

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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"Precious" and "Death"

John Lee

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

An exercise used in school is to be given two words and put them together in a simple sentence. But only God could allow the words "precious" and "death" to be truly put together. We would more likely say, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the LIFE of His saints." But for God, it is their death.

When a death of a saint occurs, many of our lives will never be the same -- nor should they. Life goes on with little thought when we lose a trinket, but when we lose a treasure, things are changed. This summer, we lost a treasure.

All of us have special people who have made a great impact on our lives. For many of us, Marvin Ingle was such a one. This summer, he went to his reward, but he lives in our hearts until we meet again. Marvin was a pillar in the Lord's church, serving as an elder, then as an evangelist in Iowa and Indiana. Countless people learned of the gospel through his teaching and were brought to the Lord.

In a time when the opportunity for higher education was unavailable or shunned by many, Marvin persisted and ultimately earned his Ph.D. in Education. And yet, he never let his education dampen his common sense. Doctor Ingle always remained Marvin, a unique blend of deep and yet simple, content and yet restless, firm, but loving.

In **Acts 13:36**, we find this about David: *"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption."* So it could be said of Marvin. He served his generation by the will of God.

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things! (Romans 10:14-15).

Sometimes we may use overly grandiose words for those we love and share our walk with. Words such as "awesome and great" might best be reserved for our God Himself. But in

God's vocabulary, maybe the word "good" would apply well to Marvin as it was applied to Barnabas. Good enough to sometimes tell what we needed to hear in his blunt way rather than what we might want to hear. Faithful, loving, and steadfast also fit the life of Marvin Ingle.

We often think of losing a fellow soldier when death takes them from us, but this is not right. When something is lost, we don't know where it is. But now, we have the faith of knowing where Marvin is. This is not a parting but an arrival. This is a prelude to the grand reunion.

"One generation passes away, and another generation comes" (Ecclesiastes 1:4). And as such, mantles are dropped at our feet. Mantles of responsibility and service in the church, home, and to the lost. Mantles Marvin has left, which we now must pick up and carry on. This occurs with the passing of each of God's saints. As Elijah left, Elisha carried on. And so it must be today. The work is somewhat like a relay with the baton being passed from generation to generation. Lord grant us a double portion of his spirit as we continue the race.

David had it right:

And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:22-23).

With each passing saint, our desire to join them in the presence of God should grow stronger and stronger. The Greek word "koimeterion" meant "a sleeping place," and it became the name of the place where Christians would bury their beloved. It is the word we now get "cemetery" from.

As I began writing this article, I intended to honor Marvin, and so I do. But as I began putting words to paper, I felt a greater need to try and capture what Marvin would want me to say. I think he would not have wanted another grand eulogy as much as encouragement for those of us left behind. When I asked Donna what she thought, she said, "I think that's what Marvin would want." So I submit it with love and adoration to a man we love, who performed our wedding service and started our lives together 48 years ago.

I close with these words from William Cullen Bryant's classic work, *Thanatopsis*:

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So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.
Thank you, Marvin, till we meet again.

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Jesus and the Evidence

John Morris

Some doubt that Jesus ever existed. But they're in the minority. There's just too much evidence to the contrary.

The first-century Roman historian, Tacitus (born c. AD 55), mentions Jesus in his *Annals of Imperial Rome*.¹ Tacitus' contemporary, Josephus (born c. AD 37), references Jesus twice in his *Antiquities of the Jews*.² The Roman administrator, Pliny the Younger (born AD 61), mentions Jesus in a letter to Emperor Trajan.³ And the second-century satirist, Lucian of Samosata (born AD 125), speaks of Jesus in his work *The Death of Peregrine*.⁴

None of these authors was a Christian, yet each spoke of Jesus as a known historical figure, one who had impacted his world in recent times.

So the question before every thinking person is not "Did Jesus exist?" but rather, "What's the truth about him?" Was Jesus the Son of God as Christians believe, or was he something less? And how can we know?

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (i.e., "the gospels") claim to be historical records of Jesus' life, particularly his ministry. And in their accounts, they write that Jesus said and did all the things that Christians claim for him: that he said he was the Son of God, that he performed miracles, that he rose from the dead, that he said he is the only way to God. Monumental claims. But not the sort of things one can be expected to believe without evidence.

So is there evidence to support the historical reliability of the gospels? Absolutely.

PUT THEM TO THE TEST

Concerning any historical document, three basic tests can be applied to determine its reliability.⁵ They are

1. The Bibliographical Test (Is the text we have now what was originally written?)
2. The Internal Evidence Test (Does the text bear the marks of credible history?)
3. The External Evidence Test (Is there evidence outside the text to support its claims?)

These tests are identical for both secular and sacred documents. No exceptions exist for either category. If a historical work is trustworthy, it will pass these tests. If it's not, it won't.

Let's apply the first of these tests to the gospels and see how they do.

THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST

As already mentioned, this test seeks to answer the question, "Is the text that we are reading now a trustworthy transmission of what was originally written?" The gospels were written nearly 1,400 years before the invention of the printing press. So for well over a millennium, their dissemination among believers, as well as their transmission from one generation to the next, depended upon the work of scribes. Scribes made copies and then copies of copies. At some point, the original documents were lost to history, and the copies were all that remained.⁶ The question naturally arises, then, "Are the copies accurate?" Though careful and highly trained, ancient scribes certainly were capable of making mistakes. And they did (more on that later). So how can we have any confidence that the gospels we're reading now bear any resemblance to the originals? Let's see what the evidence reveals.

NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS⁷

To begin with, consider that we have over 5,800 ancient manuscripts (i.e., copies in the original language) of the New Testament. No other ancient work boasts even half that number (the New Testament's closest competitor is Homer's *Iliad*, for which we have fewer than 2,000 copies). And that number—over 5,800—doesn't include the thousands of ancient translations of the New Testament or the many quotations from the New Testament found in commentaries, sermons, letters, etc., produced by early Christians. Inclusion of the translations alone would bring the number to over 24,000. This mountain of material puts us in a very good place. With so many samples available for scrutiny, scholars have been able to make an extensive examination of the gospels' paper trail. Those thousands of documents have been meticulously and painstakingly checked, re-checked,

and cross-checked. And what has all this labor revealed? With only the very rarest of exceptions, the substance of the original narratives is beyond all question. The text of the gospels was not "lost in transmission."

AGE OF MANUSCRIPTS⁷

In addition to the number, the age of these manuscripts is also extremely significant. The interval between the earliest of them and the original compositions is uniquely small among ancient writings. For example, the oldest surviving manuscript of Homer's *Iliad* was copied 400 years after the original was penned. In Tacitus' *Annals of Imperial Rome*, the gap between the oldest surviving copy and the original is over 700 years. For Josephus' *The Jewish War*, it's over 800 years.⁸ For Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, it's over 900 years. And for the works of Herodotus and Plato, the oldest manuscripts that are of any use to us post-date the originals by at least 1,300 years! Yet, the existing texts of all these ancient books are routinely regarded as reliable by scholars.

How do the gospels compare? We possess manuscripts that date to within 50-100 years of the originals.⁹ Unparalleled by any other ancient work. As Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum has said: "[I]n no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament."¹⁰ To call into question the reliability of the gospel texts, then, is to call into question all of ancient history! That is something no reputable scholar would be willing to do.

VARIATION AMONG MANUSCRIPTS

"But there are variations in how the copies read," someone will say. And that is true. Upon comparison, we do find that there are variant readings in the manuscripts. Scribes did make mistakes. For example, we observe in **Matthew 1:18** that some manuscripts read "the birth of Jesus Christ," while others read "the birth of Christ Jesus." Another reads "the birth of Christ," while yet another "the birth of Jesus." Four variant readings. But are they significant? No. The substance of the passage remains firmly intact. Even atheist Bart Ehrman has admitted: "To be sure, of all the hundreds of thousands of textual changes found among our manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant, immaterial, and of no real importance for anything other than showing that scribes could not spell or keep focused any better than the rest of us."¹¹

CONCLUSION

So as far as the text of the gospels is concerned, we can be confident that we have a reliable record of what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote all those years ago. As one respected scholar has noted: "...if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would

generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."¹² The question for us is not whether we have what the gospel writers intended for us to have, but whether or not we will believe it.

ENDNOTES

1. *Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15:44
2. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3 and 20.9.1
3. *Epistulae (Letters)*, vol. 2, 10:96
4. *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13
5. *Introduction to Research in English Literary History* (Sanders), p. 143ff
6. This is a universal reality. We do not possess the original of any ancient document.
7. Manuscript totals and dates are taken from: <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>
8. *The Case for Christ* (Strobel), p. 60
9. *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible* (Holden, Geisler), p. 373
10. *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 5
11. *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 207
12. *The New Testament Documents* (Bruce), p. 10

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Glory to God!

The church which meets on **Riverside Road, Ozark, MO**, welcomed **Paul and Diana Smith** as members of the congregation.

The **Rock Creek Church of Christ, Ottawa, KS**, joined the heavenly chorus when **Bob Bullington** was baptized on July 25. Brother Bob and his wife **Terri** placed their memberships with the congregation. The congregation rejoiced again when **Bob, Kathy, and Jared Tapp** joined the congregation.

Blessed Are the Dead

Wesley Almond, Sr., 70, of the **Pleasant Street Church of Christ, Laclede, MO** passed away on June 19, 2021. He is survived by his wife **Esther** and four children. **Wesley**

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Continued from page 3: "Blessed Are the Dead"

(Heather) Almond, Jr. and **Ernie (Alicia) Almond** of Brookfield; **Cynthia (John) Richards** of Minnesota and **Marie Almond** of Tennessee. Also surviving are seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

David Caple Sr. went to our Lord unexpectedly on July 15. Brother David was an elder of the church in **Pueblo, CO**. He was preceded in death by his parents and siblings. He is survived by his wife of 63 years, **Peggy Caple**; son, **David Caple Jr. (Susan)**; daughter, **Norma Colyar (David)**; six grandchildren, numerous great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

Alvin Lee Bown, 87, passed away unexpectedly on Saturday, July 17, 2021, at his home in rural Martensdale, IA. Alvin, or 'Al' as he was commonly referred to, was a member of the **Martensdale Church of Christ**. He was known for having a beautiful singing voice. Along with wife **Marlene**, he is survived by daughters **LuAnn Woody**, **Alannah (TJ) Bruce**; sons **Rus**, **Kurt**; sister **Lorraine Doke**; brothers **Arlis (Leah) Bown**, **Fred**, **Dick (Phyllis) Bown**; nine grandchildren; twenty-one great-grandchildren; daughter-in-law **Anita Bown**, and nieces and nephews. Al was preceded in death by his parents, son **Randy Bown**, infant brother **David Bown**, son-in-law **Tom Woody**, sisters-in-law **Marilyn** and **Marlene Bown**.

Here and There

Evangelist **Mike Kirby**, who is sent out by the **Chapel Glen Church of Christ, Indianapolis, IN**, sends the following report:

Praise God, a new congregation has been established in **Allendale, MI**! The congregation is currently renting space at the **Allendale Christian School**, located at **11050 64th Avenue (M-45)**. The brethren are meeting Lord's Day morning at 9:30 am and at 7:00 pm on Wednesday.

Allendale is the home of **Grand Valley State University**. If any Gospel Message readers know of students attending Grand Valley, please let them know of this new

congregation. If students do not have transportation, the Allendale brethren will be pleased to help.

The group has been meeting for two months and has had consistent attendance. God has truly been kind to the effort.

Special Meetings

The church which meets on **Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO** invites you to a **Family VBS on Saturday, September 11** from **10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.** Classes from preschool through adult will be provided.

2021 Meetings

September 11...Murray Rd Family VBS, Lee's Summit, MO
September 4-5.....Labor Day Meeting, Pleasant Hill, IA
September 18-19.....Brookfield, MO

The Gospel Message

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