. She was his first choice, and he married her. Rachel wasn't an inferior plan. The Messiah is not an inferior plan. Matt 1:2 shows that God works out His purposes through Jacob. *God will work all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Rom 8:28). Even if we are faithless; God is faithful because God cannot disown Himself (2 Tim 2:13). God is always faithful.* My dear brothers and sisters, I have made blunders, even as a believer, of which I am ashamed. Of course, I repent and move ahead in my walk with God, trusting His promises because He is faithful and true.

2. His Genealogy shows that God entered our history

The Hindu Brahmins of India can trace their genealogy for several centuries.

Hindu priests write Brahmin genealogies in ancient books kept in their holy city of Haridwar and update it when a Brahmin family pilgrimages to that city. The Jews of Israel could also trace their genealogy from ancient times to 70 AD

when

the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem Temple, and they lost all their records. But in both cases, Brahmins and Jews, the genealogy recorded is patriline—i.e.

father

to son. Their genealogy proves their history.

Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus. It proves that Jesus existed in human history. Unlike a myth or fairy tale that starts with, "Once upon a time, there was, etc." Not so with Jesus. Matthew records His genealogy. The genealogy of Jesus proved that He was fully human. The Jewish leadership crucified Jesus because He claimed to be God (Matt 26:63-65). His resurrection after death on the cross proved His claim that He was fully God. The gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) show that Jesus is 100% fully God and 100% fully human.

The genealogy tells us that the eternal Creator God entered our history by becoming human. He has done something in history that changes everything. And we will be judged based on how we respond to it.

Non-Christians have no problem with Christians who say they believe in the gospel

of Jesus. But they would have a problem when we say that Jesus, a historical

figure who claimed to be 100% God, died and rose from the dead. Everybody has to believe if it's historically authentic. And if it's history, then rejecting it would be rejecting God's only offer of salvation.

3. His Genealogy shows that God gives us Sabbath Rest.

The genealogy given in Matthew's Gospel differs from that in Luke's. Matthew is a Jew, and his purpose was to present Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Matthew traces Jesus's ancestry right up to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. Whereas Luke most probably was a Gentile, his purpose was to present Jesus as the Saviour of all humanity. Luke traces Jesus' ancestry right up to Adam, the father of humanity.

Matthew uses the Greek word *gennaō* for "father of". We could also use this word for "forefather of". Matthew could have purposely selected Jesus's ancestors, skipping generations between a forefather and his descendant. Matthew puts Jesus' genealogy in three groups of 14 — Abraham to David, David to Jeconiah (in exile) and Jeconiah to Jesus.

Scholars say Matthew uses the number 14 to emphasise Sabbath Rest. 14 is two 7s. Three groups of 14 are 7,7,7,7,7,7, which is six sevens, and then the seventh seven is Jesus, who brings perfect Sabbath rest. (Count the generations, noting Jeconiah is mentioned twice, before and after exile in Babylon).

In the Old Testament, **seven** is a number that signifies resting in God's provision.

One day in seven was the **Sabbath day**, and on the Sabbath day, you rested from your work (Exodus 20:8).

One year out of seven was a **Sabbath year**. On the Sabbath year, the seventh year, God told the Jews not to till the land but to give it rest (Lev 25:3-5). Furthermore, they were to cancel the debts owed to them by fellow Jews (Deut 15:1) and were to set free any Jewish slaves they owned (Deut 15:12).

After seven Sabbath years (49 years), the fiftieth year is the **Jubilee year**. In the Jubilee year, you rested your land, cancelled your debts, and freed your Hebrew slaves. But also, any land you lost due to bad management or natural disasters that made you sell your land in the last 50 years — your family got that land back. The Jubilee year was **a year of celebration and freedom**. It points to the perfect Sabbath rest that Jesus offers in His gospel to set people free from slavery, guilt and shame of sin.

In Luke 4:18-21, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth and read the scriptures, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*" 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21, and he began by saying to them, "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**" (This scripture is from Isa 61:1-2). Jesus came to fulfil the Jubilee year and free us from sin, guilt and shame. I will give you an example below.

There are times when I ministered the gospel to people with memories of grave sin in their lives. The Holy Spirit would reveal that they could rest in Jesus's salvation. When they grasped this, they were free from guilt and shame, bringing spontaneous, joyful laughter from deep within. They were celebrating the year of the Lord's favour—the Jubilee year. They found rest at last in the perfect Sabbath that only Jesus brings. **(Note: All have sinned and suffered guilt and shame. And all need the gospel that brings freedom.)**

4. His Genealogy shows that God has no class or caste, or gender distinctions

Hindus are a patriarchal society, and to a great extent, so are the Jews. In a patriarchal society, genealogy records father to son as necessary. But in the genealogy of Jesus, we find five women mentioned—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Uriah's wife (Bathsheba) and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Why? For many reasons, as we shall see below:

(i) Jesus is proud of the women in His family. This should forever change the status of women in His Church.

(ii) Jesus is proud of the Gentiles in His family. Jewish society at that time wanted nothing to do with the Gentiles. But Rahab, a Canaanite from Jericho, was included in Jesus' genealogy. And Ruth was from Moab, who often were enemies of Israel.

(iii) Jesus is not ashamed of gross sinners like **Tamar**, who tricked her father-in-law, Judah, into sleeping with her and giving birth to Perez. Jesus includes Judah, Tamar and Perez in His genealogy, and **Rahab**, the prostitute. And then, we read of **Uriah's wife**, with whom King David committed adultery and murdered Uriah. She gave birth to Solomon. Jesus has David, Uriah's wife and Solomon in His genealogy.

Jesus' genealogy shows that your race, gender, class, caste or moral failures don't matter to Him. He died for men and women, high and low caste, even outcasts, all races and nationalities, and all gross sinners. He offers His gift of salvation to all. The love and grace of Jesus go out to everyone and anyone. Everybody needs it and can receive it — no matter what they are or what they have done. *The Bible says in Hebrews 2:11, "So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."* He's not ashamed of you. "Come to me," says Jesus, "and I'll be proud of you. You will have an honoured place in my family."

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Gospel and Presentation of Jesus

Outline

1. Jesus Presentation Event (Luke 2:21-33, 38)
2. Simeon's remarkable prophecy (Luke 2:28-35)
3. Jesus will cause the rise and falling of many (Luke 2:34)
4. Jesus will cause division within your heart (v35)

Read Luke 2:21-38

1. Jesus' Presentation Event (Luke 2:21-33,38)

Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses throughout His life as the second Adam. He fully obeyed God's Law till He died on the cross. There, He gave His righteousness to us in exchange for our sins (2 Cor 5:21).

His godly parents had him circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21) and named Him Jesus (Hebrew, it is *Jehoshua*, which means *God saves*). Thirty-three days later, on the fortieth day after His birth, Mary underwent purification rites for mothers who gave birth to a son by offering a lamb sacrifice. But the poor could offer two doves (Lev 12:1-4,8). Joseph and Mary offered two doves. The firstborn sons must also be consecrated and presented to God for sparing the Hebrew firstborn sons during the Passover event in Egypt (Exod 13:2,12,15). Luke combines the purification rites for Mary and the presentation of Jesus to God in Luke 2:22-24.

The Holy Spirit led two godly and elderly Jews, Simeon and Anna, to witness the presentation. The Holy Spirit revealed to them that this baby, born of poor parents, was the long-awaited Messiah (Luke 2:25-32, 38), not only Israel's Saviour but the whole world. Simeon also made a remarkable prophecy concerning the ministry of Jesus (Luke 2:34-35).

2. Simeon's remarkable prophecy (Luke 2:34-35)

Luke 2:34-35 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Simeon prophesies that Jesus will cause the falling and rising of many people, and it will disclose their secret thoughts. Many people will oppose Him (v34). Mary will also suffer much (v35).

The critical point is that nobody can be neutral when faced with Jesus. They either reject Him altogether or will accept Him as Lord and Savior. In one way or another, He will expose the thoughts and purposes of their hearts as they draw near to Him.

The principle to understand is that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He comes to reconcile us to God and give us peace. Jesus lived the life we should have lived in perfect obedience to God—but we didn't. Then He died and rose again to fully pay for our rebellion against God, which we couldn't. He did all this because He loved us. This is the gospel.

But, many people don't want to think they rebel against God. So they reject Jesus and His gospel. But in doing so, they rebel against God and are condemned. Other people repent of their rebellion, receive Jesus and are saved. Thus, Jesus divides people between those who receive His gospel and those who don't. He divides between the sheep and the goats, good and bad fish, wheat, and weeds. There is no neutral ground—you either fall (reject Him) or rise (accept Him). In doing so, the thoughts and purposes of your heart are disclosed and exposed.

3. Jesus will cause the falling and rising of many

Many people acknowledge that Jesus is a great moral teacher.

- Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) spoke highly of Jesus' life and His profound words.
 - Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner (1874-1958) wrote, "*It is universally admitted ... that Christ taught the purest and sublimest ethics ... which throws the moral precepts and maxims of the wisest men of antiquity far into the shade.*"
- Hindu guru Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) said Jesus is the greatest guru.
 - Even today, most leaders of other religions highly respect the moral teachings of Jesus. No one finds fault with it.

But when you read the gospels, besides His teachings, Jesus does some supernatural miracles that leave the onlookers in shock and awe. They would ask, "*Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey Him?*" (Mark 4:41, Luke 8:25). He would perform a miracle or speak with astounding wisdom and then forgive sins. And the

people would ask, "Who is this man who forgives sins? Only God could do that (Luke 5:21, 7:49).

As Jesus' ministry progressed, He began to give Himself Divine titles using "**I am**" with double emphasis. (*John 8:58 Before Abraham was, I am*). He declared what no other religious leader could declare. He said, "**I am** the resurrection and the

life" (John 11:25) and followed it by raising Lazarus from the dead after he was buried four days in the tomb. The double emphasis "**I am**" is the title of the

Creator

God Himself, "*I am who I am*" (Exodus 3:14). Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. It greatly angered the Jews. They wanted to stone Him. They did not crucify Him for His teachings or miracles but because He claimed to be the Son of God, which in Jewish understanding is equal to God (John 10:33, Mark 14:61-64).

President Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the USA, loved the teachings of Jesus but did not believe in His Divine claims. Jefferson cut out the claims of Jesus from his copy of the New Testament he carried in his pocket. What Jefferson and others like him do is deny that, in Jesus, God came down to earth in bodily form (flesh) to save humans from their sins and consequent human misery. The spirit of the anti-Christ blinds them (1 John 4:2-3).

1 John 4:2-3 This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

As the Creator God, Jesus commands total obedience. Some will accept Him as Lord and God, and others will say no. There is bound to be division. There can be no neutral ground. Therefore, Jesus tells the following:

Matt 10:32-36 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. 34 "Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 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— 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'

People say many others, besides Jesus, claimed to be God, even a Divine Creator God. Yes, maybe so. But they have very few followers. Indeed, no founder of any significant religion claimed to be the Creator God. So, how could Jesus manage to convince people to follow Him? How could Jews, who would never agree that God could become human, follow Him? They followed for two reasons:

(i) His sinless character (John 8:46), wisdom (John 6:68-69) and miracles.

(ii) His resurrection from the dead

But if Jesus came to divide people, why are many people neither rising nor falling when they hear the gospel? Why is it that most people are moderately religious, even Christians?

Many people in the world hate the claims of Jesus. There are also Christians who are great followers of Jesus. But most people neither hate Jesus nor follow Him when they hear the gospel. They are moderately religious. What about them?

The answer is that they need to find out who the real Jesus is. There's no evidence of their kind of Jesus in the Gospels. Is your Jesus Christ who says, "*I did not come*

to bring peace on earth, but a sword?" Is your Jesus the one who makes people rise or fall but allows no one in between? If not, then the Jesus you believe in is a fantasy.

But that's not enough. It's not just that Jesus divides people, but He also divides you in your heart.

4. Jesus will cause division within your heart

Simeon says, "*... the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.*" He means Jesus will reveal the rebellion in man's heart against God. Simeon also tells Mary, "*... a sword will pierce your soul too.*" God did not allow Simeon to speak about Joseph, even though he stood with Mary as Simeon talked to her. Why? Because God knew

Joseph

would die before Jesus became an adult and began His ministry. But Mary would continue living. She was at Jesus' side as He died on the cross. I don't want to minimise her suffering, for Mary was Jesus' mother. Like any other mother, she would suffer to see her son die a horrible and unjust death. Yet, I want to say

anyone

who loves Jesus and with faith sees Jesus on the cross will also have a sword pass through their heart. Mary, in that way, represents all faithful followers of Jesus.

The initial sword of repentance cuts away the rebellion and circumcises the heart of an unbeliever. It turns them around to surrender to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Let

me explain from the History of the Jews by Josephus. Besides being a historian, Josephus was also a commander of the Jewish army that fought against the occupying Roman army in Israel. When he realised the Roman army was too strong for them, Josephus told the Jews to "repent" and surrender to Rome. By "repent", Josephus meant to turn from rebellion against Rome and surrender. The war is over, and you will have peace with Rome. Josephus used the same word for "repent" that the gospel writers used when saying, "Repent and believe in the gospel". When an unbeliever does that, they have peace with God.

But rebellion against God runs so deep in our lives that we need ongoing repentance and surrender to Jesus, even as believers. We do this in four ways:

- (i) By reading God's word and submitting to Him daily.
Heb 4:12-13 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
- (ii) Secondly, we also need the fellowship of believers in a Bible-believing church. The fellowship also uncovers ungodly behaviour in which we are unaware that we need to repent and meekly surrender to Jesus.
1 John 1:6-7 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
- (iii) Thirdly, believers may still have stubborn sins they want to hide. There are two ways to follow simultaneously to be set free from them.
 - Confess your sin and be accountable to a trusted confessor.
 - By faith, look at the cross of Jesus. Ask Him to reveal His abundant love for you. Let His love rule higher in your heart than the love for your stubborn sin.
- (iv) Fourthly, there's also a repentance of absolute surrender. When you still lack peace in your life; it generally means you haven't fully surrendered to Jesus
Phil 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Nick Vujicic, born in 1982 without arms and legs, found great joy and purpose when he surrendered fully to *God* at 15. He has become an international evangelist today.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beeaXdv_mGg