

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **MOTIVATIONAL LESSONS**

### **“The Open Books”**

#### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, James Gravelle.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:11-15).

Welcome to THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. We are so glad that you chose this opportunity to be with us in this study of God’s Word. The verses that I have just read—Revelation 20: 11-15—present a word picture of the Last Judgment. They point out the following: the great white throne; the Judge Who sits upon this throne; the dead standing before the throne; the books (plural) that were being opened; and the doom of sinners. Did you notice in the reading that at least three books will be opened? Notice in Revelation 20:12—“And books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life.” This makes at least three books. At this time, we are going to focus on those books to see just what the three books might be.

First, the one book that is actually listed by name in Revelation is the Book of Life. This also is called “the Book of God’s Remembrance.” We see a reference made to this book in Malachi 3:16—“Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.” This book could be called “man’s book in God’s hands.” It is a family record, and inscribed within it are the names of God’s children. Again, it could be called “man’s book in God’s hands.” It is **our** book, but **God** is the One Who writes within it. Paul mentioned this book in Philippians 4:3 when he wrote, “I urge you also, true companion, to help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, **whose names are in the Book of Life.**” When a man is born anew, his name is written in this book. When one obeys the Gospel of Christ, he is added to the body of Christ (that is, the church of Christ). Notice Acts 2: 47—“The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” But how were those people being saved? Peter and the other apostles were preaching the very first Gospel sermons after receiving the power that was promised to come to them. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This promise was made to the apostles. They were told to wait in Jerusalem, and that there the promise would be fulfilled. That promised power came upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. It was Peter who boldly proclaimed in Acts 2:36, “Therefore let all the house

of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” The response of those people whose good hearts were receptive is recorded in Acts 2:37—“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” Peter’s reply to their question is found in Acts 2:38—“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Now, let’s see two different responses of pricked hearts. First, the proper response can be seen in Acts 2:41—“Those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” Second, the improper response can be seen in Acts 5 where Peter and the apostles were standing before the Jewish Sanhedrin, which had charged them not to teach or preach any longer in the name of Jesus. The apostles had been arrested and put in prison, but an angel had released them from prison and told them to go right back into the temple to continue their teaching—which is exactly what they did. The Sanhedrin had assembled and had sent people to the prison to bring the apostles to stand before them. But those whom they sent said, “We do not know what happened. We found the prison completely secure and closed up, but those people are not there any more.” While these people were speaking, others came to the Council to say, “Those men whom you put in prison are in the temple right now, preaching and teaching this new doctrine.” Imagine the response of the Council. They sent their officers to arrest the apostles and bring them before the Council. You probably know the rest of the story. When the apostles were asked why they were doing this, Peter and the others responded, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The reaction of the Jews was very dramatic, as recorded in Acts 5:33—“When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.” The King James Version says, “When they heard this, they were cut to the heart and took counsel to slay them.” In this rendering, we find the very same wording (“cut to the heart”) as is found in Acts 2. The same Word of God influenced two different types of hearts. One—the receptive heart—chose to obey God. The other—the unreceptive heart—chose to kill God’s messengers. Those who obey God are the ones whom He adds to the church. At that time, God also records the names of the saved in His Book of Life. For the redeemed, this should be a matter of great rejoicing. To those who would be the Lord’s disciples, as they returned from carrying out the Limited Commission, Jesus redirected their thinking from the power they had been given to the eternal life that they would someday enjoy. Notice Luke 10:17-20.

“Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ And He said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.’”

Jesus’ point was, “Do not worry so much about the earthly ‘here and now.’ Rather, look beyond the earthly to Heaven. Look to eternity, and rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.” The question that each person must ask is this: “Is **my** name written there?”

The next book opened at the Judgment is the Book of Books—the Bible. This is God’s Book in man’s hands—a book intended to help man put his life right and to purify his life. Jesus said to those who would be His apostles, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (Jn. 15:3). Whence did their cleansing come? It came from the Word of God. God’s Word lights our way (Ps. 119:105—“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”). Unto every responsible person there comes three serious questions: (1) Whence have I come?; (2) What is my mission?; and (3) Whither do I go? In the Bible and the Bible alone we find the answers to these three questions.

First, let us consider the question, “Whence have I come?” Only the Bible tells man of his origin and his nature. Man has tried, and will continue to try to explain, his origin. New theories come, and when they are disproved, they fall by the wayside. Another one springs up to take its place, and another one after that, and another one after that. They fall because they are man’s devising. With each new and more-elaborate explanation, additional millions or billions of years of time are required to make the theory plausible. How much simpler could it be than to simply take Moses at his word when he wrote in Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”? Why not listen to Moses as he further explained in Genesis 2:7, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”? In Acts 17:28, Paul said to those on Mars Hill, “In Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’”

God’s Word also reveals to man his duty to God and to his fellow man. After a lifetime of trial and error, the wisest man who ever lived (Solomon) wrote (by inspiration of God), “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Eccl. 12:13). The King James Version says, “...for this is the whole duty of man.” In Matthew 22:34-40 we read,

“But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.’”

Notice that when Jesus says in verse 40, “the Law the Prophets,” that was the Jewish way of referring to the whole Old Testament. “The Law” represented Moses’ writings, and “the Prophets” represented everything that came after Moses’ writings. Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God,” and then “Love your neighbor as yourself.” As the Bible draws to a close, John would have us to understand, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). The tree of life is that which makes us live for eternity. The “gates into the city” is representative of our entrance into Heaven—the place where we will be for eternity if we keep God’s commandments.

Finally, only the Bible points out man’s destiny. In Jeremiah 21:8 we read, “Now you shall say to this people, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.”’” Jeremiah understood that we as human beings have two choices to make as we travel through life. There are two avenues, two paths, two roads that we can walk. Each person has the ability to choose. Jesus explained this in Matthew 7:13-14 when He said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Notice that Jesus indicated that the majority will not go to Heaven. When the people on Pentecost cried out to Peter, “What shall we do?,” they had two choices—the narrow gate that leads to Heaven, or the wide gate that leads to destruction. They made the right choice. But remember the Jewish leaders in Acts 5? They wanted to kill God’s messengers for telling them God’s will. They, too, had a choice to make. But they made the wrong decision. In both accounts, the Bible lets us know the eternal destination of both of these groups of people. One group will spend eternity in bliss; the other will spend eternity wishing that they had made better choices. In the Bible and in the Bible alone these types of questions are answered: (1) Whence have I come?; (2) What is my mission?; and (3) Whither do I go? A secular writer summed

up the purpose of the Bible in one phrase: “The glory of God and the salvation of man through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This provides a beautiful summary of the entire Bible, does it not?

Now, let’s look at the third Book—the Book of Deeds. This is a book of man’s own making. It is man’s book in man’s hands. This book, containing spotless pages, is given to each person at the age of accountability. All are given an equal start in life via this book, full of blank pages. As we proceed from that age of accountability (the time at which we understand right from wrong and have the ability to make a choice regarding which road we will walk), the deeds that we commit—the good things we do and the bad things we do—are all written as a history in this book. It is now in the making. On the pages of this book are written our words, our deeds, and our deepest and most-silent thoughts. The great objective is not to make the Bible conform to our book, but instead to make our book conform to the Bible. We need to understand that we cannot change the Bible, even though some would try. In Galatians 1:6-9 Paul wrote,

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

Paul beautifully tells us that there will be no changes in the Gospel message. In Revelation 22:18-19, a stern warning is given to those who would tamper with God’s Word. There, John wrote,

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Paul also admonished us in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The Book of Deeds will be sealed at death, after which no changes can be made. Do you remember the account of the rich man and Lazarus, as told by Jesus in Luke 16:20-30? There was a rich man who died and who went to a place called Torment. Lazarus, a beggar, also died and was escorted by angels to a place called Paradise. This was in the same realm—the realm of the dead. There are two different sides to this place, and through the middle is a great fixed gulf that prevented people from moving from one side to the other. In Luke 16:26 we read, “And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.” This was said by Abraham in response to the rich man’s appeal that Abraham please send Lazarus to him so that he could have some water. Notice that he did not ask to cross the gulf to go to the other side. Rather, he wanted comfort from the torment in which he found himself. This story tells of a waiting place for the dead until the final Day of Judgment. This account tells us that once we reach that point—once we have passed through the portal of death—there is no changing our eternal outcome. In Hebrews 9:27 we read, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul wrote, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Ultimately, all three books will fall into the hands of the Judge of all the Earth. On the Day of Judgment, they will be opened. Their contents will determine man's destiny. Notice again Revelation 20:12—"And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." As we stand before God in Judgment, these three books also will be present: God's Book in man's hands—the Bible; man's book in God's hand—the Book of Remembrance (or the Book of Life); and man's book in man's hands—the Book of Deeds. All three will be present, and all will be opened.

When the Book of Life is opened, will **your** name be found there? Remember John's promise in Revelation 20:15—"Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." We must be so very careful to be sure that our names are written in this Book. The Bible will be opened. Jesus said in John 12:48, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." The Bible is a standard (or measuring rod of sorts) against which our deeds will be placed alongside. Will our deeds compare well against the Bible? Or will we find great differences between the two? The Book of Deeds also will be opened. When the Judge places those two books side by side, will He find agreement between them? Will He find harmony? Remember that there can be no changing God's Book (the Bible). If you were to die today, or if the Lord was to return, would you be afraid or ashamed for the Book of (your) Deeds to be opened and read by the Great Judge?

Remember that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He does this even today as He provides time for you to make your life conform to His will. Forgiveness and remission of sins are yours for the asking. Salvation has been provided. God wants us to believe His Word, and has given us evidence so that we can know that what He says is true. Jesus said in John 8:24, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Jesus also said in Luke 13:3, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Repentance is brought about by godly sorrow. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul contrasted two types of sorrow when he wrote, "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." The sorrow of the world is simply, "I'm sorry that I got caught." Godly sorrow, however, is different. It says, "I am not sorry that I got caught. Rather, I'm sorry that I did wrong. I now know that what I did was wrong, and I will not do it again." In Matthew 10:32 Jesus said, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven." In Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Jesus tells us that we must confess His name before others, and that we then must be immersed in water for the remission of our sins. Those who do these things will be saved. Those who do these things will have their names written in the Book of Life. These words were spoken by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. These words were given to Him by God the Father, as we read in John 12:50—"Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." The God who created the heavens and the Earth, and Who spoke into being all things, wants you to live with Him forever. What a wonderful Savior we have in Jesus Christ! Join us again next time as we continue to preach the Gospel of Christ.

### **Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST* is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

**607 McLish Ave.**

**Ardmore, OK 73401**

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com). We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where “the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached.”

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE OPEN BOOKS”

1. What future scene is depicted in Revelation 20:11-15?
2. According to Revelation 20:11-15, how many books will be present on the Day of Judgment?
3. What is name of the first of those books?
4. What is the name of the second of those books?
5. What is the name of the third of those books?
6. According to Revelation 20:12, what will happen in regard to those three books on the Day of Judgment?
7. What question did the Jews (who had crucified Christ) ask in Acts 2:37?
8. How did the apostle Peter answer the Jews' question in Acts 2:38?
9. According to Acts 2:41, what response did the Jews make to Peter's statement in Acts 2:38?
10. What important affirmation was made by Peter and some of the other apostles in Acts 5:29?
11. According to Psalm 119:105, what is God's Word?
12. This lesson discusses three important questions that every accountable person eventually must ask and answer. What are those three questions?
13. According to Jesus' statements in Matthew 7:13-14, how many paths can we travel in this life?
14. Where does the first path lead that Jesus discussed in Matthew 7:13-14?
15. Where does the second path lead that Jesus discussed in Matthew 7:13-14?
16. Which of the two paths discussed by Jesus in Matthew 7:13-14 will most people take?
17. When God opens our Book of Deeds on the Day of Judgment, with what other Book must it compare favorably if we expect to be welcomed into Heaven?
18. According to Revelation 20:12, by what will we one day be judged?
19. According to Revelation 20:15, where will those people end up whose names are not found in God's Book of Life?
20. According to John 12:48, what will judge us in the last day?