



WITNESS

21-DAY EASTER DEVOTIONAL

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WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

Before you get going, you are probably curious about what you will be reading over the course of the next four weeks. In *Witness: A 21-Day Easter Devotional*, you will discover more about the four authors that wrote what we refer to as “the Gospels.” These are the first four books in the New Testament that share the Gospel, which is the Good News that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for our sins so that we could have salvation and freedom in His name. Four men named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all attempted, with the great help of the Holy Spirit, to write an account that captures who Jesus is. These four witnesses to the power of Jesus are the inspiration for this devotional.

Not only will you learn about who each of them were, but you will also learn more about why their unique perspectives have helped countless believers know Jesus over the last 2,000 years. Each of these early believers had an important message to share about who Jesus was to them, and why He is the One He claimed to be: The Son of God. By looking at the four different Witness accounts, you are going to have a greater understanding of why we are incredibly blessed to have multiple accounts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all give a glimpse of Jesus that is unique to their experience and faith.

This brings us to you. The goal of this book is not only to teach you some cool stuff about the Gospel writers. It is also to encourage you to look at your unique experience with Jesus, and think about how you would share the Gospel (or Good News) with others!

HOW TO USE WITNESS:

This is a 21-Day devotional. There are really two different options you can choose from when reading through it. The first option is to read a new devotional every day. If you are someone that can stick to a plan, then this option is perfectly fine for you. However, when designing this devotional, we actually intended for most people to go with option two. In option two, you will begin the devotional four weeks before Easter. Each week, you will have seven days to complete five devotionals.

Every five days, you will learn about one specific gospel writer, how they viewed Jesus, and learn about some things that make their account of Jesus unique. Not only does this help you engage more fully with each of the gospel writers, but it also gives you some 'buffer days'. Maybe you wake up on a Monday and feel like you need to roll back over and sleep for another ten hours. That's ok! Your journey with *Witness* is not meant to be a burden to you. It is meant to be encouraging and easy to access.

If you miss a day here or there, you can still catch up! Keep at it. We know you've got this.



WEEK I: MATTHEW

week one: matthew

DAY 1 — WHO WAS MATTHEW?

Have you ever been sent a message that was written for someone else? A lot of Gentile (or non-Jewish) Christians can be tempted to say “wrong number” when it comes to the Gospel of Matthew because the language, imagery, and stories all seem to be written to someone else. One of the things that sets Matthew apart from the other three gospels is that it was written specifically to a Jewish audience. That means that there are things mentioned that might seem strange or unimportant to us. But Jewish people at the time would have heard these old prophecies and phrases and followed the implications very easily. It’s a bit like having an inside joke with your friends... most people wouldn’t understand why you are laughing until you explain it to them. But if you are with people who know the joke, you don’t have to slow down and explain anything.

There is a strong belief in the Christian church that Matthew was named Levi before Jesus called him to be a disciple. And interestingly, Matthew is also known to have been a tax collector prior to his calling to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9). Tax collectors were hated among the Jewish community because they tended to make their wages by charging people more than what they actually owed to their government. This common practice among tax collectors made them incredibly unpopular. People tended not to trust tax collectors because they took advantage of others. Despite this, Jesus called Matthew to be one of His followers. And if that wasn’t enough, He called him to tell all of the people that likely thought he was a no-good lying thief about the life-changing power of the Gospel. Pretty incredible, right?

Matthew’s witness is an important one, because it not only shows us why Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, but it also gives us a glimpse of how gracious God is. Jesus came with glory as the Son of God, but also with the humility of humanity. Matthew filled his witness with imagery of Jesus as the Promised Messiah, who was there to usher in a new kind of Kingdom that had no need to tax its citizens. Instead, it is a Kingdom of grace that is ruled forever by a perfect King- Jesus Christ.

DAY 2 — JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH

And all the people were amazed, and said, 'Can this be the Son of David?' -Matthew 12:23

Each of the four Gospel authors viewed Jesus in a certain way, and they presented Him to their readers from that perspective. Matthew presented Jesus as the Promised Messiah. The word 'messiah' also means 'anointed.' Think about a King that is sworn into office- that is the imagery that surrounds the word messiah. With that in mind, Matthew wanted his readers to know that Jesus fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament and is the promised King. Matthew often makes references to these prophecies by using messiah-type titles that people give Jesus. For example, in the verse above, the people asked, "Can this be the Son of David?" which is a direct reference to 1 Samuel, where God's people are promised that a son of King David would one day establish an everlasting Kingdom.

Matthew wanted the people of God to understand that even though Jesus is the Messiah, or promised King, He was meant to be a King of an eternal Kingdom, not an earthly one.

Read Matthew 21:1-11.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a young donkey, the crowds welcomed Him into the city by waving palm branches in the air, shouting, "Hosanna in the highest!"

It was a common misconception of the people in that day to believe the Messiah would come as a political leader. They were expecting a leader who would overthrow the Roman Empire and establish a new earthly kingdom. Their shouts of "Hosanna" meant "save now." Later, when they realized Jesus was not a political leader, many did not believe He was the Promised Messiah. Sadly, the crowds did not see Jesus for who He really was. They placed their personal desires on Him instead.

We can be tempted to do the same. It's easy for us to mold Jesus into who we want Him to be instead of who He actually is. Jesus is not a person we manufacture. As Matthew tells us, He is the Promised Messiah of the Old Testament! And thankfully, He came to be so much more than a political leader or great teacher.

DAY 3 — MATTHEW: THE MAN

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. -Matthew 1:1

Sometimes in Christian art, you might see the four Gospels represented by four different images: a man for Matthew, a lion for Mark, an ox for Luke, and an eagle for John. These images originally come from a vision Ezekiel had in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 1:10-12), and they help us remember the different sides of Jesus each Gospel is trying to focus on.

Matthew is represented by the image of a man with wings. Why? Not because Matthew was some kind of angel, but because in Matthew's Gospel, he really emphasizes the humanity of Jesus! He even starts with a genealogy of Jesus right at the very beginning (Matt. 1:1-17). A genealogy lists out someone's ancestors in order, and Matthew lists Jesus' human ancestors all the way back to Abraham.

Now, like lots of people, you might be tempted to just skip right over genealogies in the Bible. Who wants to read a long list of confusing names, right? But these genealogies are actually there to tell us something really important! Jesus' genealogy tells us that Jesus is a real human being. After all, right after Matthew gives Jesus' genealogy, he tells us the story of Jesus' very humble human birth (Matt. 1:18-25). But even more than that, he tells us that Jesus is the ultimate, perfect human!

Jesus' genealogy is full of ancestors who were seriously flawed and sinful, even the big names like David and Abraham. But unlike His ancestors, Jesus never sinned. And it's Jesus' sinless, human life that makes it possible for you to be set free from the power of sin in your own life. Matthew's Gospel reminds us that Jesus is human like you and me, and He knows what it's like to live a hard human life. But it also reminds us that, unlike you and me, Jesus defeated sin, making a way for us to find salvation in Him.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Matthew wanted to emphasize Jesus' humanity?
2. How might it change your relationship with Jesus to remember that He can relate to you and your experiences as a human being?
3. Is it comforting to remember that Jesus entered into our world to live a human life? Why or how?