

Do the Gospels Matter?

Mosaic series

by Bill Aumack

Do you guys know what a mosaic is? Right, it's when they make a big picture out of little tiles or stones. And they're usually quite large, they're on a wall or something. And when you get close, you can't even tell what the picture is, all you can see is the little tiles. You have to back up, so you can see what the picture is, right? So we're starting a new series called Mosaic, and we're gonna be looking at the four gospels and why they matter, why are they important. And these four gospels, we're not gonna do a deep dive into, just one week each. We've done deep dives into the gospels and we'll do that again. But this time we're taking a big picture look. What does the gospel tell us about Jesus? And how do we put that tile into the image that we have of Jesus? And combine that with what we just learned from the Names of God series, we begin to build this mosaic of Jesus, okay?

Now, to get through these four gospels, it's gonna take us six weeks. I know you're going four, six, how does that work? Well, next week we're doing our graduates, we're honoring our graduates, we're gonna have a Christian education Sabbath. And some of you are checking out already, like I'm done school, I ain't doing that no more. Me included. But your Christian education never ends. You should always be learning, always be growing, always be. and have something else that you're learning and doing. So we'll be talking about how Christians continue to grow, even till retirement age. You're still learning and growing, learning more. Then we'll hit three of the gospels. Then the last week in June is Communion Sabbath, so we'll take a break and then we'll come back and finish up the first week in July.

I wanna talk real quick about Communion because we're gonna do something different this time for Communion, I'm gonna introduce that, kinda get everybody started with it. We've been kind of doing communion so that Sabbath school ends at 10.30 and we have foot washing till 11 and then church starts at 11 like normal. And when Pastor and I came up with that idea, we were proud of ourselves. We thought this was a genius idea and it hasn't worked quite the way we had hoped.

So we're gonna change it a little bit. So what we're gonna do this time, Sabbath school still ends at 10.30, but church is gonna start at quarter till, 10.45. We're gonna meet in here at 10.45, get our service started, do some things. We're gonna do foot washing together, come back in, finish up the service, okay? So the last week in June, what time does church start? 10.45, quarter till, okay? I know, 15 minutes earlier you gotta be here, but I'm proud of you, you can do it. See, I'm always proud of the people coming to Downing Church because we change stuff up. And if you can keep up with us and get here at the right time and when we're moving stuff around, we only want smart people coming. So you gotta be smart enough to keep up with us. I'm just kidding, but we're glad that you guys keep up with us and everything on that.

We're also gonna do something new during this series. We're gonna release some questions out on the website. So if you go to our website, there's a section where you can view the sermons and there's a page for each sermon. And we're gonna put some follow-up questions that go with each service. that you can use during the week for your personal study, maybe a family worship, maybe you're in some kind of Bible study or small group. And so you can take this farther along as we go, all right?

So with all that out of the way, do the gospels matter? Why are they so important? Let's just jump right in and get started. **The gospel, the four gospels are the most important books in the Bible.** I believe that the four gospels are the four most important books of the Bible. And if you told me which four books of the Bible are you gonna keep, I'd say Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. That's what I'm saving. No hesitation every single time. Because let's be blunt, without the four gospels, we'd all be Jews. And nothing against our Jewish brothers in any way, shape, or form. But without the four gospels, there wouldn't be Christianity. We would be Jews. Even with the rest of the New Testament and what it says, I don't think Paul's writings would make any sense at all without the four gospels. We'd read that stuff and go, man, that guy, what's he talking about? This just makes no sense. The four gospels are just fundamental to what we believe They're the foundation of our faith, and I believe that they're the four most important books of the Bible.

They're written by four eyewitnesses, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And just to be completely transparent, not everybody in the world believes that. There are some folks that believe that two of them, Matthew and Mark, were written by eyewitnesses, and the other two were written by friends of the eyewitnesses. I don't personally subscribe to that. It is quite possible that they used scribes. That was very common. Back in the day here, remember, we would use, anybody ever use a dictaphone or something like that where the boss would dictate something in and they'd come along later and type it out? Anybody here old enough to remember that or am I the only one? Our two transcriptionists in the back. Okay. And so they probably use that. But I believe that all four of these books, and a lot of other scholars do, all four of these books were written by eyewitnesses. And we know the value of eyewitnesses. If you've ever been involved in our court system, an eyewitness can make or break your case. The eyewitness could say, yes, I saw them do it. Or no, they didn't do it, they were with me at the beach. They couldn't have done it, right? Eyewitnesses can make or break the case.

Let's suppose that we all get together and decide we're gonna go on a group vacation down to Mexico, but we're not going to one of those, you know, plush beach resorts. That's for tourists. We're going out into the jungles of Mexico. We're gonna experience what life is like out in the jungles in the wilderness. So we're out there in the jungles of Mexico, doing whatever you do in the jungles of Mexico. and we stumble across a new Aztec pyramid that nobody's ever found before. And it's a great archeological find. And the experts of the world descend on it and began deciphering it and reading it. And they're just all excited, right? And right there on the bottom stone in the corner, there's an inscription about a new Aztec king that we didn't know about. Nobody had ever heard of this Aztec king before. Would anybody doubt that king existed? No. Their name is right there. That guy was real. There he is. One eyewitness. We have four!

Four eyewitnesses to what happened, to what was seen. They didn't write down what they believed to be true. They didn't write down what they thought might be true. They didn't write down what they heard somebody else say. They wrote down what they saw and heard. Turn your Bibles open with me real quick to Acts 4:20. Acts, fifth book of the New Testament. Acts 4:20, remember the book of Acts is written by Luke and it's kind of a history of the early church. Acts 4:20, give me an amen when you get there. Now this is Luke speaking and he says, "as for us, we

cannot help speaking about what? What we've seen and heard." I saw this, I heard this, here it is. It's not something I made up. It's not something I dreamed about. It's not something somebody else told me. I saw it and I heard it. Okay. Very, very powerful, right? Very powerful.

You ever talk to somebody, maybe somebody at work or a family member, and they poke holes in what you believe. Maybe they're not a Christian and they're poking holes in it. Poking holes in the stories. They like to pick on the Old Testament, right? They don't like the Genesis story. They don't like the flood story. They start poking holes in it, okay? And you wonder like, What's going on? They don't like these stories. And these stories are hard to prove. I'll be honest with you, I believe them. But they're hard to prove. But I don't believe them because they're in the Bible. I believe them because Jesus did. See, **we can take the Old Testament seriously because Jesus took the Old Testament seriously**. And I have eyewitnesses that talked about Jesus talking about the Old Testament. He quoted it, he used it, he referred to it. Jesus comes to tell us what we're doing wrong in our religion, right? He's got some harsh words for some of the Jewish leaders. You're not doing it right. Don't you think if we had the creation story wrong, and it was not six literal days, it was six billion years, that he would say, oh, by the way, you need to change days to years there in that story. Right? He doesn't. Because Jesus took the Old Testament seriously, and because Jesus took it seriously, I take it seriously. I can't explain all of it. I don't understand all of it, but I take it seriously. I take it seriously, right?

And it's not just true because it's in a book, right? Anybody can write something down and put it in a book. You ever been to Barnes and Noble? All kinds of stuff in the books. Most of what's in Barnes and Noble is not true, right? They've got a fiction section. They've got a science fiction section. None of those stories are true. They got a mystery section. None of those stories are true. They got a romance section. Ladies, none of those stories are true. The guys just learned that there's a romance section. So there's a children's section in the back. Most of those stories aren't true. There's not talking animals in the woods solving today's problem. There's no talking trains. They're not true. These things aren't true because they're in the Bible. I take them seriously because Jesus took them seriously. Okay. Look at what Jesus says, turn with me to Matthew 5:17. Matthew 5:17, if you're an ax, it's just back towards the front a couple of books. Matthew

5:17. Give me an amen when you get there. Amen. All right. Jesus is talking and says, "do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them." To fulfill them. What does that mean? Those things were true because I came to fulfill them. You can believe in those things because Jesus believed in those things, amen? All right. So. When you're talking to your non-Christian friend and they're poking holes in the Bible or what you believe, and they say something like, how can you believe that? Silly book written by sheep herders, they don't know anything. Here's what you say, I don't believe this because it's in the Bible, it's better than that. I believe this because Jesus believed it. You don't have a problem with Jesus, do you? No, Jesus, he's a good guy. Okay, well, Jesus took it seriously, I take it seriously. Okay, that's how easy it is to talk about this and why you believe in these things.

Okay, now, some people ask the question, well, how do we know what was written down by these four witnesses is reliable? How do we know what's in the Bible is reliable? When the early Christian church got together to make up the Bible, They didn't pick things and put them into the Bible and then call it reliable. They picked things that were considered reliable and put them into the Bible. Do you follow that? They don't put things into the Bible in order to make them reliable. They put reliable things into the Bible. When you're in college, do you have to buy that book of short stories for English class? Hated that. I was a poor college student, and maybe buy this book of short stories, like 15 stories, and we read like two of them. What a waste. I was poor, I couldn't afford that. So, you know, this book was titled something like, you know, great short stories from whatever, the 1700s or whatever it was, right? The younger kids are looking at me like, you don't have to do this anymore. You don't do this in college anymore? Some of them are saying yes, some of them are saying no. Maybe it depends what school you go to. Okay, back in my day long ago when we were young, we had to read these books of literature, okay? And why did all these short stories end up in this book? Did somebody go around and randomly gather up short stories, put them in a book and go, these are great? Or did somebody go out and find the short stories that people considered great, put them together into a book and said, here's all the great ones, right? That's what they did with the Bible. They took the things that were considered reliable and put them into the Bible. This was the early church. They were much closer to the writing of this. A lot of these

books have been written when there were eyewitnesses still alive. We're gonna talk about that in a minute. And they've gotten a reputation for being reliable because people read it and said, I remember that. I remember when Jesus did that. I was there that day. And that was a crazy day, right? This authenticity, the sense people say these are reliable because people were there and they witnessed it and they verified it, okay?

And some people say that the books of the Bible, especially the gospels, weren't written until like 100 AD, right, when Jesus dies about 30 AD, and these aren't written until like 70 years later, 100 AD. I don't believe that either, okay? And there's a lot of other people that don't believe that too. They were written much, much sooner than that, probably all before 66 AD. So we're talking 36, 37 years after Jesus's death, all these are written. And some of you might say, well, 36 or 37 years is still a long time. You only think 37 years is a long time if you're younger than 37. I had a birthday last week. I know this is gonna come as a surprise to most of you, but I'm a little older than 37. I know, it's shocking. (congregation: How old are you?) 61, you never thought I'd make it that long. And so we, you know, we look at this and go, how could they remember something for 37 years? Listen, you remember stuff you did as a kid, you get together at family reunions and talk to your siblings and your cousins, remember when we did this or that? That was, man, it was great. You go to high school reunions or college reunions, you talk to your friends, you remember stuff you did. I remember stuff I did in high school, and that was like just after the last Ice Age, right? We can remember this stuff. This stuff that happened to the disciples was amazing things. These things were crazy. How could you forget Jesus calming the storm? How could you forget Jesus feeding 5,000 men and women and children with a happy meal? How do you forget guys coming and ripping off the roof and lowering their friend down? You don't forget stuff like that. That's seared in here, right? It was easy for them to remember these things. Plus the Holy Spirit is helping them recall things, okay? And so these things are written down early when there's lots of eye witnesses to read it and say, yes, I remember that. That's how it happened. And these documents start getting this aura of reliability. You can trust this. It's been verified by other people, okay?

The other reason that I think that they were written well before 100 AD is the disciples, quite honestly, didn't live that long. Right, we know that all but one of

the disciples were martyred. They wouldn't wait till they were 90 or 100 years old to try and write this. They didn't live that long. And they knew their lives were in danger, right? They were in and out of jails and beaten and all kinds of crazy stuff, right? They got down to it and got writing. Get this stuff recorded.

But the biggest reason I believe that this didn't happen is because of what happens in 70 AD. Do you remember what happens in 70 AD? I know Dr. Mario does. 70 AD is a date you should always remember. 70 AD is the day that Rome came and destroyed Jerusalem. I wanna talk a little bit about this event because this was the biggest event in Jewish history, maybe ever, but certainly for a long time. It was a big day in Roman history, and it's a big day in Christian history. So as we know, Rome was ruling over Israel and lots of other parts of the world, they ruled for like 600 years. They were the dominant world force. And Israel was rebelling against them. So Rome sent Vespian and the army down to quell this rebellion. And that's called the First Jewish War, lasted six years. Towards the end of that war, as Rome was pushing them back and back and back, the Israel fighters have to fall back. Now sometimes when we think of the Israel fighters, we think of farmers with hoes. Standing up against the great imperial forces like Star Wars, right? The little rebel fleet against the big, you know, omniscient presence, you know, battle droids, right? They had everything and we had hoes. No, Israel had some valiant fighters. These guys were warriors. They invented guerrilla warfare. No more standing in lines and running and attacking each other like barbarians. They'd run out at night and run raids and do all kinds of crazy things. Okay, well they start falling back. They fall back into Jerusalem, overrun the garrison in Jerusalem, kill all the Romans, take all the weapons, run up to Masad, which is a big fort up in the hills behind Jerusalem, overrun that, kill all the Romans, take all the weapons and come back down into Jerusalem. About then Vespian comes rolling up with the Roman army and says, come on out. And they go, come on in and get us. We're pretty good. We got all these people, we got all these weapons. Come get us. So Rome sets up to do a siege.

Now, Jerusalem was a tough city to overtake with a siege because it had three walls. There was an outer wall, and then there would be some little villages and communities. There was another wall, some villages and communities, and then the inner wall around kind of the main city. It's about 42 miles around all that. Okay? This is a big city. So Rome builds like 50 to 60 forts around this. They start

trying to siege the city. They tried going under the walls, that didn't work. Because the Israelites are behind the walls attacking them, right? They tried going over the walls, that didn't work. So they start going through the walls. They would build their big war machines and battering rams and roll them up to the wall. And at night the Israelis would run out, set them on fire and tip them over and run back into the city. For a while, they got to a stalemate. It was just Rome sitting out there in the field and Israel sitting there in the city, staring at each other like a standoff. Vespian gets called back to Rome to become the emperor and his son Titus takes over. Son Titus builds a ditch all the way around Jerusalem. That's a 42 mile ditch. That's impressive. And then he built scaffolding all the way around it. that they used to hang and torture to death any Jews they caught outside the city. And leave them dying and rotting on there so the people in the city would look out and see what was going on. Say, that's gonna be you next. Must have smelled wonderful.

And eventually, Rome gets through the first wall and overtakes those little cities. And then Rome gets through the second wall and overtakes those cities. And while Rome is working on the third wall, it's Passover and a bunch of the Jews ask Titus, can we go in and celebrate Passover? And he goes, sure. So he lets all the Jews in to celebrate Passover. When Passover was over, he says, yeah, but you can't leave now. So Rome is, I mean Jerusalem is packed full of people. And August 70 AD, the Romans break through the last wall. And they are mad. I mean, they are really angry. They've been living in tents for four years. Now this may be the Holy Land, but it's hotter than you know what in the summertime. And in the wintertime, it snows. And they've been living in tents, and all these guys have been living in houses, and they are mad. And they just start destroying and killing everything, everybody. They end up taking 97,000 prisoners back to Rome to feed the gladiator machine, because you need bodies for that. And they killed a lot of people. Now Josephus is a Jewish historian that transferred to the Rome side. In fact, he fought against the Romans in that first Jewish war, then flip-flopped and joined the Romans because you gotta do what you gotta do to stay alive, right? He says that 1.1 million people died. That's Romans and Jews. A lot of modern historians put that number a little lower, maybe five, six, 700,000. I've seen numbers as low as 300,000. So let's take the lowest number, 300,000. They took 97,000 prisoners and 300,000 people died. That's every man, woman, and child in

Downey three times. That's everybody from north of the five to south of the 105, from the 605 to the 710 at the bottom of Downey and up to like Old River School Road here. All those apartments, all those houses, all those people, three times over. It took them two months to kill everybody. because they were fighting the whole time. This was hand-to-hand, door-to-door combat.

And eventually Rome perseveres and they are mad and they viewed the Jewish religion as the reason for this rebellion and they erased the temple from the face of the earth. No two stones are left on top of each other. And if you go to Israel today on the Temple Mount, there's no temple there. There's one piece of the outer wall of the courtyard left, the wailing wall, you may have heard of that. That's it. There's a little bit of rubble over there on the ground that they think might have been from the temple. Nothing left. It's the day that ancient Judaism died. Phenomenal event in their history. It was a phenomenal event in Rome's history. Titus goes on to take Masad back, goes back to Rome, has a parade with the things from the most holy part of the temple, the tables and the candle stand, and parades them through Rome, because nobody's ever seen them except for the Jewish high priest. And he brings them back as trophies to Rome. Titus gets sick and dies and his brother becomes emperor and he builds an arch to honor Titus. And that arch is still there, it's in a prominent place in Rome. And you can see on the inside the inscriptions of his victory over the Jewish people.

It was a huge day for Rome. It was a huge day for the Jews. And it's a huge day for Christians because there's not one word of this in the Bible. The biggest thing ever to happen in Jewish history is not recorded in the Bible. Why is that? Because it hasn't happened when all this stuff is written down. We know Peter works with the Jews in Jerusalem. He doesn't say nothing. James is running a church in Jerusalem. He doesn't say nothing. Wouldn't you think one of them would say, "I'd like to go to Jerusalem and visit y'all, but you know, that's the whole siege thing. I can't." Don't you think when John says and records that Jesus says the temple will be torn down and not one stone left on each other, that he would come back and say, and it happened just like Jesus said? Or when Mark records the people tormenting Jesus when he dies, he's on being crucified, say, hey, you said the temple was gonna be torn down, what's going on? Don't you think he would have said, and it happened? See, there's all kinds of things you could say about this. You could say, as a Christian, you could say, this is proof that God was upset with the

Jews and you don't need this Jewish system of doing sacrifices anymore. Jesus replaced all that. There's not one word of this in the New Testament because it hasn't happened yet. It hasn't happened. All of this stuff is written down before that. Okay?

So I believe, and lots of other scholars believe, that the gospels were written and circulated within 40 years of Jesus' death when there were plenty of eyewitnesses. They didn't happen way out 70, 80, 90 years later. That didn't happen, okay?

Now, we know that these books are reliable. We have eyewitnesses, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We didn't even talk about Peter, who writes a bunch of great stuff in the New Testament. We didn't talk about James, who's Jesus' brother. Jesus' own brother believed that he was the Messiah. Now, how many of you in here have siblings? Anything your siblings could say or do to convince you they were the son of God. I got a brother, I love my brother, we're tight, ain't nothing he could say or do, convince me he was the son of God. Right, but Jesus convinces James. Of course we have Paul, now Paul's not an eyewitness, but Paul gets a revelation, and the people who were eyewitnesses said, yeah, that's true. Okay, and so these things are reliable, we have these things, and we know it, because it was written when people could review it and say, yes, I was there. I saw that. Okay?

I wanna say something here and I want you to hang with me. I know I'm running horribly late, I'm sorry. Hang with me. I do not use the Bible as the foundation of my faith. Now, some of you, your heart's beginning to race, your palms are getting sweaty. Stay with me. The foundation of my faith is a singular event, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the foundation of my faith. Not a book. I think the reason that our students grow up in church and then go away to college and come back and they're not Christians anymore is because we told them to put their faith in the book and they get to college and some professor pokes holes in the book and you can feel the faith just draining out of you. My faith is not based on a book. My faith is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen. We have eyewitnesses that saw it happen. It didn't happen in the dark at night, in the corner. There were eyewitnesses that saw it happen. There were eyewitnesses that read about it and said, I was there and I believe it. I take the rest of the Bible

seriously because Jesus took it seriously. And that's the foundation of my faith and why I have hope.

If you're struggling with belief right now, I have good news for you. Jesus came to the earth for you and He died for your sins. And He rose from the dead, not in a corner, but publicly. And we can believe it because we have credible witnesses that saw it. And they suffered for it and they died for it. It was not a lie, it was the truth.

And if you've drifted, away from Christianity because somebody tells you can't have a thinking mind and be a Christian. I'm gonna tell you, you're welcome to come back because you're allowed to think and be a Christian. You don't have to give up your brain. What's written in Genesis has nothing to do with Jesus' resurrection. If you don't wanna believe in Genesis, that's between you and God. But I believe in the resurrection and I believe in Genesis because Jesus believed in Genesis. Amen.

Real quick, reflection, have you read the gospels recently? When was the last time you sat down and read these?

If you haven't read them recently, now's a really good time to start. One chapter a day, just one chapter a day. Start and get through those until you get through them.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much. Thank you so much for this Bible we have. That was written down for us by eyewitnesses who were with you and saw what happened. And we can trust this, we can have faith in this. Thank you so much for that. It helps us make it through the tough times. It helps us make it through the good times. It helps us to follow you. It helps us to be more like you because we have a good picture of what you're like. Be with us as we embark on this series and we look at these four gospels. And what's the big idea and the big picture about Jesus that comes to us from these four gospels? Lord, we're grateful for the things that you do for us. We ask that you be with us to keep us safe. Bring us back again in Jesus' name, amen.