

## Unit 2 Introduction

# The Greatest Communicator of All Time

I'm always amused at the wide array of magazines at the local grocery store check-out line. Every one of them claims to have the latest and best revelations about interesting people making news. As fresh as the revelations claim to be, none come close to matching the incredible self-revelation of the almighty Creator of the universe. What a scoop! God not only made us; He also wants us to know Him personally.

Adam and Eve, our original parents, took long walks with God through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening. They forfeited that relationship through willful disobedience. Not satisfied to leave lost humanity in spiritual alienation, the Lord has been working diligently to restore relationship with His children. God reveals himself in the splendor of the night sky, the magnificence of mighty waterfalls, delicate flower pedals, beautiful butterflies, and the amazing complexity of our human bodies. We see God at work in a thousand ways throughout history. And, we sense the finger of God quietly involved in events which have no other explanation than divine intervention.

All of God's attempts at revealing himself to us find their completion in the greatest self-revelation of all: His Son Jesus Christ who lived with us and taught us. Most of what we know about God flows from the life and ministry of Jesus. Most people recognize the two greatest celebrations of the Christian calendar: Christmas and Easter. Christmas celebrates the beginning of Jesus' earthly life; Easter marks the triumph of His resurrection from death. Between those two bookmarks Jesus taught us about God, His kingdom, heavenly realities, and a host of other useful information.

The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, describe the inauguration of the ministry of Jesus with His baptism by his cousin John the Baptist. His earthly ministry concluded with His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven. Jesus traveled throughout the Holy Land preaching, teaching, and performing miracles. Acts 10:38 summarized the ministry of Jesus well: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. . . he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

Jesus began His earthly ministry by accomplishing something no human being had ever accomplished: He successfully resisted Satan's temptations, not just three times in the wilderness but throughout His life on earth. His example of memorizing Scripture

and living in close communion with His heavenly Father offered hope that we can resist Satan's temptations as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. His ministry offered a lifetime of examples of how to follow in His footsteps. Three features of His ministry offer windows for exploration.

## 1. The Parables of Jesus

Jesus also often spoke to His audiences through storytelling. Parables are stories which contain spiritual truths. Storytelling was popular not only in Jesus' day but throughout time, across cultures, and in languages around the world. Everyone likes a good story.

Jesus, however, told stories in a different way than anyone in His day had ever told them. He packed them with layer upon layer of spiritual truth. So, Jesus did not simply teach one main idea as most story tellers; He packed several ideas into every story. For example, the parable of the sower (Luke 8:1-15) kept His disciples busy for days unpacking the wealth of truth found in it.

Jesus also told stories with unique spiritual insights. His listeners had come to expect common spiritual truths like the value of truth telling. Jesus often surprised His audiences with spiritual ideas they had not thought of or were not anticipating. Thus, His parables caught His listeners off guard and surprised them with spiritual thoughts which went beyond the learning of the scholars of His day. That is what amazed people with His unusual wisdom (Matthew 13:54)

Jesus turned cultural and religious norms on their heads in ways that often caught the attention of both highly educated and uneducated listeners. Tax collectors, some of the most despised people in the land, became the center of attention in Jesus' stories as He spoke of them in positive ways. Jesus spoke of women in terms that highly honored them and valued their contribution to His ministry, a practice unheard of in His day. People regarded as worthless by most of Jesus' listeners became the heroes in His stories. A "good Samaritan" was a contradiction of words to most people (Luke 10:25-37).

## 2. The Miracles of Jesus

Jesus sometimes taught spiritual truths through miracles. This was not unusual; religious figures of His day often used "miracles" to amaze audiences. The miracles of Jesus, however, were not the

sleight of hand tricks used by skilled magicians or lofty claims, such as professed healings, with no verifiable evidence. Jesus performed miracles which were both genuine and verifiable. He never employed miracles to draw a crowd or simply amaze His audience. Rather, He used them as object lessons to higher truths.

Jesus did not plot His first miracle on His daily schedule planner. Rather, He attended the wedding in Cana like other participants. Jesus had genuine love for His mother Mary. No doubt He held her in high regard for her selfless care in raising Him. So when she came to Him with the unusual request to “do something” about the embarrassment of the wedding reception refreshments running out, He responded from a heart of love for His mother. He stepped into the drama and turned ordinary drinking water into the finest beverage the crowd had ever tasted. The miracle may not have offered a deep spiritual truth, but it certainly illustrated Jesus’ love for His mother and compassion to the wedding hosts who found themselves in an embarrassing situation (John 2:1-11).

Jesus did not perform miracles to draw a crowd. He often used miracles as object lessons for an upcoming sermon, as when He fed 5000 men plus the women and children. Then He spoke about being the bread of life (John 6:1-15). He used miracles to alleviate human suffering as He did when he healed the blind man in John 9:1-41. He performed miracles to illustrate spiritual truths as when He gave the fishermen a miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:1-11. Jesus followed this miracle with a call for these men to fish for people to become members of the kingdom of God. He did not succumb to the pressure of the crowd to perform miraculous signs and wonders. For example, the next morning following the feeding of the thousands, the crowd urged Him to provide more bread as He had done the day before. He refused to be persuaded by their request (John 6:25-59).

The miracles of Jesus illustrated His divine power over every aspect of life on earth. He showed His power over water at the wedding in Cana and when He walked on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:22-32). He proved His power over sickness and suffering when He healed the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13) as well as when He healed the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19). He illustrated His power over nature’s elements when He calmed the storm that caught His disciples in the middle of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:23-27). All of His miracles gave followers the option to choose faith over fear, trust in God over hopeless resignation.

The disciples of Jesus watched Him perform miracle after miracle throughout His ministry. Following Jesus’ healing of the man who was deaf and mute, the disciples reached a startling realization. Jesus called the question in conversation with His disciples: “Who

do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Peter captured their response in words that represented the entire group, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). That was the most important spiritual lesson the disciples learned from Jesus.

### 3. The Relationships of Jesus

Jesus understood that successful ministry consisted of more than solid teaching and preaching or performing miracles. He embodied His message through deep personal relationship. He showed genuine concern for everyone with whom He interacted as He treated them with dignity, respect, and love. His interaction with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42) illustrates this virtue.

Jesus developed deep friendships with people like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He spent a great deal of time with them both in spiritual training and social interaction. One of the most insightful verses of Scripture, offering us a window into Jesus’ concern for this family, is found in John 11:35: “Jesus wept.” Just imagine, the second person of the Trinity cried over the death of His friend.

Jesus poured His life into His 12 disciples during His earthly ministry. They lived life-on-life together for three years. They saw how He handled great success as His listeners responded positively to His message, and they saw how He handled great failure as the religious leaders rejected everything for which He stood. They listened to His prayers and wanted to learn to pray like Him. They observed His close personal relationship with His heavenly Father and recognized the importance of that relationship to His ministry.

Jesus’ relationship with His friends and disciples affected them in such profound ways that they began to mirror His lifestyle. The world noticed that following His ascension back to His Father. Acts 4:13 says the religious leaders took note that Peter and John “had been with Jesus.” Something about the ministry of Jesus made His followers want to be like Him.

### Conclusion

The ministry of Jesus has continued through the pages of church history for the past 2000 years. The Holy Spirit at work in our world and in the lives of Jesus’ followers carries on His work today. We join Him in His mission of making Christlike disciples in the nations. May we be found faithful until He comes again and takes us to be with Him forever!

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