

The Words of Jesus #1

by: Ronald L. Dart

Did you ever wonder why Jesus did not write his own book. Why do we have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as the four gospels but no gospel according to Jesus? I mean after all he could have sat down and written out his message and gotten it absolutely right and then we would not have any questions, right? And have you ever noticed how little Jesus had to say? He was a man of few words for the most part, although some times he did wax eloquent for say five minutes. Let me show you something very curious about the gospel accounts of the words of Jesus. Mark in his gospel account passes over the early years of Jesus' life quickly and he comes straight to the beginning of Jesus' work. He spends a little time with John the Baptist, and then he goes to Jesus calling his disciples by the Sea of Galilee, come on after me and I will make you fishers of men, you know about that.

Then we have this account. He gets his disciples together and they went into Capernaum and straight way on the Sabbath day, he entered into the synagogue and taught and they were astonished at his doctrine for he taught them as one that had authority and not as the scribes. And then a man is presented that needs to be healed and he heals the man and he and his disciples then leave the synagogue. Now what is wrong with that picture? Well I for one, would give a lot to know what Jesus said in that synagogue, think about it. He says that he taught with authority. Mark says, They were astonished at his doctrine. Well why doesn't Mark tell us what the doctrine was? To the 20th century reader, this is a remarkable oversight. Jesus taught doctrine. He taught with authority. His listeners were astonished. Please, please, tell us what he said. But no, Mark does not think it is important. Now here I am, I am concerned about the intellectual content of Jesus teaching, while Mark is far more concerned with what Jesus actually did and I suppose with the message that was contained in what Jesus did. But if I want the intellectual content, if I want the words, if I actually want to know. What did Jesus say? What was his doctrine? Doctrine is important. I need to know what his doctrine was. Well where in the world are you going to go to find what Jesus actually said and what he taught and what was this doctrine that was so authoritative and so astonishing? And why didn't Jesus write it down himself so we could be sure what he said? I want to talk to you about that when I come back.

Alright, let's go back to my earlier question. Why didn't Jesus write his own book? Imagine for a moment that you are sitting on a jury and the attorney has put a man on the witness stand to tell you his story. You ask the gentleman, he says now, will you please tell the jury where you were and what you were doing at 10 o'clock in the morning on January 30th and the man tells you his story. He seems honest. His story is reasonable but you

actually have no frame of reference to know whether he is telling you the truth or not. And the problem is that his story is rather self-serving. He has every reason to tell the story to you this way. And so, while you might want to believe him, you really have no way to know. Now suppose that instead of that, the attorney had put a succession of four witnesses on the stand all of which tell you roughly the same thing about what the man was doing at 10 o'clock in the morning on January 30th because they saw him doing it. Which of these are you more likely to believe? Well you are far more likely to believe the witnesses. You have four of them who tell you what he was doing, where he was standing at that particular hour and what his actions were. So consequently, you can have some reasonable confidence of what actually did take place.

Now Jesus himself said this and he said it in John chapter 5 and verse 30. He said "I can of my own self do nothing, as I hear I judge, and my judgment is just because. My judgment is just because I seek not my own will but the will of the Father who sent me." "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true." Isn't that interesting? If I bear witness of myself Jesus said, my witness is not true. He did not mean that if he bore witness of himself that he would be lying. What he meant is that if he bore witness of himself, even though it might be true, it would not in a legal sense establish the truth. In other words you cannot establish the truth by bearing witness of yourself. You have to have independent witnesses and so Jesus said, the reason Jesus did not write his own book because if he had written his own book, he would have been bearing witness of himself and the book would have had no standing as real evidence. And as a revealing incident in the book of Acts that I think underlines this.

In Acts 1 in verse 15. This is one of the first items of business that the apostles had to conduct after the ascension of Jesus, after he had returned to heaven and while they were waiting in Jerusalem for the promise of the holy spirit. In Acts 1 in verse 15, in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples and said, there were about 120 of them. "Men and brethren this scripture must needs have been fulfilled which the holy spirit by the mouth of David spoke before concerning Judas who was a guide to them that took Jesus, Judas the great betrayer, who went out and committed suicide. Judas was numbered with us and he had obtained part of this ministry." Now the problem is, Judas is dead and gone. In verse 21, Peter says this, "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." He was going all the way back to Jesus' baptism and from the time he called disciples and then was carrying on his ministry for 3-1/2 years. Among those men who had been with us all that time, "beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us, must one be appointed to be a witness with us of his resurrection." Now that is interesting. It seems that there had to be 12, not 11, not 13 but 12 specifically, witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and not only of the resurrection, because they wanted all the way from the baptism forward. They wanted a complete record of Jesus' ministry, from 12 witnesses, people who saw it. Now the idea of witnesses and testimony is a powerful recurring theme in the Bible. You run into it again and again. The idea is expressed in Numbers 35 in verse 30. "Whoever kills any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses, but one witness shall not testify against any person to

cause him to die.” Now that is easy to understand why that would be so, because one witness could be the man who killed him himself and he then testifies against Mr. A over here that he killed the fellow and that would not be justice. In Deuteronomy 17 vs. 6, it is this way. “At the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death. At the mouth of one witness, he shall not be put to death.”

There is a very great doubt frankly about some of the people who are convicted on circumstantial evidence in the modern world as to whether or not they would actually be put to death in the Israelite system. Because if there are no witnesses, if they do not have more than one witness, they cannot kill him. Now this same theme is found in the New Testament because, Jesus talking to his disciples about problems that might arise between brother and brother in the church said this. “Moreover, if your brother shall trespass against you, you go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he will hear you, you have gained your brother. If he will not hear you then you take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.” So one person’s word is not good enough, you need witnesses and you need two or three. Paul in one of the conflicts that were going on between some of the Corinthians warned this. “He said this is the third time I am coming to you.” “In the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall every word be established.” Okay now coming back to our subject at hand, Why did Jesus not write his own book. He did not write his own book because he intended that every word be established by two or three witnesses. So we have in your New Testament, the four gospel accounts. There are two or three eye witness accounts and one historical account by a contemporary, by whose name was Luke, the physician. He was in a way an investigative reporter, who while all the people were still alive who had experienced these things went out and gathered the information and wrote up his account. This is the peculiar genius of the Bible, in that it is the account of witnesses of the things that took place.

In my earlier analogy of sitting on a jury, it is very apt for you. You were a jury of one and you have to examine the witnesses and decide for yourself whether you think they are telling the truth or not. What I think, is not important. I can only present the witnesses to you. I can present the argument. I can bring in expert witnesses. I can bring in scholars and I can tell you these things, but in the end you have to be the one who has to decide. Do I believe this or do I not believe it? Now some people are not so sure we can actually trust these witnesses. They want to know, Well how do we know they told the truth and how do we know that they were not in collusion? How do we know their memories were not faulty? How do we know early manuscripts were not altered by later copies? Now all of these things are valid questions and they have long since been answered by scholarship, but you are perfectly right to ask them, but you won’t be competent to judge these manuscripts until you have read them, will you? In other words, just having me tell you about them or listening to the scholars is not good enough. One scholar will come along and tell you that you cannot trust the New Testament, another will come along and tell you that you can, but how should you know unless you have read Matthew and Mark and Luke and John. You are simply not competent to render any kind of a judgment about whether they are trustworthy or whether they were not. Now you would be surprised how many people are ready to reject

or accept the New Testament on here say without so much as a careful reading. Now in this series of programs, we are going to search through the witnesses for the words of Jesus and we are going to see what we can conclude from this. In a jury trial, we hear from eyewitnesses and expert witnesses to tell us what we can make of the physical evidence and we do much the same when we study the Bible. We have the eyewitness accounts of Matthew, Mark and John and we have the report of a contemporary investigator, Luke. Then we will talk to the scholars about the documents, the texts, the translations, the languages.

Now all of this seems daunting at first, but just like any court case, step by step, brick by brick, brush stroke by brush stroke, a picture will emerge of the truth and after all, it is the truth that we want, isn't it? Now the chances are, you have the necessary documentation right there in your home. You have four affidavits, the four gospels and we can examine these for the words of Jesus to determine for ourselves. What did Jesus really say? For example, Do you know what the first recorded words of Jesus are? Let me set the stage for you. In the gospel according to Luke, he begins by saying for as much as many has taken in hand and to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us even as they delivered them unto us which were from the beginning, eyewitnesses and ministers of the world. Now let me pause just a moment. He said, I have taken in hand to set forth these things in order. So we know what Luke intended to do. He had the awareness of all the things that the church believed about Jesus, the accounts by the eyewitnesses that had been brought forward. What he was not fully satisfied with was he felt these things needed to actually be put down in order. He said that it seemed good to me also having had perfect understanding of everything from the very first to write unto you in order, most excellent Theophilus that you might know the certainty of those things wherein you have been instructed.

So Theophilus, whoever he was, had already been instructed a great deal in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the ministry of Christ, what he had done, what he had said and what Luke wanted him to have was a good account set forth in order and as a result of Luke's decision to do that, we have got something which Theophilus, prior to this time had not had. Now it is interesting to realize as you read between the lines on this, that there was a very strong gospel, an oral gospel that was circulating the church. I mean these messages had been repeated so many times. The stories have been told so many times they were a part of the collective consciousness of the church. Almost every one knew them. When Phillip went down and met the Ethiopian eunuch on his way home from Jerusalem, the Ethiopian was reading in the book of Isaiah. Phillip joined himself to him and said do you understand what you are saying? The Ethiopian said, No, I cannot say I do. I really need someone to explain this to me. So Phillip joined him and began to explain to him from the book of Isaiah and told him all about Jesus Christ. Now the only scriptures that Phillip had when he talked to the Ethiopian were the Old Testament scriptures. Where did he get his stuff about Jesus? Well Phillip new the story. The story was known through the church. The problem Luke had was it had not been set down in order. It was all a part of the collective sayings of Jesus, the collective works of Jesus, the acts of Jesus that were a part of the collective

consciousness of the church. Now I take it that Luke knew that other accounts were in existence.

For example, scholars tell us that Mark was the first one written and that Luke even made use of Mark when he wrote his account. But Luke felt that maybe these other accounts lacked some elements of order and this is not at all unlikely if we accept the fact that the three other accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus are the testimony of witnesses. But if we insist that every word of the New Testament was dictated by the holy spirit then we are in for some tough explanations. Why is the style different? Why do they even record the words of Jesus differently? Why would the same sentence spoken by Jesus be outlined let's say or diagramed in three different ways if you diagramed them through the different accounts? Why do they have the events, some times in a different order? Now these things pose no problem if we just take them at face value as witnesses. All of their accounts are true. They are not what a 20th century would call accurate. We though, have xeroxed copies and cassette records, but too much accuracy from witnesses even today is suspect. Right? I mean if we get these three witnesses on the stand and their stories all agree, word for word in every detail, we are going to conclude their stories are too perfect and therefore they are suspect. Well, we cannot say that about the gospel accounts. When I come back, I want to show you something interesting about Luke that is very different from Mark and reveals to us something that was going on in the early church. Stay with me, I will be right back.

Luke is especially interesting in that he records material about the birth of Jesus that no one else bothers to record. Why do you suppose that is true? Well consider the story. It is familiar everywhere because of the observance of Christmas. Everybody knows this little story that begins in Luke 2 verse 1. And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, everyone to his own city and Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife who was great with child. Well that expression, great with child always fascinates me. It really is a visual. You can see this woman waddling along with her very large abdomen, her hand in the middle of her back. You know, obviously uncomfortable and you have to realize that at that moment in time, the Messiah, the savior of the whole world, the Son of God, was in the womb of a woman. And it was so, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered and she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. They were not in the hotel. They were not in comfort. They were in a stable.

Now, there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shown all around them and they were greatly afraid. These are the guys I am jealous of. I would love to have been one of those shepherds. Here they are, they are out there in the middle of the night watching over their flocks, it is cold but they probably have a fire. But all of a sudden, they do not need anything for warmth because there is a huge great

light about them and a man standing there, and this light shines all around and the angel then said, Hey, Don't be afraid. I am bringing you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior which is Christ, the Lord. Now, when they thought of a Savior, the anointed of God. When they said those words, these men would have said, my a Messiah, the Messiah is coming. But the image, the prophetic image of a Messiah is of a man, not a baby. A grown man who is anointed of God and who leads Israel into battle and throws out the Romans and restores the kingdom to Israel. But the angel said to them, Unto you, this day is born in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord and this shall be a sign to you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And this is what I am jealous of. Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth, peace and good will to men." Now I have heard a lot of choirs sing Christmas music in my time but I would have really liked to have heard this one. It came to pass when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said well let us go and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste, and they found.

Now what did they find, when they came to the place? They found Mary, and Joseph, and a baby. They did not find a man. They did not find some spirit being. They did not find an angel. They found a real baby. A baby that cried. A baby that had to be nursed at his mother's breast. A baby that had to be changed when he wet his nappies. Now why does Luke give us these details? When Mark in his gospel account presents Jesus to us first as a grown man, baptized by John the Baptist and gathering his disciples around with him and starting out his ministry, tells us absolutely nothing about Jesus before Jesus was 30 years old. Well, between the writing of Mark and the writing of Luke, there were some new ideas that were beginning to circulate among the church. John makes mention of these in his general letter. 1 John 4 and verse 1. When he says, beloved, Don't believe every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God. Because many false prophets are going out into the world. Hereby, you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And of every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. It is in fact the spirit of Antichrist. You have heard that it should come, even now, it is already with us.

So an early heresy was that Jesus was not really human, that he fell down from the sky, full grown that he was actually spirit and he only appeared to be flesh. So when Luke sits down to put this thing in account, this account of his in order, he goes all the way to the beginning, to the birth of Jesus, to the start of everything and to some shepherds who were in the field watching their flocks at night and who were sent by God to the manger to look upon this baby and to bear witness, testimony that Jesus was at the beginning a baby that you could hold in your arms, wrapped in a blanket and count his little fingers and count his little toes and look at the perfection of a brand new newborn human being in the flesh. So Luke takes the time to investigate the facts and he includes the testimony and details about Jesus birth and his childhood and from this comes a fascinating question. Jesus as a baby had limited consciousness of self that is common to all babies. When did he come to know who

he was? When did the first self awareness start to appear and what kind of a boy was he? And who or what did he think he was?

Well we have absolutely no record of any words or testimony of Jesus concerning himself until he is 12 years old and therefore, we find the first recorded words of Jesus in the Bible. It is in Luke 2 in verse 40. The child grew and waxed strong in spirit and he had a lot of wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. But there is not a word here about his self awareness. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. And when he was 12, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the Feast and when they had fulfilled the days of the Passover they started home. And when they did that, the child Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem and Joseph and his mother did not even know that he was not there. That is illustrative I think of how close everyone was in the caravan that came down and came back that they just assumed he was there because he was a reliable boy. Well, they suddenly found out that he was not there and they went back to Jerusalem looking for him. It came to pass after three days, they found him, in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, listening to them, hearing them, asking them questions and all that heard him was astonished at his understanding and his answers. HA HA. I would be too. I wish I knew what they were. But when they saw him, they were amazed and his mother said, Son, why have you dealt this way with us? Your father and I have been looking for you, worried to death. And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Didn't you understand that I must be about my father's business." So for the first time, Jesus acknowledges that he has a purpose and he knows it at age 12. So Jesus went home with his parents who really did not understand what he had said to them and he was subject to them. He was a good boy. There is not another word of Jesus recorded for some 18 years. The next time we hear from him is at his baptism when he is 30 years old. Until next time, this is Ronald Dart and you were Born to Win.

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