

I. Introduction

A. Zombies are all the rage these days. Movies, books, commercials – they’re everywhere. I realized that we’d crossed some sort of cultural divide when I picked up a book entitled, *Pride, Prejudice and Zombies*. I thought, if Zombies have invaded the world of Jane Austen, then they must be pretty much everywhere.

B. So I wasn’t entirely surprised when – while sitting in an orientation meeting for parents the other day – a professor framed his remarks to students entirely around zombies. He spoke about Socrates, Liberal Arts education and life in general - all in the context of “the living dead.” His message was:

1. Zombies are not really alive but they are not really dead either.
2. They want brains but not so they can think.
3. In fact, they don’t think, they just follow other Zombies
4. There are a lot of Zombies out there. Don’t be one.

C. Hey, it worked. In fact, I was tempted to retile my message, “Don’t be a Zombie” because today – and over most of the next couple months – I’d really like you to think. And I want you to look at the most un-Zombie like person you could ever meet.

II. If you have your Bible I invite you to turn to John 1. As you are moving there let me say a few things about John and the other three books that are like it.

A. The New Testament contains four Gospels. That is, four different reports about the life of Jesus Christ, all designed to persuade us that He is the Son of God and Savior of the World.

B. The Gospels are not biographies in the classic sense because they do not tell us a lot of things a biography would. Instead they focus pretty exclusively on the last week of Christ’s life. In fact, they are so focused on the death and resurrection of Jesus that some have referred to them as Passion Narratives with long introductions.

C. For the record, the word Gospel means “Good News,” and it is called this:

1. First of all, because what it relates is good. They announce that: God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to rescue us. And through him we can be fully and finally reconciled to God. We can be restored to the relationship that completes us – that we were made for. We can be forgiven of our sins. We can gain eternal life. All of which is good news!

2. And secondly, because what they contain is news. The Gospels are not treatises on philosophy or instructions about how to look deep within ourselves to find out the great truths of the world. They are historical reports. They convey “news” and the only way you can learn what happened in the past is if someone tells you. The message about Jesus is not something we can figure out on our own if we just think about it long enough, you cannot discover it in a lab, or find it if we look deep inside ourselves.

D. The four Gospel writers each convey the story – “the news” from their own vantage point. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic Gospels because they follow a similar outline – they are synonymous in their layout – but they each have their own perspective, as does John.

1. Matthew writes for a Jewish audience. He opens with a genealogy in an effort to show how Jesus ties back to the Old Testament. How he fits into – in one sense, how he completes – the story that begins in Genesis and travels through Abraham. A Greek who started reading Matthew would not make it very far before he or she would come across words – like *Messiah* – that they had never heard before, and hear names that didn’t mean anything to them.¹

2. Mark wrote for a Roman audience. His Gospel is the shortest – most basic – of the four. We believe that he wrote first and that Matthew and Luke started with his outline and added to it.² Mark emphasizes that Jesus was a servant. And because he is writing for the Romans, he leaves out some things, like the genealogy, and adds other things, like explanations about the Passover, which Jewish readers wouldn’t need but Roman readers would.

3. Luke – the only Gentile writer in the whole Bible – writes for Greeks. He is a doctor and an amateur historian and provides historical details others leave out and also emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. Today people are very willing to accept that Christ was a man. The challenge many moderns have is believing that Jesus is God. It used to be the opposite. For a long time many believed that Jesus was God, they did not believe that he was also a man. Luke, writing as a physician, emphasizes that Jesus was a real person.

¹ Matthew wrote for the Jews. In fact, though the oldest copies we have of Matthew’s Gospel are in Greek, he probably wrote in Hebrew first. Matthew was written by a Jew, about a Jew, to other Jews.

² Even though he was not an apostle – he traveled with Paul – we think he wrote first and that Matthew and Luke looked at his work as they wrote their own – expanding upon it.

4. John, who writes last – the other apostles were already martyred for their faith. He was banished to an island and ended up living longer than they did. He writes his Gospel in the 90s, and does so with the intention of persuading people that Jesus is fully God. We know this in part because of the things he emphasizes, starting with the idea that Jesus existed before time began and including so many of the claims Christ makes to be divine. But also because he tells us this is his goal. Towards the very end of the book, John 20:30-31, John writes:

a) Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.³

E. We do not have stained glass windows here, but if you look at churches that do, they often represent the four Gospel writers using the four figures that are gathered around a throne in Revelation 4.⁴

1. Mark is the man because he is the plainest and most straight forward
2. Matthew is the lion because as a Jew he saw Jesus as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah
3. Luke is the ox – an animal of service and sacrifice, because he saw Jesus as a servant of all people and as the universal sacrifice for our sin.
4. And John is the eagle because of all the creatures he was the one with the most penetrating gaze – able to look at the most profound truths, the most cosmic, eternal mysteries about Christ.

III. OK, back to John 1. Here he opens with some of those big truths.

A. The first part of the chapter introduces Jesus as the *logos*. We translate *logos* as Word. John actually takes a term the Greek philosophers used to describe “a principle or organizing idea” and uses it to describe the Son of God – the second person of the Trinity – before he became a man:

³ John writes more thematically as well. Luke tells us he is giving us an ordered account. He’s the historian who wants everything in proper sequence. John combines some stories in order to develop different ideas.

⁴ Different interpreters line up the images found in Revelation 4 with different Gospel writers. Many have Matthew as the man because he starts with the genealogy of Christ’s human ancestors and have Mark as the lion because of his courage. The listing I used is the one suggested by Augustine.

1. 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.

B. This is describing Jesus in his pre-human state - before he added divinity to humanity.

C. The chapter then shifts over to John the Baptist, and the advance work he did for Jesus, before describing an event that happens as Jesus walks by John the Baptist. And this is our focus. At this point, John the Baptist is big news. He was a bit of a rock star. He was attracting large crowds. But as Jesus walks by two of John's disciples end up leaving John to follow Jesus.

IV. I'm reading from John 1:35 to the end of the chapter.

A. The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

B. When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

C. They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

D. "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

E. So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

F. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

G. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

H. The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

I. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote —Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

J. "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

- K. “Come and see,” said Philip.
- L. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”
- M. “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.
- N. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”
- O. Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”
- P. Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”
- V. There is a lot going on here.
- A. We could easily do a study of the names used for Jesus in John 1: Lamb of God, Son of Man, Son of God, Logos, Rabbi, Messiah. Or we could head in a dozen other directions. There is a lot here! The thing I want you to see is the invitation that is extended to Nathan – and to you. “Come and see.” I want us to embrace it and extend it to others. Come and see who Jesus is.
- VI. Next week we begin a bit of an adventure. We are going to explore the life of Jesus
- A. This is all part of the FencePosts Series that we began four years ago. As some of you know, for six weeks every fall we focus on one of the main tenets of the Christian faith. We combine sermons, readings, daily devotions, small group discussions and even some more in-depth lectures in order to more fully understand some foundational aspect of the Christian faith.
- B. The first – FencePosts I – was about the Bible and dealt with questions of authority and worldview.
1. There are six big questions out there that we really should answer: Who am I? Where did I come from? What is expected of me? What happens when I die? What is really real and ultimate? (Is there a God or not. If there is, what is God like?) And, how do I know any of this?

C. FencePost I dealt with the last question. How do I know what I know? We explored the four sources of authority: reason, revelation, tradition and experience, noting that all four matter, but revelation – truth *revealed* by God in Christ and the Bible – is the trump card.

D. Next up – FencePosts II – was the nature of God. We looked at the offer to know him; spent a bit of time learning about His triune nature; then looked at what he’s like. (Both the ways we are like him – his communicable attributes – and the ways he is all-together different than us – his incommunicable attributes.)

E. The third year we focused on us and the situation we are in. We looked at what it means to be a person. We took a long look at sin, evil, death, judgment and Hell. We also looked at salvation and Heaven

F. In this next series – FencePosts IV – we focus on Christ.

G. Each of these series stand alone. You do not need to have been through the first three to understand FP IV. And they are all nearly inexhaustible.

H. I am thankful to be focused on Jesus because the news is so good! And to that end I set Phillip’s challenge in front of you. Come and see. In fact, I encourage you to be Phillip and extend that challenge to others as well.

VII. When I was in high school a friend of mine lived right on the Mississippi River, and a few times a week we’d go out to his house to go waterskiing. And every time we’d take the boat over to the Iowa side and go back into this channel that was about a mile long. We liked it because it didn’t connect back into the river so – there was no current and the water was warmer. It was great – perfect for us. However, you need to understand, it didn’t lead anywhere. That channel would never get you to the Atlantic Ocean.

A. When it comes to understanding Jesus, many people are caught in a channel – in the backwaters, in an eddy that doesn’t go anywhere. They like it. Hey, it feels very safe – the water is warm and there is no current. But, it doesn’t lead anywhere.

B. I want to be sure you’re not in one of those channels. And because several billion people have headed down this path before you we know the most common places to get stuck. I want to suggest there are five.

VIII. The Five Back Waters

A. Baby Jesus: Some stop with Baby Jesus – a term that either makes you think of Christmas or Ricky Bobby, the Will Ferrell character in Talladega Nights.

1. I'm actually using the term *baby Jesus* to refer to the Jesus of babies or of grade-school children. This is the Jesus you learn about when you're five.

2. And the descriptions you get are not bad. After all, when Jesus was asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he pointed to a little child and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." There is much about children and a child-like faith that is to be celebrated.

3. But being childish is not a good thing. Being uninformed is not a good thing. There is a difference between a 5 year old saying that Jesus is their "Forever Friend" and a 35 year old saying it.

4. Lots of people have childish views of Jesus. In his biography of Douglas MacArthur, entitled, *American Caesar*, William Manchester lets MacArthur have it for his juvenile views about God and faith. MacArthur is a fascinating figure – almost too amazing to be believed. He is a fearless man's man in battle. He is brilliant. When he goes through West Point he sets all kinds of records. But he was a child when it came to women. When he went to West Point his mother moved into a hotel right next to campus in order to keep an eye on him. He saw her almost every day and it really messed him up. And he was a child when it came to faith. Manchester says, "it's inexcusable that someone so bright in so many areas, didn't keep reading and looking and growing in terms of his faith." Many people stop with Baby Jesus.

B. College Jesus: Others stop with College Jesus - that is, Jesus as described by their college professor.

1. As you may know, college is where many people's faith goes to die. If you took a religion class you probably heard about the Documentary Hypothesis and redaction criticism and heard all kinds of arguments for why the people who supposedly wrote the books didn't write the books – may not have even existed. And, well, none of it does much to help you know God.

2. Now, most people don't remember a lot about what they learned in college. In fact, lots of people have problems remembering what classes they took, let alone what they learned in them. I actually do remember that I took a calculus class but have to admit that I not only can no longer do a calculus problem, I wouldn't recognize a calculus problem if it was wearing a name tag. But we carry impressions away, and the impression (the vibe) many carry away from religion classes is that it's not true.

3. Well, it is true. There are good challenges to the attacks on faith that get leveled in college classrooms. Much of what you may have learned 10, 20 or 30 years ago was dated when you learned it. The case for the trustworthiness of the Bible has grown stronger in the last several decades. I'll be talking about that in the first lecture – which is on

C. Hollywood Jesus: In the third spot we have Hollywood Jesus, or Jesus as described on the pages of the National Enquirer.

1. Every so often someone like Dan Brown comes out with a book like *The Da Vinci Code* in which we learn that: 1) Jesus was married; 2) or the disciples were part of a grand conspiracy; 3) or the Bible was written in a secret code; 4) or the books we have in the Bible are the wrong ones; 5) or, Jesus was a time-traveler or a space alien. Generally, the more bizarre the claim the better – and tragically, instead of reading this Book, people read Dan Brown. And people like me end up jumping up and down and getting all red in the face saying, “Don’t!” Do not read these books unless you are willing to read the books that explain why they are pure, 100 percent nonsense.

2. But lots of people do not read the books that tell them why they are nonsense. Nor do they even read the Bible! Instead they read the nonsense or watch the movies and end up thinking that Jesus is hanging out with Elvis and ET on some island in the Bermuda Triangle.

D. Religious Jesus: Fourth up is Religious Jesus, who often looks like this: Warner Sallman’s image

1. This image of Christ was painted by Warner Sallman in 1941 and has been reproduced somewhere between 500 million and 1 billion times. It’s famous because it has been reproduced at least 500 million times! and also because it’s controversial. And it’s controversial because: 1) it portrays Christ as a blue-eyed, blond-haired Westerner; 2) it gives him long hair – which he probably did not have. (Many confuse the Nazarite vow – which Sampson took and meant he couldn’t cut his hair – with being a Nazarene); and 3) because it makes him look a bit feminine. Or, at the very least, he doesn’t look like a blue-collar guy who hung out with a dozen men. Where are the callouses and the muscles and the scars that come from working in the construction trade most of your life?

2. My problem with religious Jesus is that it makes him appear harmless. It makes it look like he's very gentle and soft and only used his inside voice. As I've said before, he comes off like Mr. Rogers. He's kind to children and small forest animals and spends all his time saying, "Let's all be nice." Men and women, you do not crucify someone like that! You give him a children's TV show for 30 years.

E. Like Me Only Nicier. The fifth and final view of Jesus that traps many people is what I'll call, "He's just like me only nicer." This is Jesus is our own image.

1. Have you ever noticed that virtually every group out there claims Jesus as their own? In the thirty years I've been paying attention I've seen: Republican Jesus and Democratic Jesus; NRA Jesus and vegan Jesus; socialist Jesus and capitalist Jesus. I've seen pictures of Jesus as an African, an Anglo and an Asian. I've seen pictures of Jesus as a woman.

2. When we visited the Church of the Annunciation in Israel we saw pictures of Jesus with Mary that have been sent by churches in 150 countries. And in every picture, Mary and Jesus look like they were natives of the land where the picture was painted. As opposed to being first century Jews – they were Finish or Filipino or French.

3. Many people end up thinking that Jesus is a lot like they are, only a bit nicer.

F. To all of this I want to say – keep looking. Don't stop there. Keep reading. Come and see the Jesus we find in Scripture. Let the divinely inspired words on the pages of the Gospels paint a picture that is true and shocking and almost certainly different than the one you are holding onto.

G. I am confident that Jesus is different than you think. He is bigger and better. He is mind-numbingly glorious and wise and wonderful. He is more amazing and beautiful and shocking and daring than you can believe.

H. Don't stop with Baby Jesus, College Jesus, Hollywood Jesus, Religious Jesus or the Jesus who looks just like you but is just a bit nicer. Come and see who Jesus is. The challenge Andrew set before Peter is the challenge I am setting before you. Come and see the most remarkable man you will ever meet.

IX. This journey begins next week – with sermons, readings, small groups, daily devotionals and more. If you want to be a part of this – if you want to lean into this:

A. First, pick up a packet today. There are 3 parts to it: the book I wrote, a workbook, and a DVD that you'll watch in your small group. These packets are \$20 – zero goes to me or the church, we are simply covering costs of production and printing. And, if you can't pay \$20 but want to be a part of this, let them know. We do not want that to stop you.

B. Second, get into a group – this is better in a group. You can HOST a group of your friends. We have made this very, very easy to do so. Invite your friends or neighbors or colleagues. If you want to HOST a group, sign up in the lobby for a HOST briefing. We have made this as easy as we can for you to do this. If you are not in a group but want to be there is a sign up for that.

C. Third: Come back next week! You can read chapter one in the book and be ready to go. But things do not really start until next weekend.

X. Quotes

A. Emmanuel. God with us. He who resided in Heaven, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, willingly descended into our world. He breathed our air, felt our pain, knew our sorrows, and died for our sins. He didn't come to frighten us, but to show us the way to warmth and safety. Charles Swindoll

B. Man was added to Him, God not lost to Him; He emptied Himself not by losing what He was, but by taking to Him what He was not. Augustine

C. Christ is the humility of God embodied in human nature; the Eternal Love humbling itself, clothing itself in the garb of meekness and gentleness, to win and serve and save us. Andrew Murray

D. [He] is not proud... He will have us even though we have shown that we prefer everything else to Him. C.S. Lewis

E. Because we children of Adam want to become great, He became small. Because we will not stoop, He humbled Himself. Because we want to rule, He came to serve. J. Oswald Sanders