



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## ***The Case for Christ, Part 5: “Mister Jones, Meet the Messiah”*** **Matthew 11:1-6; Acts 10:34-43**

Occasionally I visit in a home with a person or a couple new to our church, and as we get acquainted, I have the pleasure of discovering they have an interest that I know is a passion of someone else in the church. For example, “model railroading” is a passion for several of you. So I go to Mr. and Ms. Jones’s house, discover he’s “a train nut from ‘way back”, and I can’t wait to connect him with Craig George, or Kurt Simon, or some others here. I might write myself a note right there and then to call Craig, and suggest he look for Mr. Jones some Sunday morning—and if I’m really lucky, I’ll remember that on a day when they’re both in worship, and I’ll run across the hall to drag Craig George to meet Mr. Jones.

I bet you’ve done that—made a connection with and for someone that gives them great joy. You listen, discover their need, and bring the parties together. That’s what brokers do—and they get paid well for it!

Another thing I enjoy in my ministry, is giving people some information they really need. For example, someone is looking for how to grab hold of work on low income housing. Well, I “sic Bev Anderson on them”, and the Placer Collaborative Network—the organization she helped create that involves churches and social service agencies of our part of Placer County. Great stuff! I can only imagine what good things could come from that!

Volunteers who worked at the “Information and Referral” center for the County did that for years—you’d call them up, or go on by, and they got the privilege of making that connection. You can do that, too, right? All it takes is the right information to pass on, and being in the right place at the right time.

But my greatest joy in ministry—and I should have learned this long before Seminary—is leading someone to make a connection with Christ. I listen to the person, discover their need, and stick with them until they meet the Messiah and start walking in a new life with Jesus. It’s a great joy—to see their deepest need met, their life begins to change, and to experience their deep gratitude. D. T. Niles, a missionary to India, once said something like, “Telling one hungry beggar where to find bread—that’s evangelism.” There’s nothing more rewarding than helping Mr. Jones meet his Messiah.

And you can do that, too! We’ll talk about that a bit this morning.

These days, our church is working through Lee Strobel’s book, *The Case for Christ*, in these kick-off messages, in the discussion groups that meet at various times, and in the individual reading we are doing. Strobel approaches Jesus like a lawyer would do, in building up a case for Jesus’ identity. He looks for the evidence that would support a case that Jesus is who he said—Son of God, the fulfillment of God’s plan. Week by week, we read of Strobel interviewing a

world authority on one aspect of “the case for Christ”, and through his often-tough questions, Lee helps us appreciate the reasons to trust the Bible as it witnesses to Jesus in these ways.

Now, in our weekly time together, I don’t want to go over the same ground, as if your individual reading of Lee’s work and your discussion with others were not important. They ARE! And I don’t want to ‘steal Lee Strobel’s thunder’. But each week I’m up here, I want to extend “the case for Christ” in a bit of a different direction, or further, in some way.

**It’s time for a POP QUIZ!** Let’s see where you fit on this scale of spiritual development. You won’t be turning these in for a grade, this is just for you. Are you “not yet a believer”—not even to the starting line of the most important race of life, and Lee Strobel’s book is definitely giving you more to think about? Or, are you a “believer” in Jesus—you’ve already become convinced that Jesus is who he said, and *The Case for Christ* is more confirmation that you made the right choice? Or, are you a “follower” of Jesus—you read the Bible, you pray, you worship, you give money to Christian mission, you worship with this Church Family—things like that? Or have you come to full development as a Christian, and you have become an agent of God, a worker with God, living for God, making disciples? What do you think? . . .

What’s the next step, for you? . . .

You see, I am hoping Strobel’s book will change you, will “move you up a notch”. And I hope you can use Lee’s book as one more ‘tool in your toolbox’ to help YOUR Mr. Jones meet The Messiah.

In the two chapters we read in the days ahead, Lee does two things. In Chapter 9 Lee takes a theological question about Jesus being the Son of God, and interviews a Biblical expert on the evidence and how it is possible for Jesus and God the Father to be “one”. I had some of these questions about Jesus when I was in Junior High, but many people never think about these questions, and so when someone brings up “this nonsense”, we don’t know how to respond. So Strobel does us a service in his Chapter 9, “Did Jesus fit the attributes of God?”

A Bible text I like to open at this point comes from Matthew’s gospel. Would you open your Bibles with me to Matthew, chapter 11? I’m going to read verses 1-6, and I invite you to listen with me for God’s Word TO US THIS MORNING, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

Strobel, naturally enough, takes much of his material for his Chapter 9 from John’s gospel, for John recorded more of what Jesus said about himself. The Synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are more plot-driven, we might say. And yet, even in the Synoptics, we find evidence about who Jesus was and is, because of what he did.

Here in Matthew 11, John the Baptist has been arrested and is in prison. John has disciples—did you know that? It was common for a rabbi to attract disciples who would ask to learn from him. But John is troubled. John’s mission has been to “prepare the way of the Lord”—the Messiah promised throughout the Old Testament (as we’ll see in Strobel’s chapter 10). But John’s picture of the Messiah was one of judgment, of FIRE, as he said in his early sermons to the people at the Jordan River. He has not heard much about judgment and fire about Jesus. So, now that his ministry is “on hold”—and maybe “over”—John is hoping he’s not wasted his life on someone who “is not the right guy”.

Jesus gets John's concern, and wants to comfort him. So he tells the messengers to go back to John, and tell John all that's been happening. People have been healed, cured, and invited into the Kingdom of God with good news. That's "Messiah stuff", John. "Happy is the man who does not fall away on account of me"—that's Jesus' sidebar message to John, saying, "This doesn't fit your Messiah blueprint, John. I understand. But listen deeply to what God is doing here, and know you have been faithful and right." I AM 'the guy'!

That's Strobel's Chapter 9—Jesus DOES fit the attributes of God. As the crowd said from time to time, only God could do what Jesus did. Now, in Strobel's Chapter 10, he's especially aiming his evidence at Jews who avoid Jesus. But a lot of other people also have such objections about Jesus being the Messiah, so I'm glad chapter 10 is in this book, too. Chapter 10 quickly enumerates just some of the evidence from Old Testament scriptures that point to Jesus being the Messiah (or, "the Christ"—that's the Greek word for the Hebrew word, "Messiah").

To go along with this, let's pick up another Synoptic passage, from Luke's "Volume Two"—that's what we call the book of "Acts". Find Acts, chapter 10, starting with verse 34. Let me bring you up to speed on what's been happening before we read this passage. Jesus was crucified, and raised from death in God's resurrection power. He appeared to his disciples, and later returned in the gift of the Holy Spirit--like a spark in a tank of gasoline, as Luke records in Acts, chapter 2. Now the apostles and other believers had been fanning out from Jerusalem to bring the good news about Jesus to others, and Peter has been summoned by God through a dream to go--not to another Jew, as Peter would have preferred--but to a Roman, a Gentile, to speak to him and his household about Jesus Christ. Indeed, messengers from this military sub-commander Cornelius have come calling on Peter at his house in Joppa, to ask him to come over to Caesarea to meet with Cornelius. All this confirmed the vision God had given Peter. So after the two men met, and compared visions they each had received, Peter has a breakthrough of insight that goes 'way beyond just Cornelius himself. God means to save everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. [*text Acts 10:34-43*]

You'll notice in this text that Peter doesn't dwell on how Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies from the Old Testament. This Roman soldier probably would not have known about any of that; it was not his culture. So Peter cuts to "the bottom line"—what all this is about—so that he can appeal to Cornelius right here and now, giving Cornelius the chance to respond to this love of God poured out for all people. That's why I say the material Strobel's expert—Louis Lapidès—assembles on the Old Testament fulfillment must be primarily aimed at Jews. But Lapidès clearly answers the question, Did Jesus—and Jesus alone—match the identity of the Messiah, like a fingerprint matches only one person? While we can mention this to anyone—and it's pretty awesome piece of the puzzle—it would be especially appropriate to share with our Jewish friends.

This morning, we have set up Strobel's chapter 9 and chapter 10 on "profile evidence" and "fingerprint evidence" to prove Jesus was and is the Christ of God. Strobel's work is good at providing evidence and persuasive arguments, but there's a limitation to this whole approach: almost no one actually becomes a Christian through argument. Yes, the intellectual approach is a piece of the puzzle—we DO have brains; but what drives us are emotions. And emotions are primarily "caught", not talked about.

In Carol Visser's seminar a couple of weeks ago, the leaders made mention that research has shown we get only about 7% of our information through words. Our brains pay 'way more attention to someone's tone of voice, and body language, to discern what they are "really" saying

to us. If I pet my dog and say, “You are the most despicable little mutt on the planet,” what is the dog going to get from me? Yes, the tone of my voice and my body language are communicating someone much different from my words, and the dog will respond to my non-verbal cues. People are the same.

I bring this up to say, how do you talk about Jesus? That reveals much more about how you feel about Our Lord. And that feeling is a huge component in communicating the good news of Jesus. Compare this: (deadpan) “I have heard the good news about Jesus the Savior, and I am glad.” Do you talk about Jesus like that? (Do you talk about Jesus at all??)

Yes, Strobel’s evidence helps with the 7% verbal content, but what is fascinating, he writes, is that as he was working on this project, it was not the evidence he gathered, but rather his relationships with his wife and kids that were key in changing his mind about Jesus. His wife’s love—he knew she and her Christian friends were praying for him—and her changes in behavior since becoming a Christian were a kind of evidence that came with emotional power. Yes, he needed the intellectual content; but it was love that won him to the Lord.

That’s something to keep in mind as we walk with Lee through his case-building book, and listen to God about with whom we are to share this good news in these weeks.

My prayer is that you will decide to enlist in the Lord’s Army because of your love for Jesus, and join the invasion force that is liberating people around you who are slaves of hell, unknowingly. I hope you, like Peter, will have your own conversion “to the world” in mission, and move from a believer to a follower, from a follower to an active agent of God’s love. I hope you start to pity people who don’t know Jesus as you do, and that you bang on God’s door on behalf of your neighbor--or your friend or acquaintance or relative—so that God would open their eyes to His love for them, and help them respond to that love, for LIFE!

And I hope you start imagining—and hungering for—the glad day when your friend asks you to help them meet the Master, the Christ of God—the day you get to say, “Mr. Jones, meet the Messiah!”

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on March 2, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]